



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Dandami Maria Tribe (Bison Horn Maria / Khalpati Maria)

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Context

- The **Bison Horn Maria dance** of the **Dandami Maria tribe** of **Bastar, Chhattisgarh**, has recently gained attention for its **resilience and continued cultural vitality** despite modern influences.

Who Are the Dandami Maria?

- A **tribal community** belonging to the **Gond (Koytorias) ethnic group**.
- Also called:
- **Bison Horn Maria** (due to horn-shaped ceremonial headgear)
- **Khalpati Maria**
- Part of one of the **oldest indigenous traditions of Central India**, with deep forest-based cultural practices.

Origin & Ethnic Background

- Trace lineage to the **ancient Gondwana region**, historically spread across central India.
- Identify as part of the **Gond tribal tradition**, known for:
- Close relationship with forests
- Rich oral heritage
- Distinct ritualistic and folk practices
- **Language:**
- Primarily speak **Dandami Maria**, a **Dravidian oral language**
- Many also use **Gondi dialects** for inter-tribal communication

Habitat & Distribution

- Predominantly inhabit **Bastar region, southern Chhattisgarh**, including:
- **Darbha, Tokapal, Lohandiguda, Dantewada**
- Settlements are integrated within **dense forests**, shaping:
- Subsistence economy
- Ritual and festival calendar

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- Social structure

Livelihood

- Primarily **agricultural**, with supplemental income from:
- **Hunting and fishing**
- **Collection of minor forest produce**
- Strong reliance on forests fosters **ecological knowledge and conservation practices**.

Key Cultural Features

1. Bison Horn Maria Dance

- Signature cultural expression; performed during:
- Religious festivals
- Ceremonial occasions
- Community celebrations
- **Men's costume:**
- Bamboo horn-shaped headgear adorned with bison/cattle horns, feathers, cowries, and cloth strips
- Bead necklaces and ankle bells
- **Women's costume:**
- Handwoven saris
- Heavy silver and brass ornaments
- Coin ornaments and ceremonial crowns
- Symbolism:
- Reflects **valor, unity, and harmony with nature**
- Reinforces **community identity**

2. Social Institutions

- **Ghotul (youth dormitory):**
- Central to **socialisation**, skill-building, and transmission of cultural norms
- Facilitates education in **folk music, dance, and tribal ethics**
- Social norms:
- Divorce and widow remarriage are permitted, reflecting **flexibility and egalitarianism**

3. Material & Ritual Culture

- **Distinctive hairstyles, ornaments, and ceremonial objects** (e.g., tobacco boxes, combs)
- Functional and symbolic significance in **daily and ritual life**

Cultural Significance

- The tribe represents a **living heritage of India's tribal culture**, showcasing:
- Survival of ancient rituals and folk traditions
- Intergenerational transmission of knowledge
- Harmony between humans and forest ecosystems
- Highlights the **diversity within Gond tribes** and broader **tribal art forms of India**