

INSTITUTION OF YOUTH DORMITORIES AMONG TRIBES OF INDIA.

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“Passion. It lies in all of us. Sleeping... waiting... and though unwanted, unbidden, it will stir... open its jaws and howl. It speaks to us... guides us. Passion rules us all. And we obey. What other choice do we have? Passion is the source of our finest moments. The joy of love... the clarity of hatred... the ecstasy of grief. It hurts sometimes more than we can bear. If we could live without passion, maybe we'd know some kind of peace. But we would be hollow. Empty rooms, shuttered and dank. Without passion, we'd be truly dead.”



Bells of Tribal Dancer Boy on way to Ghotul of Village Edka in Bastar, Chhattisgarh

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The culture of community houses among tribes of India has aroused the interest of anthropologists ever since the knowledge of the earliest accounts of the Maria's Ghotul, Nagas' great bachelors' halls and the Oraons' youth dormitories. One of the first references to the *morung* of certain Naga tribes is probably a passage in tribal culture of Konyak men's houses and girls' dormitories referred not only to the bachelors' houses of such Assam hill-tribes as Kabuis and Garos, but commented at some length on the youth dormitories of the Oraons of the Chota Nagpur highlands. Since those early days of ethnographic observation, much information has been gathered on the *morung* and kindred institutions of Assam, but for many years little attention was paid to corresponding institutions in Central India. About Assam and Myanmar reliable information on youth dormitories and men's houses in Peninsular India is still so scanty that there seemed to be little scope for a critical comparison of these institutions with the better documented *morung* system of the Naga Hills. The ensuing years, however, saw an intensification of anthropological field-work in Peninsular India, and publication of an imposing monograph on the youth-dormitories of the Bastar, that prolific student of the Indian aboriginal, enables us to review the role of youth clubs in the scheme of Indian cultures.

Let us briefly consider the various types of community-houses, youth-clubs and girls' dormitories occurring among the pre-literate peoples of India. There are the great men's houses (*morung*) of certain Naga tribes which serve as social centers not only of the unmarried youths but also of the married men. These institutions play a vital role in coordinating the activities of all male members of the community and gain particular importance in those warlike societies which depend on the young men for the defence of the village. In some tribes, as among the Nagas, the men's house is linked with an elaborate system of



Figure: 1 Yakang' Morung, the site of the first Yachme village Morung reported to have been built long before the Ahom king Sukhapa set foot on Naga soil

age-groups. Boys entering the *morung* at puberty remain for three years in the lowest grade, after which they, with all their contemporaries, rise to the next age-group. Each age-group discharges prescribed duties and enjoy definite privileges, and in the course of his life a man passes automatically from one age-group to the other. In other tribes, such as the Konyaks, the age-groups are less clearly defined, but there too the principle prevails that all members of a men's house have obligations and rights determined by age and the time of initiation into the *morung*-community (Fig. 1).



Jen Kiiruinha boys and girls in front of the *pundal mane* of Tarkoli. the *doda puntlat* at the extreme right.

Among the Naga tribes the men's house became the real home of the boys, 'The Community House of the Lamet' taken literally, the statement is misleading, and I take the opportunity to correct it. Nowhere in the Naga Hills, as I discovered, can the men's house be considered as replacing a boy's parental home. Its function is altogether different: by entering the *morung* a boy gains admission to the society of men without, however, severing his ties with his own family. Throughout life — for the unmarried son, for the young married man who, perhaps at the height of his importance in *morung* affairs, sets up a household of his own, as well as for the seasoned village elder — the family or household remains the dominant economic unit. Though the highly developed *morung* institution of some Naga tribes absorbs much of the men's social and political energies, there is no conflict between a man's loyalty to his *morung* and his obligations towards his family or household. Family and *morung* satisfy different social needs and are in no way mutually exclusive. However deeply a Konyak youth may be engrossed in *morung* affairs, for sustenance and most other necessities he is dependent on the efforts of his own household, and he has to render to the family unit services equivalent to the privileges which he enjoys at its hands. Though in some Naga villages the members of a *morung* cultivate one or two fields as a joint enterprise, the yield of such fields is destined solely for entertainment at feasts and ceremonies, and does not contribute to the day-to-day food-supply of the *morung* members.

Economically then the *morung* does not encroach on the family's function as the primary economic and social unit; but in the political field there are instances of the *morung* usurping the political role otherwise played by the village. Some Konyak *morung* are largely autonomous political units and pursue their own policies which may be at variance with those of the other *morung* of the same village. This political dominance of the individual *morung* is most marked in communities organized on 'democratic' lines, where power is vested in a council of prominent men, each of whom is influenced by the views held by the members of his own *morung*. In communities ruled by chiefs, the political importance of the *morung* and even its role as a ritual centre is overshadowed by the dominance of the chief's house and the functions of the men's house recede to those of a dormitory for the unmarried and a club for the married.

The principle that children over a certain age should not sleep under the parental roof is not confined to boys. From the age of nine or ten girls too must sleep apart from their parents. Forbidden to enter the *morung* except on certain ceremonial occasions, they repair each evening to special dormitories where they spend the night. In these dormitories they are visited by the unmarried boys and young men of those *morung* which stand in marriage relations with the *morung* of their fathers and brothers. Girls' dormitories are seldom separate buildings. They are usually annexes to private houses or rooms in the chief's house which are set aside for the use of the unmarried girls. The girls' dormitory lacks the ritual importance and magical virtue of the *morung*. Serving as the approved meeting place for boys and girls of inter-marrying clans the girls' dormitory assumes the role of a mixed youth club, whereas the *morung* remains a purely masculine institution. (Fig.2)

The men's house is an important element in the social structure of many hill-peoples of Assam and north east . In the one or the other form it occurs among most of the Naga tribes, but among the Semas and Angamis it has to-day lost all practical importance in everyday life. For ritual purposes, however, even Semas and Angamis construct occasionally small models of *morung*. Men's houses are also found among the Abors , Mikirs, Garos, Lalungs and Lyingams, as well as among most Kuki and Lushei tribes. In Myanmar men's houses occur among the Khamtis and the Karen, and further east the institution is found among the Moi tribes of French Indo-China. The latter region, however, is ethnographically so little known that it is impossible to trace accurately the distribution of the men's house in Indo-China. But study of the institution among the Lamet in the hills east of the Mekong River has brought to light the most detailed parallels between the men's house of this Mon-Khmer speaking tribe and the Naga *morung*. (Fig.3). Indeed there can be no reasonable doubt that the *congying* of the Lamet and the *morung* of the Konyak are but two manifestations of the same institution. Community-houses of similar type flourish in Sumatra, Sulawasi, the Philippines and New Guinea, and the occurrence of this cultural element in widely separated areas — areas which share, however, a common cultural background — are consistent with the current theories of the ethnological structure of South East Asia and Oceania.

The existence of youth dormitories in certain areas of India, on the other hand, poses a more complicated problem. The distribution is patchy, and *prima facie* cannot be correlated with any distinct cultural, racial or linguistic tradition. According to the data at present available the main areas of distribution are firstly Almora and Garhwal in the Himalayas, secondly a broad zone of Central India including parts of Bihar, Orissa and Bastar, and thirdly the hill-tracts of Travancore and some regions in Karnataka , the Wayanad and the Nilgiri Mountains. Our knowledge of the first and the third area is limited, and the data available on the constitution and function of the youth-dormitories does not allow of a detailed comparison with the corresponding institutions of Assam and Central India.



Figure: 2 The young Naga Boy and Girl are ready to assemble in function at Morung



Figure: 3 The Naga girls are dressed up with jewelry and sitting before Morung

Among the Bhotias of Almora, and especially among those of the Darma Pargana, we find an institution which is club or guild composed of women and girls. I believe that the development of such clubs is due to the men's enforced absence on trading-expeditions for a considerable part of the year. Each village has a village club, known as *Rang Bang*, but large villages have more than one. The club, whose management rests primarily with the unmarried girls and newly married but childless women, meets either in a house or on an open piazza. The young men of the village, whenever present, are freely admitted to these clubs. Sometimes the girls invite boys of neighbouring villages, and acting as hostesses supply their guests with food and bedding. On such occasions, the young people spend the whole night in singing, dancing, eating and drinking. The *Rangbang* are the accepted venues for courting and match-making and the fact that illegitimate children are known as '*rangbang* children' suggests that in these youth clubs there are opportunities for pre-marital and possibly extra-marital sexual intercourse.

From above description it would appear that the *Rangbang* of the Bhotia corresponds rather to the girls' dormitories than to the *Morung* of the Nagas, but the *Rangbang* serves — like most *Morung* — also as a place where travellers and visitors can find shelter. It is quite clear, however, that although there may exist a clubhouse (*rangbangkuri*), the *rangbangis* primarily a social unit, an association of the young girls and women, and not a building; indeed it seems that in some places the club dispenses with a building and meets in the open.

It is unfortunate that no scholar has ever studied the interesting institution of the *rangbang* and that there is no information on the occurrence of such girls' clubs among other sections of the Bhotia people.

There is no better position in regard to the youth dormitories of South-west India. Though some of the hill-tribes of Travancore are moderately well known, information on the dormitories for boys and girls is scanty. The Kanikkar only that they have bachelors' halls which serve as dormitories for unmarried young men, as rest-houses for visitors and as village council halls. These houses may not be entered by women, and there are separate dormitories for girls.

Youth dormitories are also found among the Muduvar (Muthuvan), Mannan, Palayan and Vishavan. But on the whole little can be said of the institution in Travancore except that it prevails among some of

the tribes whose main occupation is a primitive type of shifting cultivation. It is absent among the food-gatherers and hunters as well as among more advanced communities.

Until information on the dormitories of the aboriginal tribes of the Waynad and the Nilgiris was equally deficient. Indeed, apart from their bare existence nothing was on record regarding these youth dormitories and their social significance.

The Jen Kurumbas inhabiting the forests on the borders of Karnataka and the Wynad are a tribe which combines the gathering of wild roots and fruits and the most skilful collection of honey with the raising of crops of millet, sago and pulses .

The Jen Kurumbas have dormitories for boys as well as for girls. These dormitories are small rectangular huts built of bamboo and thatched with grass . They are hardly distinguishable from ordinary dwelling huts, but both boys' and girls' dormitories stand usually at some small distance from the settlement. The boys' dormitory is called *pundal mane*; *mane* means house and *pundal* has to-day the double sense of bachelor and 'vagabond'. The girls' dormitory is called *pundatir mane* and this term has obviously a similar derivation. Both dormitories are built by the boys of the settlement and are very simple structures. They contain no furniture except some mats and there is a rule that food may neither be cooked nor eaten inside the dormitory. Boys may enter the girls' dormitory and sleep there; and girls are not debarred from visiting the *pundal mane*. Though it is not very usual for girls to come to the boys' house, there appears to be no objection to their spending the night there. Sexual intercourse between the unmarried is allowed in either dormitory and it is strictly taboo for dormitory members to disclose to adults the happenings in the dormitory. Offenders against this rule are fined, a large sum for a youngster in so primitive a community. Neither does etiquette allow adults to discuss the internal affairs of the boys' and girls' houses. This autonomy of the dormitories is accompanied by a close organization of their inmates. Every *pundal mane* has a leader, known as *dodapundal*, who is selected by the members. Age, though not irrelevant, is not the only qualification for office. A boy must be capable of managing the affairs of the dormitory and maintaining discipline. He is considered the leader and spokesman of the village youth and a man wishing to employ the dormitory boys for work on his fields must approach the *dodapundal*, who, however, consults the other boys and obtains their agreement before he commits the gang. Whenever the boys go out on a common errand it is the girls' duty to clean and sweep the *pundal mane*. Any boy who wants to sleep with a girl must obtain the permission of the *dodapundal* whose duty it is to see that the rules of exogamy are not violated even in such premarital attachments. Similarly if a boy intends to marry a girl he must consult the *dodapundal*. In most dormitories there is also a *sane pundal* who acts as the *dodapundal's* assistant and it is the *sane pundal* who is likely to succeed when the *dodo pundal* marries and has to quit the dormitory

The girls' dormitory is organized on similar lines. One of the older girls functions as *dodapundati* and exerts a certain amount of control over the girls who consult her in regard to liaisons and marriage. It appears that indiscriminate sex-relations are not approved, and the *dodapundal* in Tarkoli, a settlement near Muthanga, if a girl had sexual relations with several boys he and the *pundati* would warn her to stick to one partner. It is said that if an unmarried girl becomes pregnant she names the man responsible and declares that she wants to be his wife. In such a case the *dodapundal* with the support of the adult members of the group compels the man to marry her.

I was told that the girls do not start their sexual life before maturity. Intercourse need not take place in one of the dormitories, but young people meet in the forest or slip away from dances into the darkness of the jungle.



Figure: 4 Urali Village with the open *Chital pore* to the right.

Although the *dodapundal* has a good deal of authority over the members of his dormitory he is only an elected leader and if he misbehaves he can be fined by the other boys. As soon as he marries he automatically loses his office and may never again come to the *pundal mane*. Nor many widows and widowers, however young, return to the dormitory. The Jen Kurumbas, referred to by Malayalam-speaking people as Naiker, are not the only tribe in the Waynad that maintains the dormitory institution. It occurs also among the Oralis or Bette Kurumbas, who, like the Jen Kurumbas of to-day, are primitive shifting cultivators. In the centre of each of their small villages is a hut open on all sides which is known as *chital pore* or *chital mane* and this serves as a bachelors' hut (Fig.4). Male visitors may sleep in the *chital pore* and when a couple visits another village their host as well as the visitor sleep in the bachelors' hut while the visiting woman is accommodated in the hut of their hosts. Widowers too may sleep in the *chital pore*. The leader of the bachelors is known as *benekara* and he is responsible for the behaviour of the unmarried boys. If any of them commits an offence the *benekara* fines him and this fine is handed over to the village elders, who hold the *benekara* responsible for the behaviour of all members of his *chital pore*.

Besides the *chital pore* there is in every village at least one *bangiri* or girls' dormitory and if there are more than five or six unmarried girls and widows, there may be two *bangiri*; for all Urali huts, *chital pore* and *bangiri* not excepted, are very small. The *bangiri* is built by the men who have unmarried daughters in the same style as ordinary huts: rectangular with wattle walls and a low, thatched roof. The girls have also a leader, the *bent akka*, who fines any girl found guilty of an offence against tribal custom; the girl's parents have to pay the fine, which is ultimately handed over to the village headman.

It seems that the boys though allowed to enter the *bangiri* are not supposed to sleep there. Premarital intercourse appears to be tolerated, but love-making in violation of the rules of exogamy is punished by fines imposed on both offenders. There is no any pledge of secrecy — such as observed in the Jen Kurumbas — which would prevent the unmarried from disclosing the happenings in the dormitories.

The *chital pore* is not only a dormitory for the unmarried, but serves also as a shrine for Hetaya, the deified 'first man'. If anyone in the village falls seriously ill all villagers gather at the *chital pore* and propitiate Hetaya with offerings.

In discussing the dormitories of the Jen Kurumbas and Uralis one must bear in mind the very low level of the general material culture of both these tribes. Villages are small clusters of huts under trees or in narrow clearings. The dormitories too are insignificant structures of the greatest simplicity which no casual observer would recognize as 'public buildings'.

It is noticeable that in the Waynad only the two most primitive tribes build dormitories whereas the institution is foreign to the far more advanced Mulu Kurumbas as well as to the matrilineal Padiyas and Chettis, all of whom are cultivators of wet rice with permanent well-built villages.

The forest-clad, rolling hills of the Waynad border on the outer ranges of the Nilgiris and there too live Uralis and Jen Kurumbas as well as the numerically small tribe of Kasabaths, who appear to be culturally very similar to Jen Kurumbas. Kasabaths too have separate dormitories for boys and girls, but there is no information on their internal organization.

When one comes to the tribes inhabiting the high ranges of the Nilgiris, he is confronted with a fundamentally different cultural atmosphere. Since neither Todas nor Badagas show any trace of a dormitory institution, it is only the Kotas who interest us in this context.

The Kotas are a small community of cultivators and artisans who inhabit seven villages in the Nilgiri highlands. Every Kota has a number of Toda and Badaga clients whom he traditionally supplies with iron implements and pots receiving in exchange milk-products from the Todas and grain from the Badagas. The Kotas are, moreover, professional musicians whose services are required at certain Toda and Badaga ceremonies. This and the fact that they suffer from certain social disabilities has given rise to the impression that the Kotas are comparable to the low caste or even 'untouchable' musicians of rural Hindu society. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Kotas were probably the first agricultural population in the highlands and there is reason to believe that they initiated the system of terracing hill-slopes which later the Badagas developed so extensively throughout the hills. Small millets were the staple crop of the Kotas and they worked their fields with iron hoes of their own manufacture. The most striking feature of Kota culture is the extensive use of stone in the construction of seats, dolmens, round sitting platforms, linings to dance places and large cattle kraals. Menhirs, in pairs and in threes, can be seen in most villages, and no one familiar with living megalithic cultures in other parts of India can fail to notice the many megalithic elements in Kota culture.

Thus the Kotas appear not only as artisans and musicians but also as substantial cultivators dwelling in permanent villages with all the attributes of very ancient settlements. There is a very great contrast between the Kotas' well-built and permanent villages and the flimsy bamboo huts of Kurumbas and Uralis erected this year in one part and next year perhaps in another part of the forest.

Yet the dormitory institution — in a somewhat a typical form — has an established place also in Kota culture. Kota villages are divided into two or three quarters (*keri*) which are the principal exogamous units. In every such *keri* there are one or more houses in which the unmarried as well as young childless couples spend the night. On many evenings they sing, play instruments and tell stories until close on midnight, and after fires and lamps have been extinguished there seems to be ample opportunity for sexual intercourse. These dormitories are referred to as *erm-pay* (place house) or *erm paid pay* (house where they sleep in the place). It is possible, moreover, that *erm* may mean 'sexual intercourse' (literally to join in a place) in that case the name of the house would mean 'sexual intercourse house'.

A Kota text throws light on this institution and the Kotas' general attitude to pre-marital and extra-marital sex-relations. I shall quote it here in an abbreviated form :

"In our caste of Kotas it is customary it is customary in the caste of Kotas that when the young men go out to gather fruit, they flirt with the young women while they pick fruits. Intimate friends then confide to each other to how many girls they have made love. It is the custom even up to this day for all young

men to take their wives with them and to sleep all in one house. Only a man of strong personality will be able to prevent his wife from having intercourse with other men. When the women and men sleep in one house they are singing songs, playing and flirting until the lamp is put out. When they have extinguished the lamp a woman may think, however: Let us deceive my husband. Then she will clean her hair until he falls asleep. When she realizes that he has gone to sleep, a man who desires her may creep up to her and they may lie together. After they have finished, each goes to his or her own sleeping mat, lies down and goes to sleep. The next morning the man will boast: In the presence of her husband I went to this woman.

The indifference to marital fidelity during the first years of marriage recalls the marriage customs of the Konyak Nagas, and the whole atmosphere of the Kota institution is very close to the spirit of some of the more developed dormitory institutions in Assam and Middle India. I am not sufficiently familiar with Kota culture to assess its place in the scheme of archaic Indian civilizations, but the many megalithic elements, the custom of buffalo sacrifice and perhaps the now obsolete manufacture of bark-fiber cloth suggest eastern affinities. Here, however, is not the place to trace general cultural affinities, and we must be content with having established the existence of youth dormitories among the primitive, forest dwelling Kurumbas and L'ralis as well as — in a different form — among the more advanced Kotas.

Before attempting to account for the patchy distribution of youth-dormitories in Southern India, let us turn to those parts of north east where youth dormitories occupy an important place in the social structure a number of populous tribes, and where among the Murias institution of a number of populous tribes, and where among the Murias the institution of the *ghotul* has attained a degree of elaboration comparable to that of the Naga *morung*.

In Bihar we find youth-dormitories of various type among such tribes as the Mai and Sauria Paharias, Oraons, Mundas, Hos, Birhors and Asurs. The Mai Paharias and the Sauria Paharias — who are sometimes referred to as Malers — have separate dormitories for boys and girls, but the more recent accounts, such as for instance suggest that the decay of the institution is far progressed. A similar process of decay may also account for the disappearance of youth dormitories among other tribes, but it is doubtful whether it is justified in assuming that a youth-organization once existed also among the Santals. It is suggested that the dancing-floors, usually situated in front of the house of a certain village-dignitary, where the boys and girls often gather in the evening, are the remnants of a dormitory institution. Certain references to the Santals in nineteenth century reports would seem to support this view, but I can speak with authority on Santal institutions, tells me that these references are misleading and that I have never found a trace of either youth-companies or dormitories in any Santal village.

Among the Oraons, whose boys' and girls' dormitories are described, the Oraons of Chota Nagpur, the institution has retained much of its vitality in many boys' dormitories in good repair. The fact that various traditional and semi-sacred objects, such as the wooden animals which are taken out at religious fairs are housed in the dormitories speaks for the ceremonial importance of these club-houses. A dancing-ground lined with stone-seats lies in front of the boys' dormitory, but though this piazza is obviously used by both sexes, the girls take no part in the social and ritual life of the dormitory. They have their own dormitory which is an inconspicuous structure and has not the character of a public building

Youth dormitories are also found among Mundas, Hos and Bihors. In many villages, however, they are not separate structures, but rooms set apart in an ordinary dwelling house for the use of the young people. The organization of the boys and girls seems here to be less elaborate than among the Oraons, but whether this is due to the degeneration of the institution or whether among these tribes the dormitories never attained a more developed form is difficult to decide. The institution is also found among the Asurs, the primitive iron-smelters and black-smiths of Bihar. In Orrisa, youth-dormitory as a distinctive element in the culture pattern of the Juangs, Bhuiyas, Konds, Saoras, Gadabas, Bondos and Dires. I have not seen the Juangs, but from descriptions it appears that their men's house (*darbar*) is the nearest approach to the Naga *morung* to be found anywhere in Peninsular India. Yet the Juangs have not, like the Nagas, a highly developed material culture and Dalton has even referred to them as 'the most primitive people I have met with or read of.

'The Muria Ghotul' has close similarity of the Juang *darbar* and the Naga *morung* in Kheonjhar, the dormitory stands in the centre of the village and is often an imposing building with carved beams and pillars. Nearby is a separate, smaller house, the *dkangri-basa*, for the girls. The Juang dormitory... is the centre of the male social and economic life of the village; it is an organization of the youth of the tribe; it is a school of dancing; it is an expression of the communal art of the people. Almost every word of this could be applied to the Konyak *morung*, which is also the focus of the plastic art of the tribe. In the *darbar*, the men assemble for every important event in their corporate life. Here they settle the distribution of clearings for their axe-cultivation so that the gods overhear everything we do. Here the priest's axe, with which the first tree is felled, is stored. From the *darbar* fire is taken to kindle the brushwood in the clearings. Before every festival the men meet to decide what is to be done. Here the grain, which is to be taken to the treasury for the payment of taxes, is collected. Visitors are entertained in the *darbar*, especially that special type of visitor who has come ceremonially to arrange a wedding. The *darbar*, in fact, combines the function of a club, a church and a municipal office. As in Bastar, the Ghotul has an important influence on art and music. In many villages beams and pillars are elaborately carved with elephants, hunting and dancing scenes, female figures and rows of women's breasts. Boys are inspired to decorate beautiful little combs as presents for the *dhangri*. The door into the sacred and reserved part of the dormitory is often well carved with conventional patterns. Where the *darbar* has disappeared, as in Pal Lahara, there is a corresponding decline in the aesthetic sensibility of the tribe.

The boys' dormitory of the Bhuiyas is of similar character though it is usually smaller and less elaborate. Yet it is as important for the Bhuiyas as the *darbar* is for the Juangs. "It is a social temple, the centre of village-life, from which radiate many types of healthful and creative activity". Bhuiya girls have dormitories of their own.

The youth-dormitories of the Konds, Gadabas and Bondos are of a different order. They are primarily for the use of the unmarried, and nowhere do they serve the purpose of a village-hall. Among these tribes it is the sacred stone circles or built-up stone platforms which are used for public gatherings.

Though the girls' and boys' dormitories of the Gadabas are to-day inconspicuous huts, the youth-organizations are well-established and of great importance in the social life of the unmarried. No visitor to a Gadaba village can fail to be impressed by the free and unselfconscious manner of the young girls and the happy camaraderie visibly ruling their relations with boys. It was only later that I came to know the Gadabas' youth-organization, which provides for a leader in charge of all the boys and girls of the village as well as for specified public duties and rights of the youth-companies under his control. The results of subsequent investigations came to conclusion that despite the absence of imposing youth-dormitories, the youth-organization is a vital element in the structure of Gadaba Society

The structure of Bondo society with its strong emphasis on village-exogamy involving a ban on sex-relations between members of the same village, 'men and women who partake of the same sacrificial food (*tsoru*)', excludes intimacy between the boys and girls of one locality; the young people have to look to the youth of neighbouring villages for romantic friendships as well as for their marriage-partners. While the boys' dormitory (*ngersin*), a small hut or annex to an elder's dwelling-house, is of no importance as an avenue to amorous adventures, it is the girls' dormitory (*selani dingo*) which serves as a meeting place for the girls and boys of neighbouring villages. Originally there were two types of girls' dormitories; ordinary small houses attached to dwelling houses and underground shelters, dug some three meter deep into the ground and roofed over with branches, bamboo and pounded earth. This latter type seems to have fallen into disuse; though I was told that occasionally such pits were still being constructed.

In these dormitories the Bondo girls are visited by boys of other villages, who walk many kilometer through night or rain in order to spend some hours in the cheerful company of their girl friends. A favourite entertainment in the *selani dingo* is alternate songs, sometimes spontaneously composed and sung to pleasant tunes. Though the *selani dingo* offers ample opportunity for flirtation, sexual intercourse seldom takes place within the dormitory. The ostensible object of the boys' visit to the girls' dormitory of another village is courtship, and in every batch of boys setting out on such a visit there is usually at least

one who intends to marry one of the dormitory girls. The others join him for the fun of singing and flirting, and in the expectation of meeting sooner or later the girl of their choice. All proposals of marriage are made in the *selani dingo* and the girls are free to accept or reject a wooer. Indeed the complete absence of parental interference in the choice of marriage-partners among the Bondos is unequalled among the tribes of Peninsular India.

This freedom of the young people to choose their mates is intimately bound up with the institution of the *selani dingo*. The friendships made there are to the Bondo the only conceivable avenue to marriage and the decay of the dormitory system would of necessity result in far reaching social changes.

Though to-day our knowledge of the dormitory institution among Juangs, Gadabas and Bondos is greater than it was years ago, it cannot be compared with the information on the Murias' *ghotul*. Here every aspect of the youth-dormitory is discussed with a wealth of detailed documentation, and the institution emerges as the focal point of the social life of Muria youth.

Unlike the men's houses and girls' dormitories of other tribes the *ghotul* is essentially a youth-club in which boys and girls have equal rights and obligations. It's a vowed purpose is to provide the unmarried of both sexes with a common meeting ground where social and sexual relationships may be forged unhampered by the interference of elders. The *ghotul* buildings do not conform to any single architectural pattern; some *ghotul* are simple rectangular huts with a small door, others comprise several structures within one enclosure, the main building having a broad verandah yet others are large buildings of two rooms with doors at each end, and occasionally a *ghotul* may be built on piles, though ordinary dwelling-houses are never raised from the ground. Many *ghotul* are adorned with numerous carvings and wall-paintings, and it seems indeed that the *ghotul* like the *morung* of the Nagas — affords an important stimulus for artistic creation

Both boys and girls enter the *ghotul* when they are six or seven years old. Murias consider that it is sinful for parents to sleep in the presence of their children', and by sending their children to the *ghotul* they avoid being surprised in the intimacies of marital life. Most parents are only too willing to let their children go to the *ghotul*, but if a father prevents his son or daughter from regular attendance or tries to interfere with *ghotul* routine he is lined for what Murias consider an antisocial act.

The management of the *ghotul* lies entirely in the hands of the elder boys and girls. There is an elaborate system of *ghotul* ranks and offices, and as soon as a child is old enough he or she is given a *ghotul* title and is allotted a definite duty. As children rise in the *ghotul* hierarchy, their titles may change with their rank, but this is not a general rule and a boy or girl may retain the same title throughout *ghotul* life though in the course of time occupying a number of different offices. In every *ghotul* there is a leader of the boys (usually called *Sirdar*) and a girl (usually called *Belosa*) who is in charge of the girls. These two dignitaries exert control over the affairs of the young people. In all serious disputes the *Sirdar's* is the final word while in those *ghotul* where partners are changed in rotation the important function of allotting a sleeping partner to each inmate falls to the *Belosa*. The choice of leaders lies with the boys and girls of the *ghotul*; popularity, efficiency and organizing ability qualify a boy for the important appointment as *Sirdar*. The whole principle of the *ghotul* is that everyone is equal, rich or poor, the son of priest, headman or landlord all are one in this fellowship which knows no wealth-distinction or privilege of inherited rank. The leader of the girls too is usually chosen for her personal qualifications, though in some *ghotul* the permanent partner of the *Sirdar* often automatically takes charge of the girls.(Fig:5)

A girl leaves the *ghotul* at the time of her marriage and can never return. But a young married man may continue to go to the *ghotul* occasionally and if he is popular he may even hold office for some years after his marriage. But such cases are exceptions, and as a rule married men are not welcome in the *ghotul* company.

Strict discipline is maintained in every Muria *ghotul* and the leaders are empowered to punish and fine offenders against the *ghotul* code. The systematic education of the younger boys and girls is an important feature of *ghotul* routine and it is the duty of the *ghotul* officers to inculcate manners and give

instruction in dancing and *ghotul* games. They also see that the children receive sexual training and observe the rules of sexual etiquette. There is no ceremony of sexual initiation. From their earliest days in the *ghotul* boys and girls engage in sexual play, but usually it is only after the menarche that girls agree to full congress with their partners.



Figure: 5 Muria youth Chelik and Motiari in Orchha forest

In the *ghotul* sexual intercourse is permissible between any boy and girl who do not belong to the same exogamous group and consummation is the goal of *ghotul* attachments. The Murias consider sexual congress as natural and healthy, and continence is not admired. Though this attitude to sex is general in all *ghotul* there are two distinct codes governing *ghotul* relations: in one type of *ghotul* partners are expected to be faithful to each other and in the other there is not only no premium on faithfulness but a frequent change of partners is compulsory. The first type of *ghotul* is the older, and that the discouragement of permanent liaisons is a later development. Several reasons are given for the change over in *ghotul* rules from a system of permanent unions to a ban on strong and lasting attachments during the prenuptial period. Some Murias consider that lasting *ghotul* unions often lead to elopements and to marriages not in accordance with the wishes of the parents and the interests of established family alliances. Moreover, there is the persistent belief that a frequent change of partners lessens the likelihood of pregnancy. And although prenuptial sexual intercourse is socially approved, the pregnancy of an unmarried girl is considered an embarrassment and a misfortune.

But it seems that despite regular sexual intercourse throughout the years of *ghotul* life most girls avoid pregnancy until marriage. I have collected statistics regarding premarital pregnancies; according to his material 88 men out of 1000 cases admitted to having made their *ghotul* partners pregnant, and in 120 *ghotul* examined 327 cases of girls becoming pregnant before marriage were recorded. These figures may not be entirely reliable, but they nevertheless demonstrate that among *ghotul* girls pregnancy is the

exception rather than the rule. What is the explanation for this remarkable phenomenon? It is found that the same relative infertility of unmarried girls among the Trobriand Islanders, and during my investigations among the Konyak Nagas I came up against the identical puzzle. The answer, has suggested, probably lies in adolescent sterility during a period lasting in most cases two to three years after the menarche.

The effect of the sexual freedom enjoyed by Muria boys and girls before marriage on their behaviour in later life is a matter of considerable interest. Does this freedom result in a general inconstancy in sexual relationships, or does it, on the contrary, create a psychological attitude favourable to marital fidelity? A comparison of conditions among the Murias with those prevailing among Gond tribes that lack the institution of the youth-dormitory (Fig:6) may help us in answering this question. All observers of the Gonds of the Central India agree that they set little store by domestic fidelity, that divorce is frequent and adultery too common an event to arouse either strong passions or vehement public condemnation. Their divorce rate is high and the infidelity of a wife is not taken very seriously; indeed husbands are usually only too willing to take back an unfaithful wife who has eloped with a lover. The Murias' attitude towards marriage is strikingly different. Statistics based on the investigation of 2000 marriages reveal that the incidence of divorce is less than 3 %. It is compared this with the divorce rate of 46 % in a Gond village in the Central India and comes to the conclusion that the discipline and social sense taught in the *ghotul* is responsible for the stability of Muria marriages. Adultery is considered a social crime, a danger not only to the individual but to the whole community. For adultery brings supernatural retribution on the guilty couple and the village in which they live. To avert such dangers a purification ceremony must be performed and the wife's lover must publicly apologize to the husband. It contrasts the remarkable absence of marital jealousy among the Murias with the frequent occurrence of jealousy as the main motif for murder among the Bison-horn Marias. He believes that this is partly due to *ghotul* education which condemns possessiveness and stresses the solidarity of all *ghotul* members, and partly to the strong social feeling against adultery. Social and supernatural sanctions alike make it unnecessary to be jealous.

Yet it is not easy to explain how the permanent attachments of the older type of *ghotul* and the frank sexual communism of the 'modern' *ghotul*, where the frequent change of partners is compulsory, can be equally conducive to marital constancy in later life. Statistics show that there is no appreciable difference in the divorce rate of those who have lived in the one or the other type of *ghotul*. Thus it would seem that it is not the pattern of sexual behaviour proper to the one or other type of *ghotul*, but the principle of general discipline assimilated in the *ghotul* which determines the individual's conduct in later life. Solidarity, mutual helpfulness and the strict observance of rules are the key-notes of *ghotul* training; from an early age children are taught to be useful and law-abiding members of a community, and as office-bearers they learn to put the interest of the community before self-interest, They enter adult life with the consciousness that social conventions must be observed and that every breach of custom is an offence against the solidarity of the tribe. And as tribal law and public opinion demand marital fidelity, it is rare for adult Murias to defy society and to persist in an adulterous union.

It should not be assumed, however, that premarital freedom in sexual matters need of itself engender a mental attitude favourable to enduring marriage. Among the Ifugaos of the Philippines, for



Figure: 6. Conditions among the Murias with those prevailing among Gond tribes that lack the Institution of the youth dormitory but tendency of enjoying and dancing is perpetually prevailing



Figure: 7. Teenage maria girl influenced by modern culture is waiting for his partner to go to the Gotul of village Garbangal adjacent to Narayanpur, Distt. Bastar.

instance, where girls' dormitories provide ample opportunity for promiscuous intercourse, marriages are often and easily dissolved. But, dormitories cannot be compared with the *ghotul* institution; they are houses where young girls, divorcees and widows sleep and receive their lovers, but there appears to be no provision for training the young people in social sense and tribal solidarity.

The *ghotul*, on the other hand, though intimately connected with prenuptial sex-relations, is an institution which fulfills numerous functions other than that of a dormitory for the unmarried. The *ghotul* boys and girls have important public duties, and many rites and ceremonies cannot be performed without their corporate participation. At weddings, for instance, they play a vital role during many phases of the ritual, and are responsible for the proper entertainment of the guests. They arrange for wood, make leaf-cups and plates, do most of the cooking, and above all organize the dances and provide the music. Similarly at funerals essential duties fall to the *ghotul* boys, such as the making and, in certain cases, the carrying of the bier, and the preparation of the pyre. At the burial of distinguished men the ceremonies include singing and in this too the boys and girls have their assigned parts.

In the *ghotul*, the children are taught lessons of cleanliness, discipline and hard work that remain with them throughout their lives. They are taught to take a pride in their appearance, to respect themselves and their elders; above all they are taught the spirit of service (Fig.7). These boys and girls work very hard indeed for the public good. They are immediately available for the service of State officials or for work on the roads".

The *ghotul* is thus an institution as important in Muria society as is the *morung* among the Nagas. But while in some respects both fulfil similar functions, the *ghotul* is distinguished by the constant and close co-operation of boys and girls. Most youth-dormitories are fundamentally either boys' or girls' dormitories, and though boys are often regular and welcome visitors in the girls' houses, girls are rarely admitted to the men's club-houses, and then only on special occasions. It is only in the *ghotul* of the Murias that boys and girls live in one house on a footing of complete equality, and thus form a real children's republic with its own laws and office-bearers.

What then is the origin of this type of youth club which is so highly developed among the Murias, and so rare among other tribes? Can it be the original form of youth-dormitory from which other types are later deviations, or is it a phenomenon peculiar to the genius of Muria culture? We lack the historical data to answer this question, but the comparatively rare occurrence of combined boys' and girls' dormitories speaks in favour of the second alternative. In the *ghotul* of the Murias a specialized form of co-education has been developed to a very high degree, but this development excludes a number of functions characteristic of the community houses' of other peoples. The very fact that the *ghotul* is a 'children's republic' secured against all adult interference bars its use as a 'village-club' and a social and ritual centre for the whole community. While it serves to train the young people in a spirit of co-operation and solidarity, it does not offer possibilities for the continuance of this co-operation among adults, a feature which is so characteristic of the *morung*-system of Assam. In a way, the *ghotul* appears more as a developed and glorified girls' dormitory than as a men's house relegated to the role of a children's club. It is not difficult to imagine that where the necessity for an efficient organization of the adult men for war and defence has been reduced the men's house may have lost much of its *raison d'etre*, and the girls' dormitory, used traditionally as the nocturnal meeting place for boys and girls, may have more and more assumed the role of a youth club, and ultimately taken over those functions; of the men's house which relate to the community life of the unmarried boys.

While the exact causes for the peculiar development of the Muria type of youth club must remain a matter of conjecture, there can be little doubt as to the reality of a connection between the *ghotul* and the youth-dormitories in other areas of central India. The distribution of those institutions covers a large part of the tribal areas of Bihar, Orissa and Bastar, and we can take it for granted that despite local differences in form and function all these dormitories have their roots in one and the same culture-complex. But which civilization is responsible for the spread of this institution? It is obvious that youth dormitories can

hardly have originated among tribes on the hunting and collecting level. Nor is it likely that the more primitive of the shifting cultivators could have evolved in their small and unstable villages the system of separate buildings for the unmarried boys and girls. Only where more permanent villages allowed for the consolidation of substantial communities could a segregation of the unmarried have resulted in the establishment of youth companies sufficiently large to function as distinct social units. Thus it is among more advanced agriculturists dwelling in permanent villages, yet retaining a tribal organization which favours communal living, that we must look for the origin of the institution. Not only the distribution in India but the associations of the youth dormitories in South East Asia point in this direction.

But are we really justified in considering all community houses — men's club, boys' dormitories, girls dormitories, and village halls - as phenomena of the same order? Despite considerable local differences all these institutions have certain elements in common, and their present distribution in India and South East Asia can best be explained by the hypothesis that it was a Neolithic agricultural civilization of South East Asiatic type which favoured the development of community houses in the one or other form, and that the spread of this civilization was instrumental in carrying the dormitory institution into widely separated areas on the Asiatic mainland as well as in Indonesia.

Who then can have been the bearers of this ancient agricultural civilization on Indian soil? Like many ethnologists I would unhesitatingly describe them as the people of Austro-Asiatic languages, pointing to the alleged relationship between the Munda and the Mon-Khmer languages, and the undoubted cultural affinities between certain Munda-speaking tribes of Orissa and certain hill tribes of Assam. But the criticism recently leveled against the genetic connection between Munda and Mon-Khmer languages, though by no means disproving their affinity, necessitates a renewed scrutiny of the problem by linguists. The ethnologist will be well advised not to base his conclusions on controversial linguistic



The young Muriya boy playing bell metal “Turahi” for calling his female friend

assumptions, but to recognize that this particular question must be referred back to the experts competent to pass judgment on a purely linguistic problem. But we do not really need to draw on linguistic evidence in support of the cultural affinities between such tribes as the Gadabas and Bondos of Orissa and the Naga of Assam. I can say that there are striking similarities in the megalithic ritual of both areas, and besides a number of concrete parallels in customs and material culture there is an imponderable likeness in general atmosphere.

The youth-dormitory itself must be regarded as the expression of a social tendency, an 'ethos', rather than as an isolated 'element' of culture. The youth-dormitory can evolve only in a society tuned to communal living and acting, and it is this type of society which has survived among the hill-tribes of Bihar, Orissa and Bastar, as well as in Assam and parts of further India. That this society is typologically older than that of any of the historic Indian civilizations, no one will dispute, and judging from the economic level of these tribes we may be justified in seeking the roots of the institution of community houses in a Neolithic civilization which at one time extended over most of South East Asia and a considerable part of eastern Peninsular India.

While there is a fair volume of evidence of cultural affinities between north east and Assam, we cannot as yet discern any definite connection between the hill tribes of the Western Ghats and those of Bastar and Orissa. It is true, that among those tribes that stand on lower levels of culture, there are certain superficial similarities and one might argue that the subsistence economy and cut and burn cultivation of, say, the Juangs or Dires of Orissa and of the Uralis of the Malabar Hills is essentially of the same type. But to interpret parallels based on the similarities of economic levels as indicative of cultural affinity is methodologically inadmissible. It is only among the Kotas of the Nilgiris that parallels with some of the Orissa cultures extend to certain specialized traits such as megalithic elements, the manufacture of bark cloth, and the role of the buffalo sacrifice in the funeral rites. Moreover, there is the similarity between the Muria and Bondo dormitories and the Kota institution of houses where the unmarried of both sexes as well as young married couples spend the night and are allowed, as it would seem, a considerable measure of sexual freedom. Could these parallels be due to an old cultural link? Failing the support of archaeological evidence — which may sooner or later be forthcoming — or the discovery of many more elements common to both areas, we are hardly justified in assuming historical connections between the Nilgiri cultures and those of Bastar. But it would be equally premature to insist on an independent evolution of a dormitory institution in the extreme Southwest of India.

The problem posed to us relates, however, not only to the Kota 'common rooms' of the village youth, but also to the youth dormitories of the forest tribes of Travancore and the Malabar Hills. How can we explain the occurrence of this institution among tribes on a level of economic development much lower than that of the peoples who appear as the bearers of the institution of community houses in the central Indian belt and in north east? *Prima facie* there are two possibilities. The dormitories of such tribes as the Kanikkars, Muduvans, Jen Kurumbas and Uralis, all of whom practice 'slash and burn' cultivation of a very primitive type, may represent an independent growth, a first tentative step in the direction of a separation and organization of the unmarried boys and girls. Secondly the segregation of the unmarried and their organization may have been a practice introduced by a population of altogether different culture with whom at one time in their history the Southwest Indian jungle tribes came in close contact. Populations akin to the present day Kotas, for instance, may have exerted a considerable influence on the more primitive forest tribes and though they themselves may ultimately have failed to maintain their cultural and racial identity, their dormitory-system may have persisted among such isolated and conservative peoples as the Uralis and Jen Kurumbas.

There is, however, yet another possibility. In this particular region the youth-dormitories may belong to the culture-complex which reached Southwest India by a sea-route from the Malayan Archipelago. People speaking an Indonesian language migrated from the Malayan Archipelago to Madagascar, and crossed the Indian Ocean by a northern route, and it is probable that some of these migrants touched Ceylon and the Southwest coast of India where they must have found climatic conditions very similar to those of their homeland. I believe that successive migrations from Indonesia to the African coast and Madagascar continued over a long period, and under these circumstances we are justified in postulating repeated contacts between Indonesia and the Malabar coast of India. Indeed it is not at all improbable that some of the Indonesian migrants, settling in the coastal lands of Southwest India, brought with them a comparatively advanced agricultural civilization of Southeast Asiatic type,

which was far superior to that of the autochthonous hill and forest tribes. The absence in Madagascar of the plough, the wheel and any kind of writing, proves, however, that these colonists from Indonesia had not been influenced by Hindu civilization either in their homeland or on their route of migration. Thus there may have been a time when Indonesian speaking people resembling some of the so-called 'pagan' tribes of present-day Indonesia were settled on the west coast of Southern India. In Indonesia it is just among tribes of this level of culture that youth-dormitories are most common, and if we grant the possibility of Indonesian settlements on Indian soil there is no difficulty in assuming that the dormitory-institution was imitated, though not fully assimilated, by the more primitive indigenous population of the Southwest coast. The subsequent colonization of Southern India by progressive peasant folks, who introduced a type of economy based on the plough and with it many elements of 'Hindu' civilization, must have spelt the doom of the archaic 'Indonesian' culture.

After this diversion I have still to consider the institution of village clubs run by the girls and women among the Bhotias of Garhwal. The alleged relationship between the pronominalized Himalayan languages spoken by certain Bhotia tribes and the Munda languages may tempt us to consider the occurrence of girls' clubs among the Bhotias and among many Munda-speaking tribes more than mere coincidence. Mundas or tribes related to them have once been settled in the Himalayas where traces of their language can still be observed we could easily attribute these institutions to the existence of a substratum of ancient Munda culture. Should renewed investigations into the position of the Himalayan languages confirm the hypothesis of an Austro - Asiatic substratum and then it will be legitimate to see in the girls' club the survival of the dormitory system characteristic of the culture of numerous Austro-Asiatic speaking tribes. Pending a decision in the linguistic sphere we must consider the geographical situation. If peoples who had developed the dormitory institution in the hills of Assam and North-east India, migrated westwards into India proper, they had two possibilities of moving within country not too radically at variance with their habitat. The Gangetic plain must have been as uncongenial to their style of life as is the Brahmaputra plain to the hill-people of Assam to-day, but from the western end of the Garo Hills it is less than five hundred kilometers to the highlands of Bihar, and the suggestion that in neolithic times hill-people with eastern affiliations effected the crossing of the Ganges Valley does not overstrain our credulity. The existence of highly developed community houses in both areas suggests indeed a high degree of probability for such a migration. But for tribes settled on the southern slopes of the Himalayas — tribes perhaps comparable to the Abors with their large *morung* — there was no need to descend into the uncongenial atmosphere of the plains ; under pressure from the East, they could give way by moving westwards along the Himalayan slopes. The history of racial migration in north-east India points to a pressure centre somewhere in Southwest China or Northern India in late neolithic times, and the assumption of an east-west movement along the Himalayas would explain not only the existence of the girls' clubs among the Bhotias but other cultural affinities between Western and Eastern Himalayas.

Before summarizing the various hypotheses advanced in these pages, we may review the types of community houses and youth dormitories which we have met with in the course of this brief survey of the Indian material.

There is, first of all, the men's house of the Nagas and other Assam tribes. The alternative term 'bachelors' hall' is not commendable for it implies incorrectly that the *morung* is principally a house for the unmarried males. But although the *morung* serves as a dormitory for young boys and bachelors it is above all a men's club, the centre of all the most important male activities. It is the focal point of the ritual virtue of the village or village-quarter and usually harbours the valuable head-trophies. Indeed among some tribes, such as the Chang and Yimsungr Naga, the *morung* is primarily the ritual centre, and in the construction of many such *morung* sleeping space has been sacrificed to an exaggerated emphasis on the features which distinguish it from the ordinary dwelling houses. The Naga *morung* is the rallying point of all men, old and young and *morung* officials play an important role in village affairs. Notwithstanding its function as a 'school' for boys, it is primarily a community house and men's club, and only incidentally

also a boys' dormitory. In some cases, such as among the Konyak Nagas, the *morung* is also a political unit and loyalty to the *morung* takes precedence over loyalty to the village, with the result that occasionally a village may be divided against itself, individual *morung* pursuing different policies. The men's house is here the main channel of centripetal social forces. It serves to bind together the men of a compact social unit, and counteracts such centrifugal forces as rivalry, jealousy and hatred by the strictly enforced demand for co-operation and loyalty of all members of a *morung*. This loyalty and the need for discipline are instilled into the boys from an early age, and they receive religio-magical sanction through *murang*-rites and the association with the *morung* of the powerful magical forces inherent in the heads of slain enemies. In other words, the *morung* is the vessel of the magical virtue in possession of the community and periodical rites are required to maintain the potency of this virtue. The fear of outside aggression, latent in any society of head-hunters, strengthens the feeling of mutual dependence of the *morung* members and adds to its vital role in Naga society. Girls' dormitories occur in association with men's houses, but are by no means their counterpart. They are used only by the young girls and are nowhere regular women's clubs.

In India this type of community house is mainly confined to the hills of Assam, where it is found among the Nagas, Abors, Garos and Lalungs. The nearest approach to the type in Peninsular India seems to be the *darbar* of the Juangs but nowhere on the Peninsular do we find club-houses of the ritual sanctity characteristic of the *morung* or the great men's houses of Indonesia and Melanesia.

The second type of community house is the youth dormitory so widely distributed among the aboriginals of central India. This institution serves primarily the needs of the unmarried, and though occasionally it may also serve as a village hall or rest-house for visitors it is fundamentally a youth club and a youth dormitory, run by and for the benefit of the unmarried boys or girls. Usually there are boys' as well as girls' dormitories and the differences in their organization are slight. It is only among the Murias that we find a combined youth dormitory for boys and girls. But elsewhere too girls' dormitories are open to the boys and are the recognized venue for premarital love making.

In some cases married people are expressively excluded from such youth dormitories, and even widowers and widows, however young, cannot rejoin the company of the village youth. Although the two institutions show a number of common elements such as the provision of community education of the young people, the fundamental differences must not be overlooked. The Naga *morung* and the Muria *ghotul* may have certain common roots, but they have developed on independent lines according to the configuration of two different cultures.

Most community houses and dormitories can be aligned with one of these two types. But it appears that in the whole of India west of Assam the second type is prevalent and that there the community houses are primarily youth dormitories though occasionally they may serve also other purposes. An exception is perhaps the *darbar* of the Juangs which functions as a general centre of male activities and resembles in that respect the Naga *morung*. A rigid differentiation between the two types is altogether difficult, and many institutions combine characteristics of both types.

India offers many examples of a degeneration of the community house either in form or function, but here too we must distinguish between two main lines of development. In Assam we observe cases where the men's house has lost its function as a regular dormitory and has developed into a structure containing head-trophies and the sacred log drums, but is not built to accommodate any number of men. From a *morung* of this type it is probably only a small step to a village shrine and we cannot indeed exclude the possibility that the men's house in its role as the depository of sacred objects is one of the proto-types of the temple. There is reason to believe for instance, that the *nago* shrines of the Apa Tanis of the Balipara north east Tract are degenerated men's houses. Each village quarter (corresponding to the Naga *khel*) has such a *nago*, and whenever a trophy (usually an enemy's hand) is brought in, it is first kept in the *nago* and then burnt in front of it. A man's position in the ritual system of the village depends on the *nago* to which he belongs and boys and girls are organized in gangs according to *nago*-membership.

While the *nago* is a small structure into which a man can hardly enter, there is invariably a large raised platform (*lapang*) next to the *nago* and this sitting platform, built of enormous planks, fulfills many of the functions of the Naga *morung*; here visitors are entertained, gatherings held, and communal rites performed; moreover, men use it as a kind of open air workshop where they make baskets and mats, and do many other odd jobs.

In this case we see that the function of the men's house has partly remained but that its material shape has dwindled to a purely symbolic structure, a 'shrine' built to accommodate ritual objects but not people.

A different variation of the degeneration of the men's house institution is found among some of the Lushei Kuki tribes. There the practice of the bachelors' sleeping in separate dormitories is retained, but the people do not build special houses; a public spirited elder sets aside a room in his own house for the purpose. Here the principle of separate sleeping quarters remains, but the *morung* as a distinct building and ritual centre has disappeared. The Kota institution of nocturnal meetings of the village youth in private houses seems to be due to a similar process, and there are many tribes where the girls do not have a separate dormitory building of their own, but are accommodated in the house of a widow or an elderly couple.

Different from these gradual transformations of the community house is the conscious abandonment of the institution as a result of social pressure and disapproval on the part of politically dominant populations. Throughout Peninsular India the youth-dormitories are faced with condemnation and criticism of Hindu populations who invariably object to the freedom of intercourse between unmarried boys and girls. Wherever the aboriginals accept the social values of their neighbours or where they have come under the influence of Christian missionaries the dormitory is fast disappearing and the uneven distribution of the institution today may partly be due to similar cases of outside pressure in previous times.

Concluding our argument it remains to distinguish between the observable facts and the hypotheses advanced while endeavouring to explain the occurrences of youth dormitories and community houses in various and widely separated parts of India.

The facts may be summarized as follows:

1. The institution of community houses prevails in a highly developed form among many of the hill-tracts of Assam and Northern Myanmar. There the men's houses are primarily social and ritual centres co-ordinating male activities in peace and war. Girls' dormitories are of lesser prominence and serve as meeting places for the youth of both sexes.

2. Youth dormitories occur among a number of Munda speaking as well as Dravidian speaking tribes of Bihar, Orissa, and Bastar. In some instances these institutions serve also as village halls and rest houses for visitors but their main purpose is to accommodate the unmarried boys and girls, who are not supposed to sleep under the parental roof. The girls' dormitories provide opportunities for social contacts between boys and girls and in many cases also for premarital sexual intercourse.

3. The *ghotul* of the Murias combines many of the functions of bachelors' halls and girls' dormitories. It is a "children's republic" in which the organization of the village youth as a distinct social force has been developed to a high degree.

4. Separate dormitories for bachelors and girls occur among some of the semi-nomadic forest tribes of Southwest India. Little is known of their internal organization but in some cases there is a system of elected leaders of boys and girls which resembles the 'self-government' of the Muria *ghotul*.

5. The Kotas of the Nilgiris allocate certain dwelling houses for the nocturnal gatherings of the young people of both sexes. In these houses unmarried boys and girls as well as childless couples assemble in the evening and amuse themselves with singing and playing. They usually spend the night in these houses where there are ample opportunities for amorous adventures.

6. Clubs run by the unmarried girls and young women are a feature of many Bhotia villages in Garhwal. They are social associations intended to provide a meeting ground for the young people of both sexes, who join together for dances and other entertainments.

To account for these observable facts we have advanced the following hypotheses:

1. Further India inclusive of Assam was a centre of a distinct neolithic civilization characterized by substantial settlements and a developed system of agriculture which, however, lacked the plough or the principle of animal traction. Community houses combining the functions of men's clubs, ritual centres and youth dormitories were a prominent feature of this civilization.

2. In late neolithic times peoples representative of this civilization moved from Assam westward across the Ganges valley and into the highlands of Bihar and Orissa. Besides other elements of late neolithic culture, such as megalithic ritual, they introduced there the system of community houses. In the new environment the latter's function as men's clubs and repositories of sacred trophies receded, and they developed mainly as youth dormitories.

3. A similar east-west movement followed the southern slopes of the Himalayas and led to the spread of the institution of youth clubs as far as Garhwal, where among the cattle-breeding and semi-nomadic Bhotias it developed into a specialized form of girl's club.

4. In the present state of our knowledge it is impossible satisfactorily to account for the occurrence of youth dormitories among the Kotas and the forest tribes of Southwest India. But the following two possibilities merit consideration.

a) A population akin to the Kotas of the Nilgiris and culturally connected with the megalithic people of Orissa introduced youth-dormitories in South India, and some of the more primitive indigenous forest tribes adopted the institution in a simplified form.

b) Indonesian colonists introduced the idea of youth dormitories on the Malabar coast before the advanced Indian civilizations characterized by such elements as plough cultivation and metal working had reached South India. From such Indonesian settlers some of the autochthonous hill-tribes adopted the system of separate dormitories for the unmarried and the institution persisted even after the colonists had long lost their cultural and racial identity.

Although these two hypotheses postulate different channels for the spread of the dormitory institution to South India they are not as completely contradictory as it would seem at first sight. The dormitory institution in Assam, Indo-China and Indonesia belongs to a complex of closely related cultures of neolithic type which spread both east and west. There is good reason to assume that western offshoots of this civilization were responsible for the introduction of the dormitory system, megalithic ritual and various other elements into the highlands of Bihar and Orissa. Whether further southward migrations by land carried elements of this civilization including the dormitory institution into the extreme south of Peninsula or whether direct contact with Indonesia by sea led to their introduction on the Southwest coast, remains an open question. An independent origin of the institution of youth dormitories among the forest tribes of the Southwest is extremely unlikely, and though the exact channels of distribution are problematic, there is every probability that the youth dormitories in South India owe their existence to the influence of populations directly or indirectly connected with the Southeast Asiatic homeland of the dormitory institution.

Our present knowledge of the ethnology of India is not sufficient to provide conclusive evidence in favour of any of these hypotheses. The Muria and their Ghotul, which led me to review the existing information on the Indian youth-dormitories, marks a big step forward in our understanding of India's preliterate civilizations. The need of the day is more and still more solid field work, for only when the gaps on the ethnographic map of India are closed can well-founded theories take the place of tentative hypotheses.