A black and white portrait of an elderly woman with a weathered face, wearing traditional jewelry including large hoop earrings, a nose ring, and a shawl. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

DOCUMENTATION OF MADIA LANGUAGE IN MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

Final Project Report submitted to
The German Association for Endangered Languages
(Gesellschaft für bedrohte Sprachen)

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I. MADIA TRIBE AND LANGUAGE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

India is a multilingual and pluri-ethnic country. There are 121 major languages in India. Of these, 22 Indian languages as well as English are the official languages. In addition to this there are 1369 mother tongues and 1474 other unclassified languages.¹ According to UNESCO's online *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (viewed on 28. 05. 2020), India has 197 endangered Languages.

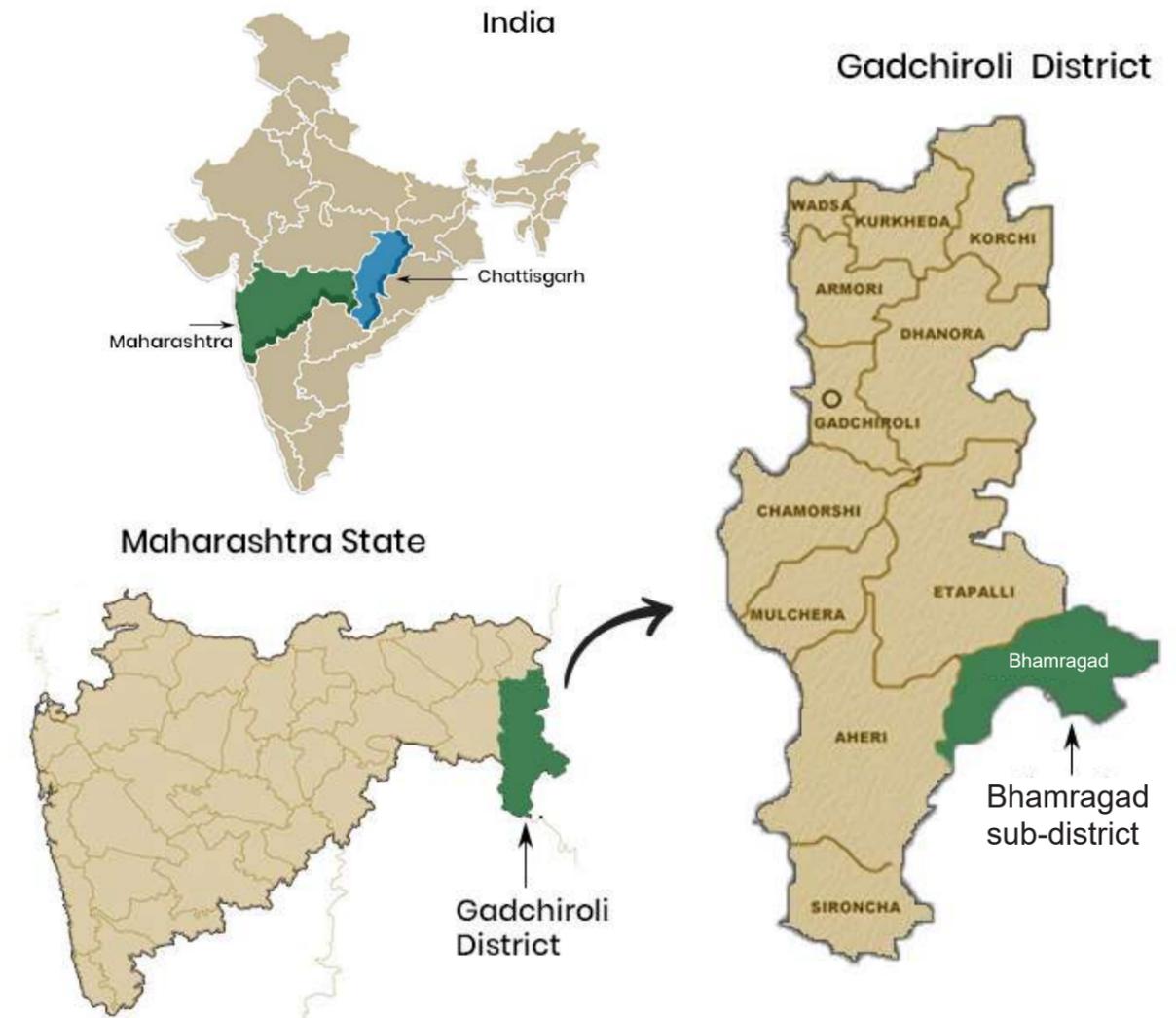
According to the Census conducted by the Government of India in 2011, over 104 million Tribal people constitute 8.6% of the nation's total population. There are ca. 700 Scheduled Tribes, out of which 75 are primitive and particularly vulnerable tribal groups.² 'Madia'³ is a Primitive Tribe in Central India.

Madias have been in existence for centuries in Central India together with other tribes such as Gond, Korku, Pardhan, Gowari, Halbi, Kolam etc. Today the Madias reside in the Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra State and in the Districts of Bastar, Narayanpur and Dantewadi of the Chattisgad State. As per the 2011 Census the total population of the Madias in Maharashtra and Chattisgad is 15, 864.⁴

The 'Madia' tribe is considered by some experts as a sub-tribe of 'Gond' and is also popularly known as 'Madia Gond'. The term 'Gond' is however used for a number of different tribes in Central India.⁵ Hence the so called Madia Gonds use the self designation 'Madia' and believe in their independent identity.⁶ A number of subdivisions of Madias can be found in the related literature: *Chota* (small) Madia, *Bada* (big) Madia; Hill Madia, Bison Horn Madia etc.⁷ But, as yet, there hasn't been enough research regarding these sub-divisions. Hence the general term 'Madia' will be used in this documentation. It will refer mainly to the Madias residing in the Bhamragad *tehsil* (sub-district) of the Gadchiroli District in Maharashtra State. It is in this area, that this documentation has been primarily conducted. The Madias in the Bhamragad sub-district constitute an endogamous social unit, distinct from the Gonds and distinct from the Bison Horn Madias from Bastar.⁸

Since several centuries the Madia tribe was cut-off from Civilization. The anthropologists speak of the megalithic practices of these 'Stone Age' aboriginal tribesmen of Maharashtra.⁹ However, during the British rule in India and thereafter the life of the Madias has been continuously encroached upon by the so-called civilization. Poverty, illiteracy, residing in remote areas, lack of facilities for hygiene, education and economic development, insurgent activities in the surrounding areas - these are some of the major problems in the life of the Madias.

The language spoken by the Madia people is called Madia. Madia is a language of oral tradition and it has no script associated with it. The Madia language belongs to the Gondi subfamily of Dravidian Languages of Central India.¹⁰ The Madia language in the Bhamragad sub-district, to which this study is restricted, is considered by the members of the speech community to be 90% -100% intelligible for the Madia speakers from other areas of Maharashtra. The Madia language is influenced by the official Indian languages of the adjacent areas like Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and recently by English as well.



¹ Census 2011 conducted by the Government of India: Data on Language and Mother tongue - Table C -16 25062018 General Note Page 4, https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language_MTs.html (accessed on 28.05.2020)

² <https://tribal.nic.in/writereaddata/AnnualReport/AR2017-18.pdf> Page 25, 40,41 (viewed on 23.5.2020)

³ In the related Literature the word is spelled in different ways: Madiya, Madia, Maria. Phonetic Script: /madjja/ The word probably means "Man of the woods" or "aboriginal" cf. Grigson, W.V.: The Maria Gonds of Bastar. London: Oxford University Press 1938 P. 42

⁴ Census 2011 conducted by the Government of India: Data on Language and Mother tongue - Table C -16 25062018 Statement 1 Part B Non-Scheduled Languages P. 8 https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language_MTs.html (accessed on 28.05.2020); cf. 2018 Ethnologue: Languages of the World. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com> (viewed on 30.09.2018)

⁵ Grigson, W.V.: The Maria Gonds of Bastar. London: Oxford University Press 1938 P. 36, 42 cf. Devy, Ganesh; Jakhade, Arun (ed.): Bharatiya Bhashaanche Loksarvekshan. Maharashtra. (People's Linguistic Survey of India). Pune: Padmagandha Publication 2013 P.339

⁶ Cf. Tribal Cultural Heritage in India Foundation. <https://www.indiantribalheritage.org/?p=1596> Madias are not Gonds. Posted on 04/07/2011 by website administrator From the report by Nandini Bedi and Erik de Maaker based on 14 December 2008 discussions including Lalsu, a member of the Madia community. (viewed on 30.09.2018)

⁷ Devy, Ganesh; Jakhade, Arun (ed.): Bharatiya Bhashaanche Loksarvekshan. Maharashtra. (People's Linguistic Survey of India). Pune: Padmagandha Publication 2013 P. 351; cf. Grigson, W.V.: The Maria Gonds of Bastar. London: Oxford University Press 1938 P.xix

⁸ Cf. Grigson, W.V.: The Maria Gonds of Bastar. London: Oxford University Press 1938 P. xix

⁹ Anuja, Geetali : "Living Megalithic practices amongst the Madia gonds of Bhamragad, District Gadchiroli, Maharashtra". In: Puratattva : Bulletin of the Indian Archaeological Society : Vol: 32 : 2001-2002, P.244

¹⁰ Census 2011 conducted by the Government of India: Data on Language and Mother tongue. Table C -16 25062018 Statement 1 Part B Non-Scheduled Languages P. 8 https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language_MTs.html (accessed on 28.05.2020); cf. 2018 Ethnologue: Languages of the World. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com> (viewed on 30.09.2018)



II. MADIA LANGUAGE: ENDANGERMENT SCENARIO AND SYMPTOMS¹¹

As compared to the total Indian population (ca. 1,30,000,000), the Madias (ca. 16,000) constitute an absolute minority.

The Madia language is passed on from the parent generation to the children. The language is however used only for limited in-group communication in restricted domains: at home or in the villages for the day-to-day communication, in the village meetings, in marriage ceremonies, festivals, rituals, disputes etc. The young educated generation is not keen on intergenerational transmission and uses Madia language in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains.

Beyond the Madia villages the Madia language has unfortunately no functional value and no status, as the socio-political, cultural and economic system uses exclusively official languages like Marathi, Hindi or English. Prerequisites for a stable multilingual setting with Madia do not exist and can not emerge due to passive assimilation.

The Madia language has no place in schools or in education. Neither it is used in any new Domains nor in modern Media (TV, Computer). There are a few books regarding the Madia Language and Tribal Literature.¹² However, no extensive study has been yet done nor is there adequate documentation regarding the Madia language. There are hardly any audio-video recordings available.

Encroachment of the so-called civilized world, unfavourable economic and socio-political factors, lack of job openings and educational facilities within the language, are some outer factors which are causing the slow extinction of the language. Social upward mobility is considered in learning Marathi or English. Hence the detachment from and indifference towards one's own Language, especially in the young generation, can be seen as internal Factors of the endangerment scenario.

¹¹ As per the endangerment Parameters of UNESCO. cf. UNESCO Document on Language vitality and endangerment. Document adopted by the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages Paris 10 -12 March 2003 Page 7 - 17

¹² Literature related to the Madia language:

- Deogaonkar, Shailaja: Madia Gondaanchi Boli (The language of the Madia Gonds) Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Saahitya aani Sanskruti Mandal, 1990
- Deogaonkar, S.G.: The changing scenario in the PTGs from Vidarbha- some observations on the Madia Gonds and Kolams. In- Chaudhuri, Sarit Kumar; Chaudhuri, Sucheta Sen: Primitive Tribes in Contemporary India: Concept, Ethnography and Demography. Volume 1. Mittal Publications, 2005
- Devy, Ganesh; Jakhade, Arun (ed.): Bharatiya Bhashaanche Loksarvekshan. Maharashtra. (People's Linguistic Survey of India) Pune: Padmagandha Publication. 2013 P. 351-364
- Gaare, Govind: Maharashtraatil Anusuchit Kshetra aani Anusuchit (Adivasi) Jamaati (Scheduled Area and Scheduled Tribes (Aboriginals) of Maharashtra).Pune: Continental Publication, 2000
- Ruby Rama Pravin; Joshi, Sanket, Gundecha, Prafulla: Madia Bhashechi Tond Olakh (Introduction to Madia Language), (Unpublished, Private Distribution) 2016
- Vaz, Christopher: Functional equivalent translation of new testament hortatory Discourse into hill Madia (Ph.D. diss., Fuller theological seminary, 2011)
- Veena, Sneha: A descriptive analysis of Madiya dialect. Doctoral dissertation, Pune: Deccan College; 1965

III. ABOUT THE DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

1. BACKGROUND

I am a retired Professor of German.¹³ Since 1982 I am connected with a social work project called “*Lokbiradari Prakalp*”¹⁴ in the Gadchiroli District, which works for the upliftment of Madias in the field of health and education. Thus, for the last 35 years I have been intermittently in touch with the members of the speech community.

In 2018-2019 my team and I prepared a Text- and workbook to teach and learn the basic Madia Language.¹⁵ Our communication with the members of the speech community while preparing the textbook allowed us to peep further into this language and to get an idea of the very well developed and complex structure of this language. Hence we decided to take up the project of the Documentation and to bring the richness of this rapidly diminishing Language and Culture to the fore.

The available literature regarding the Madia Language (see footnote 12) does not cover entirely the aims and objectives of our documentation project, but it could certainly give us a few insights into the work.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Primary data based on Audio- and Video-recordings (ca. of 20 hours), Descriptive Grammar of Madia language, a Dictionary (ca. 3000 words), documentation of Madia (ca. 50) Songs and Stories are the main objectives of this Documentation Project. Preparing Notes on Madia Culture as well as Phonology is also aimed at.

A multilingual presentation of the documentation in Marathi (one of the official Indian Languages, Regional Language of Maharashtra and Mother tongue of the Team members) and in English is another important aim, so as to reach people in Maharashtra as well as people from other parts of India and from other nations in the World.

The further aim is to publish the above documentation along with the audio-, video recordings (in a form of a pen drive/links) in a book/ E-Book form.

Thus our team wishes to create a corpus which could be of multifunctional use and could lead to further multi-faceted research. As our target group we aim at linguists, researchers from other fields, educators, members of the Speech community and people outside academia as well as policy makers in the Government.

3. WORK COMPLETED AND RESULTS

Here follows the report on the work completed from December 2018 to May 2020:

Active involvement of the speech community has been the main method of our investigation. Dialogue with the Madia speakers and their close cooperation have been proved as a major tool in collecting data, in preparing transcriptions, in translating the data into Marathi, in preparing annotations and cultural notes, in the verification and evaluation of the data as well as in taking decisions regarding the presentation of the data.

1) Field Visits: The Team has conducted so far three extensive field visits in December 2018, in October-November 2019 and in January-February 2020. As part of the field work the team members visited in all 22 villages in the Bhamragad Sub-district: Ghotpadi, Hinbatti, Bhamragad, Hemalkasa, Bejur, Halver, Laheri, Dobur, Mirgudwancha, Dudepalli, Malampodur, Darbha etc. The Team contacted ca. 500 villagers and 100 school children.

2) Audio-, video-recording:

- 22 hours of audio- and video- recordings of speech samples in a diverse range of genres and contexts: mainly stories and songs at times accompanied by dances, secondly interviews (related myths, religion, ethno-medicine, day-to-day life etc), festivals, rituals, marriage ceremony, natural conversations in a Market, a trial in

- a village court, reading out words and texts etc
- recorded ca.50 individual voices and ca.250 voices in Chorus songs
- Observed communicative events (OCEs), Staged Communicative Events (SCEs), natural events, elicitation, interviews, making them read and role-playing were a few possibilities used for the recordings.
- Metadata has been prepared for ca. 60% data.

3) Photos:Ca. 2500 photos of people, dances, cultural aspects, day to day life, villagers, trees and medicinal plants, festivals, religious ceremonies etc.

4) Phonology: Some observations on phonology and morpho-phonology have been noted and based on these observations conventions of orthography have been decided.

5) Songs and Stories: Collected 60 Songs and 12 stories: Songs related to the Marriage ceremonies, festivals and rituals, love, relations in the family, problems in day-to-day life etc; Stories about Myths, family relations, fable, stories showing human traits like jealousy, love, deception etc.

6) Transcription and translation: Completed Transcription and translation of 45 songs, 12 stories and of a few interviews and conversations. For transcription ‘*Devnagari*’ script and ‘IAST’¹⁶ scheme have been used. The transcribed texts are translated into Marathi and into English.

7) Dictionary:

- Collected ca. 2000 words with the help of the primary data and through elicitation and direct inquiry
- Prepared alphabetical lists of the words in *Devnagari* script and IAST scheme along with translation into Marathi and English accompanied by phonetic transcription (IPA), cultural annotations and exemplary sentences.

8) Grammar:

- Following Grammar Units have been collected through analysis of the primary data, direct inquiry and elicitation sessions: Verbs (Tenses: Past, present, future; Aspects: simple, continuous, perfect, subjunctive; passive voice, Present and past participles, Modal verbs) Nouns (gender, singular-plural, 8 Cases), Pronouns (personal, possessive, interrogative, demonstrative, relative), Postpositions (local, temporal and others), Adverbs and Adjectives (declination, comparative), syntactical structures
- While presenting the Grammar we have followed the western linguistic tradition of descriptive Grammar and have interspersed the presentation with Marathi terms, wherever necessary, in order to better explain them to the members of the speech community.

9) Notes on Madia Culture :

- Analysis of the primary data, direct inquiry, elicitation, interviews and oral questionnaires have been used to collect cultural information.
- Prepared notes on the various aspects of the Madia Culture: Community Life, Family life, Hygiene, Religion, Folk art, indigenous knowledge of local ecology, ethno-medicinal knowledge, naming and folk taxonomy etc

In the appendix a few cultural aspects discovered through our investigation have been briefly presented.

It was a great asset for us that a few members of the speech community in our team have a high level linguistic awareness and insight. They have realized the importance of our work and are enthusiastic about it. Our Team received a very positive response from the villagers as well. Our association with the ‘*Lokbiradari*’ project, our basic knowledge of the Madia language and our effort to become a part of the ‘scene’ (dance, rituals or festivals) helped the villagers to feel comfortable and to cooperate with us.

¹³ I have worked at the Department of Foreign Languages of Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, India till 2017 for more than 35 years. One of my specializations is Didactics of German as a Foreign Language (DaF-Didaktik).

¹⁴ See: www. Lokbiradariprakalp.org

¹⁵ Paranjape, Manjiri et al.: “ माडिया शिकू या ” (Madia shiku ya). Pune: Tribal Research and Training Institute 2019 ISBN:978-81-941103-0-9

¹⁶ The book is meant for the new generation of social workers, Doctors, teachers and others working in the Gadchiroli District.

Devnagari: a Script used to write Marathi and some other Indian Languages. IAST is the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration. This transliteration scheme is used for Romanization of Indian languages and is easier to read than IPA. The IAST scheme is an international standard and represents more than a century of scholarly usage in classical Indian studies.

4. WORK ENVISAGED

We still need two extensive field visits to get the remaining data (ca. 1000 words, a few Grammar structures and a few cultural aspects), to transcribe and translate the remaining data as well as to verify and finalize the data together with the speech community members. Presentation of the vocabulary in semantic Domains along with photos or images, preparing a few notes on Phonology and Culture and finalization of the presentation of the data followed by publication are the further steps, we wish to undertake. We would need ca. one more year to complete this work.

5. TEAM OF RESEARCHERS

The team consists of the following members:

Principal investigator: Dr. Manjiri Paranjape (Retd. Professor of German, Pune, India)

Experts: Dr. Shrikant Joshi (Ph.D. in Linguistics from Université de Lausanne, Switzerland), Darshan Pol (Masters in Music Production, Berklee College of Music, USA. Professional Audio-, Video- recordist), Neelesh Kale (M. Des., IIT, Powai. Professional Photographer), Saeed Kulkarni (European Master in Lexicography)

Team Members: Maithilee Dekhane-Joshi, Shruti Jog, Nupur Khisty, Mrunal Shevade, Shama Khare, Pooja Desai, Rujuta Tilekar (All are Language Experts and have Masters in German Studies)

Members of the Speech community: Manisha Majji, Sharada Oksa, Ramila Wachami, Parvati Wadde, Kishor Wadde, Sharada Bhosekar and others.

6. BUDGET

The GBS funding (1,500 Euro = Indian Rs.1,18,845) for the period from December 2018 to May 2020 was extremely useful to cover a part of the expenses. As mentioned in our proposal a part of the funding has been used to cover some expenses of the field visits. The remaining amount has been used to compensate the members of the speech community for their help and contribution. The details are as follows:

- Field Visits: Travel to the tribal area (Pune - Nagpur - Hemalkasa), accommodation and daily expenses during the field visit (for 4 persons): 850 Euro (Rs. 67,345)
- Remuneration to the (7) members of the speech community: 650 Euro (Rs. 51,500)

7. WE THANK

The German Association for Endangered Languages (GBS), Maharogi Sewa Samiti, Lokbiradari Project, Dr. Prakash Amte, Dr. Manda Amte, Dr. Anagha Amte, Prof. (Retd.) Raiomond Doctor (Linguist), Dr. Lokesh Tamgire, Trupti Chafekar, Sneha Mahajan, Ruby Saptarshi, Sanket Joshi and all the villagers.



APPENDIX: MADIA TRIBE AND CULTURE



The tribal community families reside in the dense forest in the Bhamragad Sub- District. The climate is rather unfriendly, in Summer it is 48°C and in winter 5°C, it rains heavily in Monsoon season due to which the seven big rivers in this area are flooded and the entire area is cut off for weeks together from the rest of the world.



Villages are usually small, having ca. 200 to ca. 1800 inhabitants. Huts are built of mud, thatch, bamboo and grass. The animals - cows, goats, hens and pigs - are part of the family and have their own separate huts near the main hut. No wonder that the Madias have a very close relationship with the nature. Initially they would not plough the farm, since they considered it as a rape on the mother earth. Cows are even today not milked, since the milk is for the calves



Gotul, a kind of Community Centre can be found in every village. Traditionally unmarried boys and girls used to assemble in *Gotul*, used to dance and sing together and could eventually find their life partner. Today *Gotul* is rather a meeting place for all villagers. Meetings are conducted in the *Gotul* to take decisions or to solve disputes. All villagers dance in *Gotul* on auspicious occasions. A Madia group dance ('*Rela*' or '*Dhol*') is a notable spectacle to watch.



Traditionally Madias are hunters. They also do farming. The main crop is rice. They grow vegetables and millets. Madias eat 'anything that moves' ranging from birds, squirrels to snakes and crocodiles. They are very fond of 'Laing', a preparation of red ants. Homemade liquor made from *mahua* flowers and *toddy* – Palm wine are also a part of their food. ▲



Madias are skilled craftsmen, carve pillars and stones, make music instruments and bamboo utensils. ▲



Madias have their own religion and they worship their local deities and forces of Nature. They offer hens or goats to the Gods. Their festivals (*pandum*) are mostly related to agriculture. In each village there is a *Perma* (= priest and healer), who worships in the village temple and who has knowledge of medicinal plants. He uses *mantras* (holy verses) to treat patients or sometimes he even sacrifices animals to cure diseases. ▲



A Madia girl has freedom to choose her husband. The father of the groom pays bride price in the form of rice, ▲ goats, hens and liquor. The entire village is invited for the marriage. The villagers drink liquor, sing, have music and dance throughout the night.



The dead are buried. Stones and the objects, utensils dear to the dead person are placed on the tomb. Some ▲ carved stone pillars are erected on the burial ground to honour the dead. The Madias carry the belief that the soul dwells in these pillars before it takes rebirth.

The observations and experience during our field visits show that Madias are very self confident and have a strong self esteem. Our Team has formed the impression that they are dignified people ready to face the challenges of life, are satisfied with the little they have. They co-operated well with our Team, answered all our questions patiently, allowed us to record various events without any monetary expectation from us. Our Team members were always welcome into houses of strangers during the field work. Their hospitality, simple life, closeness to nature, community living, sense of humour, humane attitude and innocence impressed and touched us during our field work. The field visits were a very enriching experience for all the Team members, we learnt a lot from the Madia people.