

## Significance of Fermented Beverages among Bison Horn Maria of Bastar

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### ABSTRACT

Bison Horn Maria is one of the indigenous tribes of the Bastar region who survive on naturally available resources such as land, water, and forests. Despite contact with modernity, Maria still uses traditional foods and beverages as staple foods and stores them for consumption during lean periods. Of the locally available beverages, indigenous ones like *Suram*, *Mahuwa*, *Landa*, and *Sulfi* are important. Preparing such beverages is a household activity and provides alternative livelihoods to Maria during exigencies. The present study aimed to document the process of making indigenous beverages of Maria and adopted the descriptive research design. Traditional anthropological methods, i.e., observation, key informant interview, and schedules, were used for the present study. The study found that no rites and rituals of Maria are completed without consuming these drinks. With the rampant use of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), the indigenous beverages were facing endangerment and recommended for the benefit of modern technology in the manufacture of its by-products.

**Keywords:** Beverages, Fermentation, Livelihoods, Rites and Rituals, Traditional Knowledge

### Introduction

Health and nutrition are catalytic for the development of a nation, state, region, or individual. Keeping this in mind, our ancestors had developed culture-specific foods and beverages that are rich in vitamins, minerals, pro-bacteria, and micro-nutrients and made them part of our consumption in the traditional manner. Since ancient times, tribal communities have relied on fermented foods and beverages to a great extent since they are made with locally available natural resources. Fermentation is one of the oldest methods of preservation of excess food for consumption in the lean period (Jeyram, 2008). But with the contact of modernity, the present generations prefer consuming processed junk foods and beverages made with refined sugar and salt. As a result, they are vulnerable to diet-related non-communicable diseases, raised blood pressure, obesity, and malnutrition. Global statistics testified that 2.2 billion adults are overweight, of which 40.8 percent represent women. Similarly, 570.8 million girls and women of reproductive age (15-45) are anaemic, 538.7 million people have diabetes, and 1.2 billion experience raised blood pressure (Global Nutrition Report 2021). The global food demand is now responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, and the environmental impacts of foods rose by 14 percent when compared to 2010. According to the National Family Household Survey report 2019-20, altogether, 22.9 percent of adult men and 24 percent of women are obese in India. About 57 percent of women of reproductive age are anaemic in the country. Even the dietary intakes of fruits, legumes, nuts, fish, and dairy products are deficient, and hence they are susceptible to lifestyle diseases. The situation is further exacerbated with the invasion of the

Covid-19 pandemic, where individuals with under or over-nutrition became prey to the deadly virus. Consequently, the countries realized the significance of vitamins, minerals, and other required micro-nutrients in our foods to fight the new viruses, bacteria, and fungus. It is a fact that fermented foods and beverages contain pro-bacteria which internally fight the invading viruses into our body. At the same time, nutrition is already inbuilt into the indigenous foods and beverages of different cultures (Rawat et al., 2018). Apart from perceived health benefits, traditional foods and beverages play an essential role in the socio-cultural and religious life and in procuring the livelihoods of millions of rural and tribal people. Thus, healthy and sustainable diets protect people from rampant pandemics and lessen the impact on the fragile environment.

Based on traditional knowledge, tribal communities make various beverages using natural resources through fermentation. These fermented drinks facilitate the development of micro-organisms that helps in building immunity as well as nutritional requirements. Mintz and Nayak's (1985) observations on the anthropology of food reveal the core and fringe dichotomy about food consumption in traditional societies. It is so that most people live on starch food termed as 'core' which has become an object of worship in rites and rituals. Plants grew such complex carbohydrates become symbolic channels for expressing human feelings of those who cultivate them. The core is supplemented with 'fringe' foods (e.g., fermented, sun-dried, cured, salted, or smoked) that are consumed in equal quantities. However, its consumption rises during festive occasions. Their taste, smell, and odour are in contrast to starch foods. They can significantly increase the consumption of core. Hence, it has become customary for ethnic groups to offer fringe foods as a libation to Gods and Goddesses.

Apart from this dichotomy, Longkumer (2016) used rice beer as a tool to distinguish the conflict between the world views of indigenous religion and Christianity among Zeme Naga. Consumption of rice beer discerns the boundaries of religious affiliation, traditions, and customs within an ethnic community under the influence of Christianity and modernity. In *Paupaise* (traditional religion), rice beer functions as a medium to contact with Gods, spirits, and ancestors. Though rice beer is used in important religious events and festivals in *Hareka* (indigenous reform movement), sometimes it is abusive considering age and moral discipline. For Christianity, drinking rice beer is stripped of its religious meaning and restricted to cultural activity. Thus, religious identities are shaped by the consumption of fermented beverages.

Despite their traditional use, they help procure livelihoods as and when required. In the Kokrajhar district of Assam only, Narzary et al. (2016) documented 12 fermented foods and three beverages produced by diverse ethnic groups that are crucial for the survival of ethnic groups of Kokrajhar. With the impact of modernity, these fermented foods and beverages have become endangering. Hence, the researchers felt the application of science and technology in processing such foods and beverages facilitates harnessing the sustainable livelihoods of rural poor. Simultaneously, Sekar and Mariyappan (2007) also documented the microbial knowledge of the Indian people to analyze the scope for making Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). The study found that a few patents were made on the vast knowledge of traditional foods and beverages in India and suggested developing products based on traditional foods and beverages to bring them into the IPR framework to share the benefits with indigenous people. The Ladaki of Kashmir depends on traditional foods and beverages to overcome the cultivation barriers due to unfavourable and hostile environments by using local ecological resources, especially meat consumption during winter by nomads (Angchok, 2008). Studies highlighted that local climate and weather conditions influence the local food habits and the traditional knowledge of fermentation of beverages from indigenous herbs playing a role in socio-cultural life (Kumar & Rao, 2006; Pushpangadan et al.,

2012; and Ray et al., 2016). Studies from northeast India documented the popular fermented foods and beverages, their socio-cultural significance, health-promoting benefits, and bio-preservation of perishable foods in the life of ethnic people (Mao & Odyuo, 2007; Narzary et al., 2016; Tamang et al., 2018). These fermented foods are variously known in different parts of India, like *Jaan* and *Kacchi* among Bhotiya of Uttarakhand (Kamal Kishore et al., 2013); *Handiya* and *Mahuwa* in central India (Kumar & Rao, 2006); *Atingba* in Manipur (Jeyaram, 2008) and *Kinema* in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills (Deka, 2012). With the impact of acculturation and modernity, the significance of these fermented beverages has been questioned as it is a significant impediment to the cause of education and development. Under these circumstances, the indigenous beverages of Bison Horn Maria are located at the center of debate on the role of traditional beverages in Maria's socioeconomic, political, and religious life.

### Objective

The present study aimed to document the making of indigenous beverages, including their process and preparation. Further, an attempt is also made to understand the role of beverages in the socio-cultural life of Bison Horn Maria and in ensuring alternative livelihoods during exigencies.

### Methodology

The present study adopted a multi-site ethnographic technique to document the preparation of *Mahuwa* (country liquor made with *Madhuca Latifolia*), *Landa* (rice-beer), and *Sulfi* (Sap extracts from *Caryotaurens*) in Maria hamlets. For this, different habitats, i.e., Vetipara, Sodhipara, Pedapara, Bandipara, and Manjhipara of Bade Kilepal III of Bastanaar block in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state, were selected on purposive sampling method. Primary data was collected through intensive fieldwork during the year 2019-2020. Classical anthropological research methods such as observation, questionnaire, schedule, interview, and key informant interviews were utilized for the collection of empirical data. Transact-walk to weekly markets and villages provide an idea of locally available indigenous beverages. The researcher's participation in socioeconomic and religious ceremonies facilitated to document of the process of making at *Battis* (fire-hearth) and having easy access to the people who are shy in group discussions. Interviews with knowledgeable persons facilitated the role of indigenous beverages in their socioeconomic life. Informal discussions with Maria enabled the researcher to document their traditional knowledge of the manufacturing process. Maria's folk narratives reveal insights into the worldview, beliefs, conceptions, and associated taboos in relation to their foods and beverages. Discussions with older people revealed their experiences in dealing with crises through consuming such foods. With these qualitative techniques, an emphasis was given to documenting Maria's beliefs and practices associated with indigenous beverages with the help of their elaborated ceremonial activities. Books, journals, and *Gram Panchayat* records are consulted for secondary information.

### Study Area

For the present study, hamlets of Bade Kilepal III of Bastanaar block was selected, keeping in mind the concentration of Bison Horn Maria in large number. Geographically, Bade Kilepal village is a huge one and hence divided into three *Panchayats* such as Bade Kilepal *Panchayat-I*, Bade Kilepal *Panchayat-II*, and Bade Kilepal *Panchayat-III*. Even Bade Kilepal III, in turn consists of 09 hamlets, of which five hamlets were covered under the present study. Besides Maria, other ethnic groups such as *Halba*, *Dhakad*, *Rout*, and *Mahara* were also inhabiting for long in the study hamlets. The total population of Bade Kilepal III comes to 2,884, representing 1,355 males and 1,529 females. Of which, the Bison Horn Maria population was predominant as

it represents 92.89 percent, followed by *Rout* (2.42 percent), *Mahara* (2.53 percent), *Dhakad* (1.76 percent), and *Halba* (0.38 percent). The Bison Horn Maria male represents 47.62 percent and female 48.64 percent followed by *Rout* male represents 0.72 percent and female 1.69 percent, *Mahara* male 1.04 percent and female 1.49 percent, *Dhakad* male 0.79 percent and female 0.97 percent and *Halba* male 0.17 percent and female was 0.20 percent.

**Table 1: Population Details of Study Hamlets in Bade Kilepal III**

Sl. No	Hamlet	Household	Male	Female	Total
1	Vetipara I	64	164	184	348
	Vetipara II (Gunjepara)	69	165	177	342
	Vetipara III	73	186	206	392
2	Sodhipara	16	46	48	94
3	Pedapara	89	203	228	431
4	Bandipara	52	137	140	277
5	Manjhipara	47	113	118	231
	Total	410	1014	1529	2884

Source: Household Survey, 2020

The study village was situated at a distance of 55 kilometers from the southern direction of Jagdalpur. It was a forest and mountainous area. The geographical area of this village has been found to be 5944.75 hectares. Out of this, the forest area covers 86.09 hectares, the pastoral area covers 497.00 hectares, and the agricultural area is 5361.66 hectares. In this area, the availability of *Mahuwa* and *Sulfi* trees is abundant, and Maria depended on them for generations.

### Making of Indigenous Beverages

In Bade Kilepal 3, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages were prepared and consumed by Maria irrespective of age and sex. The alcoholic ones consist of *Suram*<sup>i</sup>, *Mahuwamand*<sup>ii</sup>, *Landa*<sup>iii</sup> and *Sulfi*<sup>iv</sup> Whereas decoction or juices made from the wild fruits collected from the forest constitute non-alcoholic ones. Of the available beverages, *Mahuwa* plays a significant role in Maria society, and no ritual act is completed without the consumption of such beverages. Before understanding its significance in socio-cultural, political and religious spheres, it is pertinent to understand their knowledge in the making of *Suram* and *Mahuwamand* from it.

### Suram

It is a mild intoxicant beverage made from the fermentation of dried corollas of *Mahuwa*. Maria collects the fallen fleshy flowers from February-April every year and allows them to dry in the hot sun and store them in bamboo baskets. Earlier, Maria used to prepare a rudimentary form of the beverage known as *Suram* from *Mahuwa*. According to them, in a significant size pot, 4 *Paily*<sup>v</sup> and in a small size pot, 2 *Paily Suram* can be prepared in a short period. The pot containing *Mahuwa* flowers and water is boiled at first instance till the mixture reaches the red color. Then the mixture is filtered with a white cotton cloth and allowed to ferment for a period of 2 to 4 days. Whenever it becomes a sour taste, it is considered to be ready for consumption. To get 9 litres of *Suram*, Maria uses 8 kilograms of *Mahuwa* flowers and 10 litres of water. It has mild intoxication when compared to *Mahuwamand* and is helpful in the digestion process. In summer, it takes only two days to prepare *Suram*, whereas, in winter, it takes at least 4 to 5 days. But nowadays, it has

become outdated, and everyone is interested in *Mahuwamand* as it is a more refined one and has high intoxication.

### ***Mahuwa Mand***

On the occasion of brewing, they pick up some *Mahuwa* corollas and soak them in water in a separate vessel for a period of two to three days. When a foul smell comes out from the pot, they presume that it is ready for cooking. Then, this mixture is transferred to another container and kept on *Batti* (fire hearth) for boiling. For this, a separate hearth is prepared inside the house by arranging three vessels one upon another vertically. The lower pot contains the soaked *Mahuwa*, the middle one is kept empty, and the upper one is filled with cold water. The middle vessel is fashioned in such a way to convert the vapor into liquid channeling through a pipe. The boiling procedure is continued till they attain the target quantity of liquor. In the beginning, the quality is tested by pouring it into the hearth. If the fire lit up elegantly, it is considered good quality. During this process, they keep on replacing water in the upper vessel whenever it gets warmer. Traditionally, Maria used earthen pots for making *Mahuwamand*, but nowadays, they are using aluminum vessels as they are low in weight and easy to carry. Thus, prepared liquor is preserved in glass bottles or plastic tins.

### ***Landa (Rice Beer)***

It is also an intoxicant beverage prepared by fermenting the cooked rice in water. It is also referred to as *Handiya* by other tribal communities in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Jharkhand. To prepare this, Bison Horn Maria used two different indigenous methods.

#### **First Method**

To make *Landa* Maria cook the rice and clean it with fresh water in a bamboo basket. Later they separate the absorbed water from it carefully in the basket. Then the rice is smashed thoroughly with *Masul*<sup>vi</sup>. Thus, they make a soft dough and again filter the *Pisan* (cooked rice) to avoid the unmeshed rice granules. The filtration process takes place several times, known as *Sohli* in local parlance. After completing this filtration, they lit the fire hearth and kept a big pot half filled with water over it. Then, the soft rice dough is mixed with water and loosened. Then they keep a triangular bamboo-made container which is known as *Chattal*. After thorough boiling of water, they slowly mix the soft material in it and cook for a long time. This process is known as *Bakkel*. The *Bakkel* is stored in a pot by covering with *Sargi* leaves and a bamboo basket for a period of five to six days. Thereafter, they open the lid and pour the water into it. It is mixed in such a way that half of the pot is filled with *Pitiya*<sup>vii</sup>. and the remaining portion is filled with water. At the same time, they also store the paddy in *Sargi* leaves for a period of five to six days. When the sprouts are coming out of this paddy, it is exposed to hot sun for a period of one or two days. When this sprouted paddy is dried thoroughly, they are again filtered with *Channi* (filter). Thus, pounded material is mixed with fermented *Pitiya* and again covered in the pots with a basket, and stored for another five to six days. It is believed that the addition of the sprouted paddy powder in the mixture facilitates the fermentation. Thus, they make the rice beer through boiling and fermentation.

#### **Second Method**

In this method, rice beer is made with cooked rice on a fire hearth. For this, they prepare the paddy sprouts by storing the wet for a period of five to six days, and it is thoroughly pounded with *Pisan*. Thereafter, the entire mixture is transferred to the bamboo basket. Then they keep water filled pot over a fire hearth and keep the *Jeevi* (cover) over it. This mixture is allowed to cook thoroughly with water vapor. Then the soft rice dough is allowed to cool. Simultaneously,



they take another pot filled with water, soft rice dough, and sprouts powder mixed thoroughly. This pot is covered with *Sargi* leaves. Thus, they store the mixture for a period of four to five days in a safe place. In case the sprouts powder is more, it takes only two days to ferment.

To prepare rice beer, generally, they use five *Paily* of cooked rice, one *Paily* of sprouted rice, and sufficient water. After preparation, it got to have a sour taste. Based on seasonal variation, fermentation takes time to make it ready for consumption. In winter, preparation takes seven to eight days, whereas in summer, it takes only three to four days. As such, it is evident that in summer, the preparation of *Landa* will take less time when compared to winter. To make this rice beer, they use natural articles such as *Sargi* leaves, bamboo baskets, earthen pots, and dried bottle guards (spoons). With *Dumni*<sup>viii</sup> they took *Landa* from the earthen pot and served in *Siyyadi* leaf cups. This rice beer is also sold in *Haat Bazars* (weekly markets) to earn additional income by Maria.

### **Sulfi (Palm Sap)**

As per the memory line of Maria, during the starvation period, they used to fell the *Sulfi* tree and cut it into two pieces to extract *Pind*<sup>ix</sup> for consumption. In the course of time, the starch portion is utilized for making *Pej* (porridge), and finally, they learn the art of collecting sap. *Sulfi* is a natural sap extracted from *Gorga* (*Caryotaurens*), consumed by all people irrespective of age and sex. Maria used to extract the sap from early morning to till 12'O clock in the afternoon from the *Donda* (stem containing starch) of the palm. Whenever the palm starts flowering, they prune its *Pango* (branch) and observe *Chati*<sup>x</sup> by *Sirha* with the sacrificial offering of the chick as well as vermillion, turmeric, incense, and rice. After completion of the rite, the concerned individual climbs the palm tree carrying a new pot covered with new cloth and tied to *Donda* with *Siyyadi* fiber. The next day morning, the same individual takes a sacred bath and collects the *Sulfi*-filled pot, and replaces it with another one. Thus, collected new *Sulfi* is offered to *Kuldevi* of *Sirha* at the first instance for blessings. Further, this new *Sulfi* is also offered at the village temple and invites a person from their *Para* (hamlet) and offered to them without taking any money on this *Chati* day. The next day onwards, they start collecting *Sulfi* for domestic use. Excess quantity is sold in weekly markets. Generally, Maria collects *Sulfi* before sunrise and after sunset. Depending on the climate, one *Sulfi* tree gives 2500 to 3500 liters of sap on average during its lifetime. Likewise, a *Sulfi* tree gives its sap till 16 to 18 years, and thereafter its wood is used as indigenous technology for irrigation of agricultural fields of Maria.

### **Beverages in oral traditions:**

According to oral narratives of Bison Horn Maria, once upon a time, the people of the *Podiyami* Maria are moving from one place to another in search of a settlement. On their journey, they halted under a *Mahuwa* tree and started cooking food in an earthen pot. Incidentally, the *Mahuwa* fruits fall in the cooking vessel, which is consumed by them instantly. With the miracle of this *Mahuwa*, they became successful in searching for a place for settlement. Since then, Maria has considered *Mahuwa* as *Devlok* (heaven) and started consuming it as a beverage. Since Maria worships *Bhimuldev* as rain God, they worship him to send rain over *Mahuwa*, facilitating the fall of its flowers. Since then, they started worshipping the *Mahuwa* tree as a symbol of *Bhimuldev*'s abode. Since *Podiyami* Maria consumes *Mahuwa* prior to the celebration of the first mango festival, they are exempted from the celebration of the first fruit ceremony. In contrast, the rest of the Maria clan cannot consume *Mahuwa* prior to the ceremony. In case anyone consumes mistakenly, they face the wrath of the deity and suffer from ill-health in their families. As such, Maria offers worship to *Mahuwamand* on mango first fruit ceremony on the premises of *Dongerdai Mata Padai* (temple). On this day, *Mati Pujari* offers worship to new mango fruits as

well as to *Mahuwamand*. On this auspicious day, the whole community collectively prepares *Mahuwamand* in a new pot and brings it to *Padai* for offering to their *Kuldevata* and distribution in the form of *Prashad*. Further, each and every household prepares *Mahuwamand* at their homes and brings it to the *Padai* for the offering.

Whenever *Podiyami* Maria got settled in a new place, they kept their *Kunda* (pot) at a particular place of the house in the name of *Hanalmata* to protect them from hunger and ensure the continuous availability of grain in this place. As such, in every Maria household, one can see the *Hanalmata* room earmarked with the presence of a sacred pot. On the day of *Nayakhani*, Maria prepares rice beer in this pot with *Kutki* or *Chikmachaval*<sup>xi</sup>. and the head of the household sprinkles the freshly made *Landa* in *Sargi* leaves beside the *Hanalmata Kunda*. Thereafter, Maria starts consuming *Landa*. It is taboo to consume *Landa* unless offering of new *Landa* to *Hanalmata*. Even they could not dare to consume in the neighboring households also.

As per oral tradition, during the drought period, Maria survived on the consumption of *Donda*, and since then, Maria has worshiped *Khaniyamata* in the form of the *Sulfi* tree. Later on, slowly, they learned the art of the extraction of sap. They believe that, like *Khandiya Sua*, where water oozes from the ground to become *Sua* (aquifer), the sap oozing from the *Sulfi Donda* is considered *Khaniyamata*. Whenever the *Sulfi* tree becomes capable of producing its sap, *Sirha* performs *Chati* on Thursday or Saturday under the tree. For this rite, *Sirha* brings sacred water from seven holy aquifers along with *Tetekara Lata*, which is available on the river banks. This *Lata* is cut into seven pieces and mixed in the water and kept in seven small pots. After completion of *Puja*, *Tetekara Lata* is planted near the *Sulfi* tree and pours water brought from seven aquifers. Then, they sacrifice *Chitbakra* (multi-colored) or white-colored rooster, requesting a good amount of sap. After completion of this, *Chati*, the head of the household, or *Sirha*, ties a new pot to the prune *Sulfi Donda*. The next day, after taking a bath, the headman brought down the pot and tied another new pot into it. Thus, collected first, *Sulfi* is also offered to *Khaniyamata*. Later on, the headman invites the neighboring Maria and distributes the first *Sulfi* in *Sargi* leaves. To this day, they never charge any money from the neighbors. After this *Puja*, the concerned owner can earn money by selling it at a house or in the weekly market.

### Socio-cultural significance:

Maria uses beverages in the life cycle and annual rituals, village festivals, council meetings, the honor of elders and guests, and purification. It is customary to contribute these beverages in a fixed quantity to the host family to reduce the burden of arranging community feasting. Acceptance or rejection of a marriage proposal is symbolically expressed through the consumption of *mahuwa* during betrothal. Collective consumption of *Sargi* leaves during auspicious occasions reveals its role in maintaining group solidarity.

**Table 2: Contribution of Beverages during Life Cycle Rituals**

Sl.No.	Ritual	Mahuwa	Sulfi	Landa
01	Childbirth	On the day of <i>Chati</i> , every relative brings one bottle of <i>Mahuwa</i>	One <i>Tumba</i> <sup>xii</sup> <i>Sulfi</i> by the relatives	One bottle of <i>Landa</i> by the relatives
02	Marriage	First <i>Mahala</i> one <i>Handi Mahuwa</i> Second <i>Mahala</i> , two bottle	First <i>Mahala</i> two or three bottle Second <i>Mahala</i> ,	One <i>Handi Landa</i> only in third <i>Mahala</i> and leading

		Third <i>Mahala</i> , two bottle Five to six bottles in leading marriage	One <i>Tumba</i> Third <i>Mahala</i> , two bottle Two <i>Tumba</i> in leading marriage	marriage
03	Death and memorial	One bottle by all the households	One <i>Tumba</i>	One bottle

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Apart from this, *Dev* or *Mata* or *Mati Pujari* offers one bottle of *Mahuwa* to each and every deity and conducts *Puja* by sprinkling it as a part of libation. During *Jatra* or *Madai*, Maria contributes collectively to purchase the required sacrificial animals along with *Mahuwa*, *Landa*, and *Sulfi* to offer them to deities. For this, individual villagers do not bring any *Mahuwa* personally to the sacrificial spot. They bring rice-filled leaf cups, incense, and coconut.

### Role of *Mahuwa* in Marriage

Bison Horn Maria follows the tradition of seeking the name of their sister's elder daughter for the first time by the head of the house for her son from ancient times, which is known as *Guda* (parallel-cousin marriage). *Badi Faida* (lineage priest) officiates the *Guda* marriage between cousins. First, the boy's relatives, such as *Badi Faida*, *Lona Vadde* (head of the house), and other relatives, carry *Mahuwa mand* in the pot to the girl's house. Apart from this, they also carry in a *Sudool Gulla* (small basket) two *Paily* rice and two to three bottles of *Sulfi* sap. It is known as *Usual*. Before departure to *Uskal*, the mother priest of the village worships the *gram Devi* (village deity) with vermilion, rice, and *Mahuwa*, for the success of the marriage proposal. After that, *Lona Vadde* worships *Kuldevi* with *Sindhu*, rice, *Hajari* flowers, and incense. After this ritual process only, all the elders go for the first *Usual*. As soon as they reach the girl's house, both the parties greet each other with the word *Johar*. Then boy's father reveals the purpose of their visit and requests her daughter for his son. If both parties agree to the proposal, both sides consume *Til* seeds on the leaves of *Mahuwa*, followed by *Mahuwamand*. The first *Uskal* is considered to be auspicious on the Sunday or Wednesday in the month of January.

In the second *Sagai Mahala*, the date for the marriage of the boy and girl was confirmed. *Badi Faida*, *Lona Vadde* (family priests), and other relatives went to the house of the bride to fix a day in the month of February. They carry a *Gulla* (big basket) with rice, paddy, two bottles of *Mahuwa*, and a *Tumba Sulfi* to the girl's residence, which is known as *Mahakala*.

After fixing an auspicious day in the month of March, the boy would go to the girl's house with a basketful of rice, paddy, two bottles of *Sulfi*, *Mahuwa mand*, and a *Landa* pot. It is known as the most prominent *Mahala* in which they decide the date of marriage of the boy and girl. After deciding the date of marriage, *Mahuwa mand* is distributed to all the present relatives in the leaves of *Sargi* or *Mahuwa*. It is known as *Kabood Mahala*. After this, all the members of the boy's side return to their respective villages.

The process of marriage is organized for three days. On the first day, Maria prepares *Landa* in the early hours of the morning. Thus, prepared *Landa* is kept in *Haanal Kholi* as it is believed to be the abode of *Haanal Kunda mata*. To avoid evil eye, they prepare *Landa* with new rice (at 3'O clock) in the early morning of the marriage day. Thereafter, they keep the remaining *Landa* at earmarked places. During *Baraat*<sup>xiii</sup> time, the groom's relatives bring three pots of *Landa*. These



pots are covered with a white cloth or with bamboo-made lids. Out of three pots, one pot represents their *Kuldevi*; another one signifies for bride's family, and the remaining one is for the groom's family. After the preparation of *Landa*, *Sirha*, head of the household, and other consanguine relatives proceeds to *Nallah* at 7 or 8 AM in the morning to bring water for the sacred bath of the bride and groom.

On the same day, the head of the house offers worship to *Kuldevi* with vermillion, rice, coconut, *Mahuwa mand*, incense sticks, and turmeric. They believe that the *Kurram* surname individual is considered very auspicious in such worship. Along with the *Kurram*, another person from the *Poyam* clan assists in marriage rituals. The *Kurram* person has been selected by the king for this work. The Bison Horn Maria considers the *Sargi* tree a boy and the *Mahuwa* tree a girl symbolically. Therefore, during the marriage, the *Kurram* person goes to the forest to bring *Sargi* and *Poyam* to bring the *Mahuwa* wooden logs to arrange the *Dangal* (marriage *pandal*). To fetch the wood, they carry water and a *Tangiya* (an axe) to the forest. After reaching the earmarked trees, the *Kurram* clan person sprays water on the *Sargi* and *Mahuwa* in the jungle three times and requests the deity to cut the branches of the tree for marriage. Then, the person concerned takes the *Tangiya* from the *Dangaal* to the house and takes it home. By smearing them with the water on wooden logs, they tied them up with the rope of the *Siyyadi* tree in *Manda*(*mandap*). For the sacred bath, the groom is asked to sit in a big container to offer turmeric oil. In the event of a marriage, all the people come together with a *Paily* of rice, a bottle of *Mahuwa*, and a *Tumba Sulfi*.

On the second day, the *Peka* (boy) and *Peek* (girl) were taken to the girl's house in procession. They carry a basketful of rice, five to six bottles of *Mahuwa mand*, two *Tumba Sulfi*, a black pig, a goat, a cock, a *Landa* pot, and a *Sundamani Pata* (*sari*) for the girl's mother. While reaching, the girl's relatives welcome the guests by washing their feet. Then bride and groom are asked to sit together in the vessel and pour turmeric water over them. Then, they apply turmeric mix oil together and take them to different rooms after bathing. Thereafter, both are given *Tikan*<sup>xiv</sup> in the vessel itself. After the program of *Tilak* and banquet, the boys (the head and the other members) take the groom back with him to the village.

On the third day, the bride goes to the in-law's house with the headmen of the house, other family members, and the people of her own village. Then the groom greets the bride's side relatives with a welcome drink, i.e., *Mahuwa*. There once again, Maria performs the program of *Tilak* (ceremony) for the bride and groom from both sides. On this day, they feed their relatives and villagers with pork, meat, and chicken along with drinks of *Sulfi*, *Landa*, and *Mahuwa*.

Later on, *Sirha* offers worship with *Landa* pot with *Manem*<sup>xv</sup>, water and egg requesting for blessings of the *Hanalmata* for the success of the marriage. Again, *Sirha* covers *Landa* pots with *Siyyadi* leaves and ties them with the rope. Till the completion of the entire marriage, they keep these pots at *Haanal Kholi* to avoid the contact of the evil eye. It is also known as the purification of new *Landa* with aquifer water. After completion of the marriage, *Landa* in three pots is consumed by the members of the concerned family as it is considered *Mata Prashad* and thus completes the auspicious event.

Marriage by intrusion is very often found among the Bison Horn Maria. In case a girl like a boy, she used to assist him in all aspects, including his domestic work. In case the boy is not willing to marry, then the girl enters the *Hanal Kunda Mata* or *Bhandar Kholi* with *Mahuwa mand* and *Sulfi*

forcefully. If she succeeds in such an act, she is accepted as a bride and taken to their home by her in-laws. Later on, the boy has no other option except to marry her.

Marriage by capture is also found among Bison Horn Maria. In case a boy likes a girl, he proceeds to the girl's house and offers *Mahuwa* and *Sulfi* to the would-be in-laws and impresses them though the girl is not interested. Later on, the concerned girl was kidnapped with the help of his friends during the weekly market or *Jatra* or *Madai* day. In case the girl's parents are not impressed, they impose a fine to accept such marriage in the form of a cow, an oxen, a goat, he-cocks, *Sulfi*, *Landa*, and *Mahuwa*. Besides this, the groom has to pay a fine ranging from ten to twenty thousand rupees.

In case a boy and girl like each other but their elder does not agree, they elope and marry. After spending some time, the newly married couple is allowed to have a reunion with the community through the elders of *GramPanchayat*. The head of the household invites *Mati Pujari*, *Naik*, *Paika*, *Mukhia*, and other relatives and organizes a *Sabha* (council meeting) for the gratification of marriage.

Among Bison Horn Maria, this type of elopement case is recognized after a community feast wherein the distribution of beverages is mandatory. Soon after the marriage, the groom takes the bride to his parent's house at first. If they agree, they pour turmeric water and allow them to enter the house. However, the groom needs to pay a fine to the girl's parents in the form of a goat, a pig, and twenty to thirty thousand rupees money as compensation. Thereafter, they fix a date for official marriage and perform the act through their tradition.

### ***MariaKhamba* (Memorial Pillar)**

It is customary to build a *Khamba* (memorial pillar) in commemoration of the dead is a remarkable feature of the Bison Horn Maria. Maria considered that unless the memorial pillar is erected, the burial of the deceased will be incomplete. Prior to the inception of a new pillar, family members first collect the bones of the deceased from the burial ground. Thereafter, they erect a memorial with megalith stone or wooden log. Nowadays, they are constructing with cement and bricks also. After erecting a structure, they decorate it with a painting made with traditional colors like black (powdered coal), red (earthen red soil), green (green leaves), white (lime soil), and the leaves of *Chind* trees are used in the form brush. The painting generally portrays the actions of the dead person as well as their social statuses, such as *Mata Pujari*, *Mati Pujari*, *Sirha*, and *Siyan*.

Different types of memorial pillars are observed in the study area that is made to mark their contribution. At the *Mata Pujari's* pillar, they mention the name, village, date of birth, and death and make designs of *Devgudi*, totem symbol, cow-bull, fair, and *Jatra*, on the pillar of the elderly person. It is believed that if a person dies from an accident, suicide, or murder, then a picture of a car, tree, or *Tangiya* is made on his pillar. The pillar of *Sirha* represents the *Mahuwa* tree because, in her life, it plays a vital role from birth to death. The sprinkling of *Mahuwa mand* is mandatory on the memorial while worshipping their ancestors. On *Sirha's* pillars, they keep the *Lehenga Choli* (traditional dress), *Mukut* (silver crown), *Bachata* (armband), *Trishul* (trident), and *Manjur Mudha* (peacock feather). After the completion of the memorial, a ceremony is organized at the site. On this day, all the relatives of the deceased brought rice, *Mahuwa*, *Sulfi*, *Landa*, and fowls with them and consumed them there itself.

### Economic significance:

*Mahuwa* is used for paying fines to the village council, marital payments, gifts, labor services during new house construction, fees to the medicine men, etc. *Karsa* (Bride price) generally includes two pigs, two goats, twenty-seven *Paiyali* of paddy, two calves, *Landa* made with three pots *Chaval* (sixty *paiyali* rice), one basketful of *Sargi* leaves, a bunch of *Dongar Bamboo Silka* (fiber), one *Dona* (leaf cup) red *chilli*, one cup salt, one cup tamarind, one cup *Hirva*, a *Dona* tamarind and *Chaapda Chutney*. They also offer a *sari* made by *Mahara* as a part of *Karsa*. Bison Horn Maria gives a *sari*, bangles, rice, goat, pig, cock, *Mahuwa*, *Landa*, *Hirva*, and cash to their daughters as part of *Parre* (marriage gift). But nowadays, parents are purchasing consumable goods in *Haat Baazar* and giving them to their daughters as a part of marriage gifts. Besides their main agricultural income, Maria also fetches additional income through the sale of beverages at their households or *HaatBazaars*.

**Table 3: Sale of beverages in the study area**

<i>Mahuwa</i> flowers	Rs. 60/- to Rs.65/- per kilogram
<i>Mahuwamand</i>	Rs. 50/- to Rs.60/- per one litre
<i>Landa</i>	Rs. 10/- per tumbler (200 ml.)
<i>Sulfi</i>	Rs. 10/- per tumbler (200 ml.)

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The seasonal collection and sale of *Mahuwa* flowers and seeds, especially from February to April every year, fetches additional income for Maria. During this period, they are free from agricultural work, and both men and women, along with children, are engaged in this seasonal employment. The scarcity of food supply is also supplemented by the consumption of *Sulfi*, *Landa*, and porridge made from different varieties of millets.

### Religious significance:

Ancestors of Bison Horn Maria depended on hunting and the subsistence of roots and tubers. But their seasonal availability and drought conditions force them to collect the *Mahuwa* flowers during exigencies. Due to its life-saving quality, Maria attributed divine qualities and became a customary practice in offering in all sorts of ceremonial activities. Each beverage is venerated with a specific deity on earmarked auspicious events. They are mainly

**Table 4: Association of beverages with Gods and Goddesses**

Beverage	Associated Deity	The auspicious occasion for worship
<i>Mahuwa</i>	<i>Bhimul dev</i>	i) <i>Mahuwa Pandam</i> (festival) is observed on any Wednesday in the month of April every year in an open place with <i>Mahuwamand</i> to collect its flowers. ii) <i>Bheej Putin</i> is observed on any Thursday in the month of April in the forest at <i>Bhimuldev</i> temple, wherein <i>Mati Pujari</i> offers new liquor to God.
<i>Sulfi</i>	<i>Khaniyamata</i>	i) <i>Sirha</i> offers the first <i>Puja</i> when the palm tree starts giving sap, followed by the head of the

		household.
<i>Landa</i>	<i>Hanalmata</i> and <i>Khandakankaleenmata</i>	i) On any Monday in the month of September before <i>the Dusserah</i> festival, Maria offers <i>Pisan</i> (rice flour) at <i>the Khandakankaleen</i> deity. ii) After <i>Dusserah</i> , again, they prepare <i>Landa</i> with new <i>Chaval</i> and offer to <i>Hanalmata</i> in <i>Sargi</i> leaves.

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Besides, Maria considers it auspicious to offer sacred material in *Mahuwa* leaves or cups to their Gods and Goddesses on auspicious occasions, especially in *Sua Jatara*, they offer worship to *Jalninmata*, and *Bhimuldev* with *Mahuwa* leaves. In this, they keep *Doni* as *Chudi Phundadi* to *Jalninmata* and offer worship in twelve leaves to *Bhimuldev*. The following table 5 illustrates the offer of *Mahuwa* as a libation to different Gods and Goddesses.

In the analysis of sacred offerings, it is observed that Bison Horn Maria lived in the midst of the natural resources and developed a symbiotic relationship with natural resources, i.e., *Mahuwa*, *Sulfi*, and *Sargi* trees, and offered to deities as libation. This veneration facilitates Maria towards optimum utilization and conservation of such precious resources for future generations. No ritual act is initiated without offering *Mahuwa* to their deities and spirits.

**Table 5: Maria Worship of Deities and Offerings**

Sl.No.	Deity/Festival	Auspicious Day	Type of Offering
1	<i>Bhimuldev</i>	On Monday or Thursday during <i>Jeth</i> (May-June) every year	offer <i>Mahuwa mand in Dona</i>
2.	<i>Sonkuvar-Vankuvar</i>	On Monday during <i>Baisakhi</i> (April-May) every year	The sprinkling of <i>Mahuwa</i> as a libation
3.	<i>Bamandev</i>	On Monday during <i>Phagun</i> (February-March) every year	offer <i>Mahuwa mand in Dona</i>
4.	<i>Hidma dokra or Pendev</i>	On Tuesday- <i>Phagun</i> (February-March) every year	The sprinkling of <i>Mahuwa</i> as a libation
5.	<i>Sinhdeorimata</i>	On Tuesday- <i>Chait</i> (March-April)	offer <i>Mahuwa mand in Dona</i> 5 to 6 times
6.	<i>Bharva dev</i>	During <i>Chait</i> (March-April) on Thursday	offer <i>Mahuwa</i> in <i>Dona</i> five to seven times
7	<i>Nakodo Natolin Taling Mata</i>	During <i>Baishakh</i> (April-May) on Tuesday	sprinkle <i>Mahuwa mand</i> seven or eleven times in a <i>Dona</i>
8	<i>Kunnel Aiyar</i>	During <i>Saavan</i> (July-August) on Monday	dropping <i>Mahuwa</i> liquor three times in <i>Siyyadi</i> leaf
9	<i>Amos Pandum</i>	On Monday or Thursday in <i>Saavan</i> (July-August).	Libation of <i>Mahuwa mand</i> three or five or seven times from the

			leaves of the <i>Siyyadi</i> tree.
10	<i>Koltel Aiyar</i>	During <i>Bhadra</i> (August-September) on Monday	Head of the family offer <i>Mahuwa</i>
11	<i>Kota Pandum</i>	During <i>Ashwin</i> (September-October) on Monday	Head of the family offer <i>Mahuwa</i>
12	<i>Visa Pandum</i>	During <i>Chait</i> (March-April) on Thursday, during the arrival of the mahuwa flower	Offer new <i>Mahuwa</i> fruit in <i>Dona</i> . Later on, consumed by all the Maria
13	<i>Dilvel Aiyar</i>	During <i>Magh</i> (January-February) on Friday	Offer worship to <i>Kuldevi</i> with <i>Mahuwa mand</i>
14	<i>Medi Tiyar (Amanuva)</i>	During <i>Baishakh</i> (April-May) on Sunday	Consume <i>Mahuwa</i> before hunting
15	<i>Bijjo Kodo Modol or Bheej Putni</i>	During <i>Baisakh</i> (April-May) on Wednesday and Thursday	Sprinkles the <i>Mahuwa</i> seven times in a <i>Sargi</i> or <i>Mahuwa</i> leaf
16	<i>Sonadai Jalnin Devi Jatra</i>	During <i>Baisakh</i> (April-May) on Monday	Offer worship to <i>Sondaimata</i> with <i>Mahuwa mand</i>
17	<i>Hingalajin mata (Paragana devi)</i>	On Tuesday and Wednesday in the first week of October month especially during <i>Bastar Goncha</i> .	Offering of <i>mahuwa mand</i> in <i>Dona</i>

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

### Ethno-medicinal Significance

Dried *Mahuwa* flowers are used for the treatment of *Bukhar* (fever), *Mirage* (epilepsy), and *Khunki Kami* (Anaemia). For this, they roast the dried flowers in an earthen pot on fire hearth and again fry them in *Tora* oil. Powder made with black *Til*, Salt, and Chilli powder is mixed with fried *Mahuwa* flowers and makes a small *Laddoo* (a kind of sweet ball) and consumed in the morning and evening on an empty stomach. These *Laddoo* are consumed primarily by pregnant women to avoid anaemia by maintaining sufficient blood levels. Consuming one glass of *Sulfi* in the morning after brushing is helpful for cleaning of stomach and assists in easy digestion. Maria believes that consuming *Landa* will enhance the life span and helps in getting an immunization. Consumption of *Landa* keeps individuals away from diseases.

### Discussion

The above results strongly support the argument initiated by Rawat et al. that nutrition is already inbuilt in indigenous foods and beverages of different cultures. Even Maria also revealed that consumption of *mahuwa* and *chapda* (chutney made with red ants) protected from the effect of Covid-19 in their area. Due to the immense nutritional values of fermented beverages, Maria made them mandatory during the celebration of life cycle rituals, annual and agricultural festivals, ancestor worship, council meetings, and magico-religious activities. Due to this reason, they use mahuwa as a purification agent to remove birth and death-related pollution.



After the child's navel cord is buried in the ground, the house is purified by the head of the household. In this process, the village priest and *Sirha* prepare *Kasapaani* with a bark of mango and *Mahuwa* with the water brought from the aquifer. Thus, ritualized water is sprinkled inside and around the house with the leaves of Mango, *Jamun*(blackberry), and *Dub* grass. In case of burial, Maria keeps one *Mahuwa* liquor bottle under the corpse believing that it is helpful in the otherworld. After disposal of the dead, they smear *Tora*<sup>xvi</sup> oil to all the relatives and villagers. Then everyone is offered *Mahuwa* in the leaves of *Sargi*. After this, the priest and *Sirha* of the village bring water, the bark of the mango, and *the Mahuwa* tree. They purify the house by sprinkling the water mixed with mango and *Jamun* leaves. After that, a feast is offered after 3, 7, or 11 days to commemorate the dead.

The argument that religious identities are shaped by the consumption of fermented beverages is proven to be true in the case of Bison Horn Maria. It is evident from the approval of betrothal, the sanctification of uncommon marriages, and the removal of birth and death-related pollution. Consumption of these beverages was not acceptable in the case of acculturated or converted Maria. In the anthropology of food, core and fringe foods complement each other, and hence core became the object of worship, and fringe became offering as a libation to gods and goddesses. In this argument of core and fringe, *Kodo*, *Kutki*, *Jowar*, and *Maize* of Maria can be categorized as core foods, whereas *Mahuwa*, *Landa*, and *Sulfi* as fringe foods.

## Conclusion

Keeping in view of the importance, Maria still relies on the indigenous preparation of *Mahuwa* and *Landa* through fermentation. Even the oral tradition mention how Maria survived during the periods of starvation by consuming them in raw form. Due to this reason, the presence of these beverages is mandatory during auspicious occasions. *Mahuwa* is considered *Bhimuldev*, and hence Maria prepares *Kasapaani* with its bark to get rid of pollution. Consuming the beverages in a ritual context reinforces the social and religious affiliation which is revealed during its application for the sanctification of marriages among Maria. Ritual drink also connect Maria to the invisible ancestors through the arrangement of Maria Khamba and subsequent offerings, including beverages. Further, the voluntary contribution of these beverages on auspicious occasions ensures collective consciousness and solidarity. Besides, they also ensure alternative livelihoods during exigencies. Its by-products have immense ethnomedicinal values and hence subject to use for curing various minor diseases and illnesses. Thus, the fermented beverages have been playing a pivotal role in Bison Horn Maria's life in fulfilling their nutritional, social, economic, and ritual obligations.

## Recommendations

Nowadays, addiction to junk food leads to the problem of loss of immunity which is a significant cause of concern for public health. It is an undeniable fact that addiction to Indian Made Foreign Liquor left them susceptible to trap in a vicious cycle of poverty, indebtedness, and land alienation, which in turn effecting their children's future in terms of low levels of literacy, and unemployment. Hence, suitable measures may be undertaken to prevent the easy availability of adulterated foods and beverages among Bison Horn Maria. With the inundation of modern beverages, the use and consumption of traditional beverages have become less, and thus people are susceptible to seasonal diseases. Hence, it is the need of the hour to apply modern technology for making energy drinks, bred, sweets, and from the *Mahuwa* and non-inclusion of fermented

*Mahuwa, Sulfi, and Landa* in the alcohol category to make its broader application for a healthy and sustainable diet.

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## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> A kind of boiled Mahuwa liquor having mild intoxication
  - <sup>ii</sup> Distilled liquor is prepared from the fermentation of *Mahuwa*, which has high intoxication.
  - <sup>iii</sup> Rice beer is made from fermented rice
  - <sup>iv</sup> sap extracted from palm
  - <sup>v</sup> Two kilograms constitute one *Paily*
  - <sup>vi</sup> Thrashing wooden bar
  - <sup>vii</sup> Solid cooked rice granules
  - <sup>viii</sup> Big spoons made from bottle guard or bamboo
  - <sup>ix</sup> inner white starch portion
  - <sup>x</sup> a small rite
  - <sup>xi</sup> Coarse grain
  - <sup>xii</sup> Container made with dried flesh out bottle guard
  - <sup>xiii</sup> ceremonial bringing of the bride
  - <sup>xiv</sup> Applying vermilion on the forehead
  - <sup>xv</sup> paddy and eggshells
  - <sup>xvi</sup> Oil extracted from mahuwa nuts