

# ROBERT VANE RUSSELL

THE TRIBES AND CASTES  
OF THE CENTRAL  
PROVINCES OF INDIA,  
VOLUME 2

**Robert Vane Russell**  
**The Tribes and Castes**  
**of the Central Provinces**  
**of India, Volume 2**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=35006449](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35006449)  
The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, Volume 2:*

# Содержание

Pronunciation	4
Part II	6
Agaria—Fakīr	6
Agharia	14
Aghori	23
Ahīr	31
Andh	63
Arakh	66
Atāri	69
Audhelia	74
Badhak	79
Bahna	109
Baiga	121
Bairāgi	143
Balāhi	164
Baliya	169
Bania	173
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	215

# R. V. Russell

## The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, Volume 2

### Pronunciation

a, has the sound of

ā has the sound of

e has the sound of

i has the sound of

ī has the sound of

o has the sound of

u has the sound of

ū has the sound of

u in *but* or *murmur*.

a in *bath* or *tar*.

é in *écarté* or ai in *maid*.

i in *bit*, or (as a final letter) of y in *sulky*.

ee in *beet*.

o in *bore* or *bowl*.

u in *put* or *bull*.

oo in *poor* or *boot*

The plural of caste names and a few common Hindustāni words is formed by adding *s* in the English manner according to ordinary usage, though this is not, of course, the Hindustāni plural.

Note.—The rupee contains 16 annas, and an anna is of the same value as a penny. A pice is a quarter of an anna, or a

farthing. Rs. 1–8 signifies one rupee and eight annas. A lakh is a hundred thousand, and a crore ten million.

# Part II

## Articles on Castes and Tribes

### Agaria—Fakīr Agaria

#### 1. Origin and subdivisions.

Agaria.<sup>1</sup>—A small Dravidian caste, who are an offshoot of the Gond tribe. The Agarias have adopted the profession of iron-smelting and form a separate caste. They numbered 9500 persons in 1911 and live on the Maikal range in the Mandla, Raipur and Bilāspur Districts.

The name probably signifies a worker with *āg* or fire. An Agaria subcaste of Lohārs also exists, many of whom are quite probably Gonds, but they are not included in the regular caste. Similar Dravidian castes of Agarias are to be found in Mīrzāpur and Bengal. The Agarias are quite distinct from the Agharia cultivating caste of the Uriya country. The Raipur Agarias still intermarry with the Rāwanbansi Gonds of the District. The Agarias think that their caste has existed from the beginning of the world, and that the first Agaria made the ploughshare with

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is compiled from papers by Mr. Mīr Pādshāh, Tahsildār of Bilāspur, and Kanhya Lāl, clerk in the Gazetteer office.

which the first bullocks furrowed the primeval soil. The caste has two endogamous divisions, the Patharia and the Khuntia Agarias. The Patharias place a stone on the mouth of the bellows to fix them in the ground for smelting, while the Khuntias use a peg. The two subcastes do not even take water from one another.

Their exogamous sections have generally the same names as those of the Gonds, as Sonwāni, Dhurua, Tekām, Markām, Uika, Purtai, Marai, and others. A few names of Hindi origin are also found, as Ahindwār, Ranchirai and Rāthoria, which show that some Hindus have probably been amalgamated with the caste. Ahindwār or Aindwār and Ranchirai mean a fish and a bird respectively in Hindi, while Rāthoria is a *gotra* both of Rājput and Telis. The Gond names are probably also those of animals, plants or other objects, but their meaning has now generally been forgotten. Tekām or *teka* is a teak tree. Sonwāni is a sept found among several of the Dravidian tribes, and the lower Hindu castes. A person of the Sonwāni sept is always chosen to perform the ceremony of purification and readmission into caste of persons temporarily excommunicated. His duty often consists in pouring on such a person a little water in which gold has been placed to make it holy, and hence the name is considered to mean Sonāpāni or gold-water. The Agarias do not know the meanings of their section names and therefore have no totemistic observances. But they consider that all persons belonging to one *gotra* are descended from a common ancestor, and marriage within the *gotra* is therefore prohibited. As among the Gonds,

first cousins are allowed to marry.

## 2. Marriage.

Marriage is usually adult. When the father of a boy wishes to arrange a marriage he sends emissaries to the father of the girl. They open the proceedings by saying, 'So-and-so has come to partake of your stale food.'<sup>2</sup> If the father of the girl approves he gives his consent by saying, 'He has come on foot, I receive him on my head.' The boy's father then repairs to the girl's house, where he is respectfully received and his feet are washed. He is then asked to take a drink of plain water, which is a humble method of offering him a meal. After this, presents for the girl are sent by a party accompanied by tomtom players, and a date is fixed for the marriage, which, contrary to the usual Hindu rule, may take place in the rains. The reason is perhaps because iron-smelting is not carried on during the rains and the Agarias therefore have no work to do. A few days before the wedding the bride-price is paid, which consists of 5 seers each of *urad* and til and a sum of Rs. 4 to Rs. 12. The marriage is held on any Monday, Tuesday or Friday, no further trouble being taken to select an auspicious day. In order that they may not forget the date fixed, the fathers of the parties each take a piece of thread in which they tie a knot for every day intervening between the date when the marriage day is settled and the day itself, and they then untie one knot for every day. Previous to the marriage all the village gods are propitiated by being anointed with oil by the

---

<sup>2</sup> *Bāsi* or rice boiled in water the previous day.



Baiga or village priest. The first clod of earth for the ovens is also dug by the Baiga, and received in her cloth by the bride's mother as a mark of respect. The usual procedure is adopted in the marriage. After the bridegroom's arrival his teeth are cleaned with tooth-sticks, and the bride's sister tries to push *sāj* leaves into his mouth, a proceeding which he prevents by holding his fan in front of his face. For doing this the girl is given a small present. A *paili*<sup>3</sup> measure of rice is filled alternately by the bride and bridegroom twelve times, the other upsetting it each time after it is filled. At the marriage feast, in addition to rice and pulse, mutton curry and cakes of *urad* pulse fried in oil are provided. *Urad* is held in great respect, and is always given as a food at ceremonial feasts and to honoured guests. The greater part of the marriage ceremony is performed a second time at the bridegroom's house. Finally, the decorations of the marriage-shed and the palm-leaf crowns of the bride and bridegroom are thrown into a tank. The bride and bridegroom go into the water, and each in turn hides a jar under water, which the other must find. They then bathe, change their clothes, and go back to the bridegroom's house, the bride carrying the jar filled with water on her head. The boy is furnished with a bow and arrows and has to shoot at a stuffed deer over the girl's shoulder. After each shot she gives him a little sugar, and if he does not hit the deer in three shots he must pay 4 annas to the *sawāsa* or page. After the marriage the bridegroom does not visit his wife for

---

<sup>3</sup> A measure containing about 2½ lbs. of grain.

a month in order to ascertain whether she is already pregnant. They then live together. The marriage expenses usually amount to Rs. 15 for the bridegroom's father and Rs. 40 for the bride's father. Sometimes the bridegroom serves his father-in-law for his wife, and he is then not required to pay anything for the marriage, the period of service being three years. If the couple anticipate the ceremony, however, they must leave the house, and then are recalled by the bride's parents, and readmitted into caste on giving a feast, which is in lieu of the marriage ceremony. If they do not comply with the first summons of the parents, the latter finally sever connection with them. Widow marriage is freely permitted, and the widow is expected to marry her late husband's younger brother, especially if he is a bachelor. If she marries another man with his consent, the new husband gives him a turban and shoulder-cloth. The children by the first husband are made over to his relatives if there are any. Divorce is permitted for adultery or extravagance or ill-treatment by either party. A divorced wife can marry again, but if she absconds with another man without being divorced the latter has to pay Rs. 12 to the husband.

### **3. Birth and death ceremonies.**

When a woman becomes pregnant for the first time, her mother goes to her taking a new cloth and cakes and a preparation of milk, which is looked on as a luxurious food, and which, it is supposed, will strengthen the child in the womb. After birth the mother is impure for five days. The dead are usually burnt, but

children under six whose ears have not been pierced, and persons dying a violent death or from cholera or smallpox are buried. When the principal man of the family dies, the caste-fellows at the mourning feast tie a cloth round the head of his successor to show that they acknowledge his new position. They offer water to the dead in the month of Kunwār (September-October).

#### **4. Religion and social customs.**

They have a vague belief in a supreme God but do not pay much attention to him. Their family god is Dulha Deo, to whom they offer goats, fowls, cocoanuts and cakes. In the forest tracts they also worship Bura Deo, the chief god of the Gonds. The deity who presides over their profession is Lohā-Sur, the Iron demon, who is supposed to live in the smelting-kilns, and to whom they offer a black hen. Formerly, it is said, they were accustomed to offer a black cow. They worship their smelting implements on the day of Dasahra and during Phāgun, and offer fowls to them. They have little faith in medicine, and in cases of sickness requisition the aid of the village sorcerer, who ascertains what deity is displeased with them by moving grain to and fro in a winnowing-fan and naming the village gods in turn. He goes on repeating the names until his hand slackens or stops at some name, and the offended god is thus indicated. He is then summoned and enters into the body of one of the persons present, and explains his reason for being offended with the sick person, as that he has passed by the god's shrine without taking off his shoes, or omitted to make the triennial offering of a fowl

or the like. Atonement is then promised and the offering made, while the sick person on recovery notes the deity in question as one of a vindictive temper, whose worship must on no account be neglected. The Agarias say that they do not admit outsiders into the caste, but Gonds, Kawars and Ahirs are occasionally allowed to enter it. They refuse to eat monkeys, jackals, crocodiles, lizards, beef and the leavings of others. They eat pork and fowls and drink liquor copiously. They take food from the higher castes and from Gonds and Baigas. Only Bahelias and other impure castes will take food from them. Temporary excommunication from caste is imposed for conviction of a criminal offence, getting maggots in a wound, and killing a cow, a dog or a cat. Permanent excommunication is imposed for adultery or eating with a very low caste. Readmission to caste after temporary exclusion entails a feast, but if the offender is very poor he simply gives a little liquor or even water. The Agarias are usually sunk in poverty, and their personal belongings are of the scantiest description, consisting of a waist-cloth, and perhaps another wisp of cloth for the head, a brass *lota* or cup and a few earthen vessels. Their women dress like Gond women, and have a few pewter ornaments. They are profusely tattooed with representations of flowers, scorpions and other objects. This is done merely for ornament.

### **5. Occupation.**

The caste still follow their traditional occupation of iron-smelting and also make a few agricultural implements. They

get their ore from the Maikal range, selecting stones of a dark reddish colour. They mix 16 lbs. of ore with 15 lbs. of charcoal in the furnace, the blast being produced by a pair of bellows worked by the feet and conveyed to the furnace through bamboo tubes; it is kept up steadily for four hours. The clay coating of the kiln is then broken down and the ball of molten slag and charcoal is taken out and hammered, and about 3 lbs. of good iron are obtained. With this they make ploughshares, mattocks, axes and sickles. They also move about from village to village with an anvil, a hammer and tongs, and building a small furnace under a tree, make and repair iron implements for the villagers.

# Agharia

## 1. Origin.

**Agharia** <sup>4</sup> (a corruption of Agaria, meaning one who came from Agra).—A cultivating caste belonging to the Sambalpur District<sup>5</sup> and adjoining States. They number 27,000 persons in the Raigarh and Sārangarh States and Bilāspur District of the Central Provinces, and are found also in some of the Chota Nāgpur States transferred from Bengal. According to the traditions of the Agharias their forefathers were Rājput̥s who lived near Agra. They were accustomed to salute the king of Delhi with one hand only and without bending the head. The king after suffering this for a long time determined to punish them for their contumacy, and summoned all the Agharias to appear before him. At the door through which they were to pass to his presence he fixed a sword at the height of a man's neck. The haughty Agharias came to the door, holding their heads high and not seeing the sword, and as a natural consequence they were all decapitated as they passed through. But there was one Agharia who had heard about the fixing of the sword and who thought it better to stay at home, saying that he had some

---

<sup>4</sup> This article is mainly compiled from papers by the late Mr. Baikunth Nāth Pujāri, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Sambalpur; Sitāram, Head Master of the Raigarh English School, and Kanhyā Lāl, clerk in the Gazetteer office.

<sup>5</sup> Now transferred to Bengal.

ceremony to perform. When the king heard that there was one Agharia who had not passed through the door, he sent again, commanding him to come. The Agharia did not wish to go but felt it impossible to decline. He therefore sent for a Chamār of his village and besought him to go instead, saying that he would become a Rājput in his death and that he would ever be held in remembrance by the Agharia's descendants. The Chamār consented to sacrifice himself for his master, and going before the king was beheaded at the door. But the Agharia fled south, taking his whole village with him, and came to Chhattīsgarh, where each of the families in the village founded a clan of the Agharia caste. And in memory of this, whenever an Agharia makes a libation to his ancestors, he first pours a little water on the ground in honour of the dead Chamār. According to another version of the story three brothers of different families escaped and first went to Orissa, where they asked the Gajpati king to employ them as soldiers. The king caused two sheaths of swords to be placed before them, and telling them that one contained a sword and the other a bullock-goad, asked them to select one and by their choice to determine whether they would be soldiers or husbandmen. From one sheath a haft of gold projected and from the other one of silver. The Agharias pulled out the golden haft and found that they had chosen the goad. The point of the golden and silver handles is obvious, and the story is of some interest for the distant resemblance which it bears to the choice of the caskets in *The Merchant of*

Venice. Condemned, as they considered, to drive the plough, the Agharias took off their sacred threads, which they could no longer wear, and gave them to the youngest member of the caste, saying that he should keep them and be their Bhāt, and they would support him with contributions of a tenth of the produce of their fields. He assented, and his descendants are the genealogists of the Agharias and are termed Dashānshi. The Agharias claim to be Somvansi Rājput̃s, a claim which Colonel Dalton says their appearance favours. "Tall, well-made, with high Aryan features and tawny complexions, they look like Rājput̃s, though they are more industrious and intelligent than the generality of the fighting tribe."<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Subdivisions.

Owing to the fact that with the transfer of the Sambalpur District, a considerable portion of the Agharias have ceased to be residents of the Central Provinces, it is unnecessary to give the details of their caste organisation at length. They have two subdivisions, the Bad or superior Agharias and the Chhote, Sarolia or Sarwaria, the inferior or mixed Agharias. The latter are a cross between an Agharia and a Gaur (Ahīr) woman. The Bad Agharias will not eat with or even take water from the others. Further local subdivisions are now in course of formation, as the Ratanpuria, Phuljharīa and Raigarhīa or those living round Ratanpur, Phuljhar and Raigarh. The caste is said to have 84 *gotras* or exogamous sections, of which 60 bear the title of Patel,

---

<sup>6</sup> Dalton's *Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 322.



18 that of Nāik, and 6 of Chaudhri. The section names are very mixed, some being those of eponymous Brāhman *gotras*, as Sāndilya, Kaushik and Bhāradwāj; others those of Rājput septs, as Karchhul; while others are the names of animals and plants, as Barāh (pig), Baram (the pīpal tree), Nāg (cobra), Kachhapa (tortoise), and a number of other local terms the meaning of which has been forgotten. Each of these sections, however, uses a different mark for branding cows, which it is the religious duty of an Agharia to rear, and though the marks now convey no meaning, they were probably originally the representations of material objects. In the case of names whose meaning is understood, traces of totemism survive in the respect paid to the animal or plant by members of the sept which bears its name. This analysis of the structure of the caste shows that it was a very mixed one. Originally consisting perhaps of a nucleus of immigrant Rājputs, the offspring of connections with inferior classes have been assimilated; while the story already quoted is probably intended to signify, after the usual Brāhmanical fashion, that the pedigree of the Agharias at some period included a Chamār.

### **3. Marriage customs.**

Marriage within the exogamous section and also with first cousins is forbidden, though in some places the union of a sister's son with a brother's daughter is permitted. Child marriage is usual, and censure visits a man who allows an unmarried daughter to arrive at adolescence. The bridegroom should always

be older than the bride, at any rate by a day. When a betrothal is arranged some ornaments and a cloth bearing the *swastik* or lucky mark are sent to the girl. Marriages are always celebrated during the months of Māgh and Phāgun, and they are held only once in five or six years, when all children whose matches can be arranged for are married off. This custom is economical, as it saves expenditure on marriage feasts. Colonel Dalton also states that the Agharias always employ Hindustāni Brāhmans for their ceremonies, and as very few of these are available, they make circuits over large areas, and conduct all the weddings of a locality at the same period. Before the marriage a kid is sacrificed at the bride's house to celebrate the removal of her status of maidenhood. When the bridegroom arrives at the bride's house he touches with his dagger the string of mango-leaves suspended from the marriage-shed and presents a rupee and a hundred betel-leaves to the bride's *sawāsin* or attendant. Next day the bridegroom's father sends a present of a bracelet and seven small earthen cups to the bride. She is seated in the open, and seven women hold the cups over her head one above the other. Water is then poured from above from one cup into the other, each being filled in turn and the whole finally falling on the bride's head. This probably symbolises the fertilising action of rain. The bride is then bathed and carried in a basket seven times round the marriage-post, after which she is seated in a chair and seven women place their heads together round her while a male relative winds a thread seven times round the heads of the women. The

meaning of this ceremony is obscure. The bridegroom makes his appearance alone and is seated with the bride, both being dressed in clothes coloured yellow with turmeric. The bridegroom's party follows, and the feet of the couple are washed with milk. The bride's brother embraces the bridegroom and changes cloths with him. Water is poured over the hands of the couple, the girl's forehead is daubed with vermilion, and a red silk cloth is presented to her and the couple go round the marriage-post. The bride is taken for four days to the husband's house and then returns, and is again sent with the usual *gauna* ceremony, when she is fit for conjugal relations. No price is usually paid for the bride, and each party spends about Rs. 100 on the marriage ceremony. Polygamy and widow marriage are generally allowed, the widow being disposed of by her parents. The ceremony at the marriage of a widow consists in putting vermilion on the parting of her hair and bangles on her wrists. Divorce is allowed on pain of a fine of Rs. 50 if the divorce is sought by the husband, and of Rs. 25 if the wife asks for it. In some localities divorce and also polygamy are said to be forbidden, and in such cases a woman who commits adultery is finally expelled from the caste, and a funeral feast is given to symbolise her death.

#### **4. Religious and social customs.**

The family god of the Agharias is Dulha Deo, who exists in every household. On the Haraiti day or the commencement of the agricultural year they worship the implements of cultivation, and at Dasahra the sword if they have one. They have a great

reverence for cows and feed them sumptuously at festivals. Every Agharia has a *guru* or spiritual guide who whispers the *mantra* or sacred verse into his ear and is occasionally consulted. The dead are usually burnt, but children and persons dying of cholera or smallpox are buried, males being placed on the pyre or in the grave on their faces and females on their backs, with the feet pointing to the south. On the third day the ashes are thrown into a river and the bones of each part of the body are collected and placed under the pipal tree, while a pot is slung over them, through which water trickles continually for a week, and a lighted lamp, cooked food, a leaf-cup and a tooth-stick are placed beside them daily for the use of the deceased during the same period. Mourning ends on the tenth day, and the usual purification ceremonies are then performed. Children are mourned for a shorter period. Well-to-do members of the caste feed a Brāhman daily for a year after a death, believing that food so given passes to the spirit of the deceased. On the anniversary of the death the caste-fellows are feasted, and after that the deceased becomes a *purkha* or ancestor and participates in devotions paid at the *shrāddh* ceremony. When the head of a joint family dies, his successor is given a turban and betel-leaves, and his forehead is marked by the priest and other relations with sandalwood. After a birth the mother is impure for twenty-one days. A feast is given on the twelfth day, and sometimes the child is named then, but often children are not named until they are six years old. The names of men usually end in *Ram*, *Nāth* or *Singh*, and those of

women in *Kunwar*. Women do not name their husbands, their elderly relations, nor the sons of their husband's eldest brother. A man does not name his wife, as he thinks that to do so would tend to shorten his life in accordance with the Sanskrit saying, 'He who is desirous of long life should not name himself, his *guru*, a miser, his eldest son, or his wife.' The Agharias do not admit outsiders into the caste. They will not take cooked food from any caste, and water only from a Gaur or Rāwat. They refuse to take water from an Uriya Brāhman, probably in retaliation for the refusal of Uriya Brāhmans to accept water from an Agharia, though taking it from a Kolta. Both the Uriya Brāhmans and Agharias are of somewhat doubtful origin, and both are therefore probably the more concerned to maintain the social position to which they lay claim. But Kewats, Rāwats, Telis and other castes eat cooked food from Agharias, and the caste therefore is admitted to a fairly high rank in the Uriya country. The Agharias do not drink liquor or eat any food which a Rājput would refuse.

### **5. Occupation.**

As cultivators they are considered to be proficient. In the census of 1901 nearly a quarter of the whole caste were shown as mālguzārs or village proprietors and lessees. They wear a coarse cloth of homespun yarn which they get woven for them by Gāndas; probably in consequence of this the Agharias do not consider the touch of the Gānda to pollute them, as other castes do. They will not grow turmeric, onions, garlic, *san*-hemp or tomatoes, nor will they rear tasar silk-cocoons. Colonel Dalton

says that their women do no outdoor work, and this is true in the Central Provinces as regards the better classes, but poor women work in the fields.

# Aghori

## 1. General accounts of the caste.

**Aghori, Aghorpanthi.** <sup>7</sup>—The most disreputable class of Saiva mendicants who feed on human corpses and excrement, and in past times practised cannibalism. The sect is apparently an ancient one, a supposed reference to it being contained in the Sanskrit drama *Mālātī Mādhava*, the hero of which rescues his mistress from being offered as a sacrifice by one named Aghori Ghanta.<sup>8</sup> According to Lassen, quoted by Sir H. Risley, the Aghoris of the present day are closely connected with the Kapālīka sect of the Middle Ages, who wore crowns and necklaces of skulls and offered human sacrifices to Chāmunda, a form of Devi. The Aghoris now represent their filthy habits as merely giving practical expression to the abstract doctrine that the whole universe is full of Brahma, and consequently that one thing is as pure as another. By eating the most horrible food they utterly subdue their natural appetites, and hence acquire great power over themselves and over the forces of nature. It is believed that an Aghori can at will assume the shapes of a bird, an animal or a fish, and that he can bring back to life a corpse of which he has eaten a part. The principal resort of the Aghoris

---

<sup>7</sup> This article is mainly based on a paper on *Aghoris and Aghorpanthis*, by Mr. H. W. Barrow, in the *Journal Anthr. Soc. Bombay*, iii. p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> Bhattachārya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 392.

appears to be at Benāres and at Girnar near Mount Abu, and they wander about the country as solitary mendicants. A few reside in Saugor, and they are occasionally met with in other places. They are much feared and disliked by the people owing to their practice of extorting alms by the threat to carry out their horrible practices before the eyes of their victims, and by throwing filth into their houses. Similarly they gash and cut their limbs so that the crime of blood may rest on those who refuse to give. “For the most part,” Mr. Barrow states,<sup>9</sup> “the Aghorpanthis lead a wandering life, are without homes, and prefer to dwell in holes, clefts of rocks and burning-*ghāts*. They do not cook, but eat the fragments given them in charity as received, which they put as far as may be into the cavity of the skull used as a begging-bowl. The bodies of *chelas* (disciples) who die in Benāres are thrown into the Ganges, but the dead who die well off are placed in coffins. As a rule, Aghoris do not care what becomes of their bodies, but when buried they are placed in the grave sitting cross-legged. The Aghori *gurus* keep dogs, which may be of any colour, and are said to be maintained for purposes of protection. The dogs are not all pariahs of the streets, although some *gurus* are followed by three or four when on pilgrimage. Occasionally the dogs seem to be regarded with real affection by their strange masters. The Aghori is believed to hold converse with all the evil spirits frequenting the burning-*ghāts*, and funeral parties must be very badly off who refuse to pay him something. In former days

---

<sup>9</sup> *Aghoris and Aghorpanthis*, pp. 224, 226.



he claimed five pieces of wood at each funeral in Benāres; but the Doms interfere with his perquisites, and in some cases only let him carry off the remains of the unburned wood from each pyre. When angered and excited, Aghoris invoke Kālī and threaten to spread devastation around them. Even among the educated classes, who should know better, they are dreaded, and as an instance of the terror which they create among the ignorant, it may be mentioned that in the Lucknow District it is believed that if alms are refused them the Aghoris will cause those who refuse to be attacked with fever.



Aghori mendicant.

“On the other hand, their good offices may secure benefits, as in the case of a zamīndār of Muzaffarnagar, who at Allahābād refused to eat a piece of human flesh offered to him by an Aghori, the latter thereupon threw the flesh at the zamīndār’s head, on which it stuck. The zamīndār afterwards became so exceedingly wealthy that he had difficulty in storing his wealth.”

## **2. Instances of cannibalism.**

In former times it is believed that the Aghoris used to kidnap strangers, sacrifice them to the goddess and eat the bodies, and Mr. Barrow relates the following incident of the murder of a boy:<sup>10</sup> “Another horrible case, unconnected with magic and apparently arising from mere blood-thirst, occurred at Neirād in June 1878. An Aghori mendicant of Dwārka staying at the temple of Sitārām Lāldās seized a boy of twelve, named Shankar Rāmdās, who was playing with two other boys, threw him down on the *oatla* of the temple, ripped open his abdomen, tore out part of his entrails, and, according to the poor little victim’s dying declaration, began to eat them. The other boys having raised an alarm, the monster was seized. When interrogated by the magistrate as to whether he had committed the crime in order to perform Aghorbīdya, the prisoner said that as the boy was Bhakshan he had eaten his flesh. He added that if he had not been interrupted he would have eaten all the entrails. He was

convicted, but only sentenced to transportation for life. The High Court, however, altered the sentence and ordered the prisoner to be hanged.”

The following instance, quoted by Mr. Barrow from Rewah, shows how an Aghori was hoist with his own petard: “Some years ago, when Mahārāja Bishnāth Singh was Chief of Rewah, a man of the Aghori caste went to Rewah and sat *dharna* on the steps of the palace; having made ineffectual demands for alms, he requested to be supplied with human flesh, and for five days abstained from food. The Mahārāja was much troubled, and at last, in order to get rid of his unwelcome visitor, sent for Ghansiām Dās, another Aghori, a Fakīr, who had for some years lived in Rewah. Ghansiām Dās went up to the other Aghori and asked him if it was true that he had asked to be supplied with human flesh. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, Ghansiām Dās said: ‘Very well, I too am extremely partial to this form of food; here is my hand, eat it and I will eat you’; and at the same time he seized hold of the other’s hand and began to gnaw at it. The Aghori on this became much alarmed and begged to be excused. He shortly afterwards left Rewah and was not heard of again, while Ghansiām Dās was rewarded for his services.”

The following recent instance of an Aghori devouring human corpses is reported from the Punjab:<sup>11</sup> “The loathsome story of a human ghoul from Patiāla shows that the influence of the

---

<sup>11</sup> *The Tribune* (Lahore), November 29, 1898, quoted in Oman’s *Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India*, pp. 164, 165.

Aghorpanthi has not yet completely died out in this country. It is said that for some time past human graves have been found robbed of their contents, and the mystery could not be solved until the other day, when the police succeeded in arresting a man in the act of desecrating a child's grave, some forty miles distant from the capital (Patiāla). The ghoul not only did not conceal the undevoured portion of the corpse he had with him, but told his captors the whole story of his gruesome career. He is a low-caste Hindu named Rām Nāth, and is, according to a gentleman who saw him, 'a singularly mild and respectful-looking man, instead of a red-eyed and ravenous savage,' as he had expected to find him from the accounts of his disgusting propensities. He became an orphan at five and fell into the hands of two Sādhus of his own caste, who were evidently Aghorpanthis. They taught him to eat human flesh, which formed the staple of their food. The meat was procured from the graves in the villages they passed through. When Rām Nāth was thoroughly educated in this rank the Sādhus deserted him. Since then he had been living on human carrion only, roaming about the country like a hungry vulture. He cannot eat cooked food, and therefore gets two seers of raw meat from the State every day. It is also reported that the Mahārāja has now prohibited his being given anything but cooked food with a view to reforming him."

Sir J. B. Fuller relates the following incident of the employment of an Aghori as a servant:<sup>12</sup> "There are actually

---

<sup>12</sup> *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment*, p. 44.

ten thousand persons who at census time classed themselves as Aghoris. All of them do not practise cannibalism and some of them attempt to rise in the world. One of them secured service as a cook with a British officer of my acquaintance. My friend was in camp in the jungle with his wife and children, when his other servants came to him in a body and refused to remain in service unless the cook was dismissed, since they had discovered, they declared, that during the night-time he visited cemeteries and dug up the bodies of freshly buried children. The cook was absent, but they pointed to a box of his that emitted a sickening smell. The man was incontinently expelled, but for long afterwards the family were haunted by reminiscences of the curries they had eaten.”

# Ahīr

## 1. General notice.

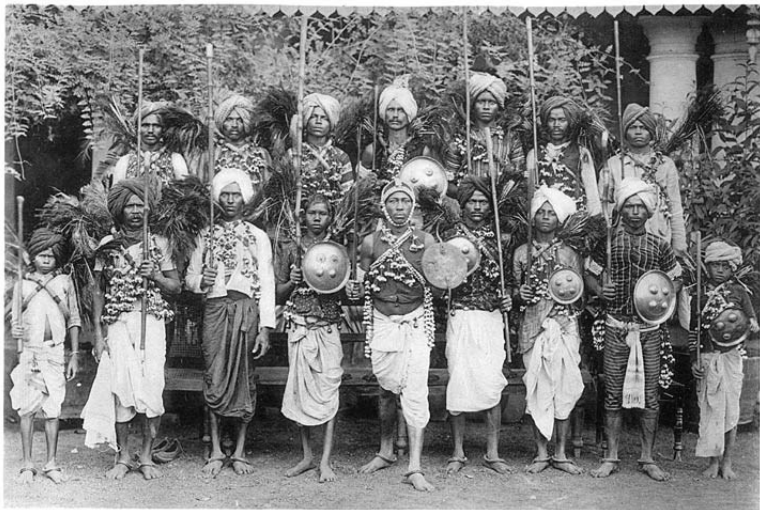
**Ahīr,**<sup>13</sup> **Gaoli, Guāla, Golkar, Gaolān, Rāwat, Gahra, Mahākul.**—The caste, of cowherds, milkmen and cattle-breeders. In 1911 the Ahīrs numbered nearly 750,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār, being the sixth caste in point of numbers. This figure, however, excludes 150,000 Gowāris or graziers of the Marātha Districts, and if these were added the Ahīrs would outnumber the Telis and rank fifth. The name Ahīr is derived from Abhīra, a tribe mentioned several times in inscriptions and the Hindu sacred books. Goāla, a cowherd, from Gopāla,<sup>14</sup> a protector of cows, is the Bengali name for the caste, and Gaoli, with the same signification, is now used in the Central Provinces to signify a dairyman as opposed to a grazier. The Gaolāns appear to be an inferior class of Gaolis in Berār. The Golkars of Chānda may be derived from the Telugu Golars or graziers, with a probable admixture of Gond blood. They are described as wild-looking people scattered about in the most thickly forested tracts of the District, where they graze and tend cattle. Rāwat, a corruption of Rājputra or a princeling, is the name borne by the Ahīr caste in Chhattīsgarh; while Gahra is

---

<sup>13</sup> The information about birth customs in this article is from a paper by Mr. Kālīka Prasād, Tahsildār, Rāj-Nandgaon State.

<sup>14</sup> *Go, gau* or *gai*, an ox or cow, and *pāl* or *pālak*, guardian.

their designation in the Uriya country. The Mahākul Ahīrs are a small group found in the Jashpur State, and said to belong to the Nāndvansi division. The name means 'Great family.'



Ahīrs decorated with cowries for the Stick Dance at Diwāli.

## **2. Former dominance of the Abhīras.**

The Abhīras appear to have been one of the immigrant tribes from Central Asia who entered India shortly before or about the commencement of the Christian era. In the Purānas and Mahābhārata they are spoken of as Dasyu or robbers, and Mlechchhas or foreigners, in the story which says that Arjuna, after he had burned the dead bodies of Krishna and Balārām at



Dwārka, was proceeding with the widows of the Yādava princes to Mathura through the Punjab when he was waylaid by the Abhīras and deprived of his treasures and beautiful women.<sup>15</sup> An inscription of the Sāka era 102, or A.D. 180, speaks of a grant made by the Senapati or commander-in-chief of the state, who is called an Abhīra, the locality being Sunda in Kāthiāwār. Another inscription found in Nāsik and assigned by Mr. Enthoven to the fourth century speaks of an Abhīra king, and the Purānas say that after the Andhrabhrityas the Deccan was held by the Abhīras, the west coast tract from the Tāpti to Deogarh being called by their name.<sup>16</sup> In the time of Samudragupta in the middle of the fourth century the Abhīras were settled in Eastern Rājputana and Mālwa.<sup>17</sup> When the Kāthis arrived in Gujarāt in the eighth century, they found the greater part of the country in the possession of the Ahīrs.<sup>18</sup> In the Mīrzāpur District of the United Provinces a tract known as Ahraura is considered to be named after the tribe; and near Jhānsi another piece of country is called Ahīrwār.<sup>19</sup> Elliot states that Ahīrs were also Rājas of Nepāl about the commencement of our era.<sup>20</sup> In Khāndesh, Mr.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ind. Ant.* (Jan. 1911), 'Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population,' by Mr. D. R. Bhandarkar.

<sup>16</sup> Elliot, *Supplemental Glossary*, s.v. Ahīr.

<sup>17</sup> *Early History of India*, 3rd ed. p. 286.

<sup>18</sup> Elliot, *ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Bombay Monograph on Ahir*.

<sup>20</sup> Elliot, *ibidem*.

Enthoven states, the settlements of the Ahīrs were important. In many castes there is a separate division of Ahīrs, such as the Ahīr Sunārs, Sutārs, Lohārs, Shimpīs, Salīs, Guraos and Kolis. The fort of Asīrgarh in Nimār bordering on Khāndesh is supposed to have been founded by one Asa Ahīr, who lived in the beginning of the fifteenth century. It is said that his ancestors had held land here for seven hundred years, and he had 10,000 cattle, 20,000 sheep and 1000 mares, with 2000 followers; but was still known to the people, to whom his benevolence had endeared him, by the simple name of Asa. This derivation of Asīrgarh is clearly erroneous, as it was known as Asīr or Asīrgarh, and held by the Tāk and Chauhān Rājput̥s from the eleventh century. But the story need not on that account, Mr. Grant says,<sup>21</sup> be set down as wholly a fable. Firishta, who records it, has usually a good credit, and more probably the real existence of a line of Ahīr chieftains in the Tapti valley suggested a convenient ethnology for the fortress. Other traditions of the past domination of the pastoral tribes remain in the Central Provinces. Deogarh on the Chhindwāra plateau was, according to the legend, the last seat of Gaoli power prior to its subversion by the Gonds in the sixteenth century. Jātba, the founder of the Deogarh Gond dynasty, is said to have entered the service of the Gaoli rulers, Mansur and Gansur, and subsequently with the aid of the goddess Devi to have slain them and usurped their kingdom. But a Gaoli chief still retained possession of the fort of Narnāla for a few years

---

<sup>21</sup> *Central Provinces Gazetteer* (1871), Introduction.

longer, when he also was slain by the Muhammadans. Similarly the fort of Gāwilgarh on the southern crest of the Satpūras is said to be named after a Gaoli chief who founded it. The Saugor traditions bring down the Gaoli supremacy to a much later date, as the tracts of Etāwa and Khurai are held to have been governed by their chieftains till the close of the seventeenth century.

### **3. Ahīr dialects.**

Certain dialects called after the Abhīras or Ahīrs still remain. One, known as Ahīrwati, is spoken in the Rohtak and Gurgaon Districts of the Punjab and round Delhi. This is akin to Mewāti, one of the forms of Rājasthāni or the language of Rājputāna. The Mālwi dialect of Rājasthāni is also known as Ahīri; and that curious form of Gujarāti, which is half a Bhīl dialect, and is generally known as Khāndeshi, also bears the name of Ahīrani.<sup>22</sup> The above linguistic facts seem to prove only that the Abhīras, or their occupational successors, the Ahīrs, were strongly settled in the Delhi country of the Punjab, Mālwa and Khāndesh. They do not seem to throw much light on the origin of the Abhīras or Ahīrs, and necessarily refer only to a small section of the existing Ahīr caste, the great bulk of whom speak the Aryan language current where they dwell. Another authority states, however, that the Ahīrs of Gujarāt still retain a dialect of their own, and concludes that this and the other Ahīr dialects are the remains of the distinct Abhīra language.

### **4. The Yādavas and Krishna.**

---

<sup>22</sup> *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. ix. part ii. p. 50.

It cannot necessarily be assumed that all the above traditions relate to the Abhīra tribe proper, of which the modern Ahīr caste are scarcely more than the nominal representatives. Nevertheless, it may fairly be concluded from them that the Abhīras were widely spread over India and dominated considerable tracts of country. They are held to have entered India about the same time as the Sakas, who settled in Gujarāt, among other places, and, as seen above, the earliest records of the Abhīras show them in Nāsik and Kāthiāwār, and afterwards widely spread in Khāndesh, that is, in the close neighbourhood of the Sakas. It has been suggested in the article on Rājput that the Yādava and other lunar clans of Rājputs may be the representatives of the Sakas and other nomad tribes who invaded India shortly before and after the Christian era. The god Krishna is held to have been the leader of the Yādavas, and to have founded with them the sacred city of Dwārka in Gujarāt. The modern Ahīrs have a subdivision called Jāduvansi or Yāduvansi, that is, of the race of the Yādavas, and they hold that Krishna was of the Ahīr tribe. Since the Abhīras were also settled in Gujarāt it is possible that they may have been connected with the Yādavas, and that this may be the foundation for their claim that Krishna was of their tribe. The Dyashraya-Kavya of Hemachandra speaks of a Chordasama prince reigning near Junagarh as an Abhīra and a Yādava. But this is no doubt very conjectural, and the simple fact that Krishna was a herdsman would be a sufficient reason for the Ahīrs to claim connection with him. It is pointed out that the names of Abhīra chieftains

given in the early inscriptions are derived from the god Siva, and this would not have been the case if they had at that epoch derived their origin from Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu. "If the Abhīras had really been the descendants of the cowherds (Gopas) whose hero was Krishna, the name of the rival god Siva would never have formed components of the names of the Abhīras, whom we find mentioned in inscriptions. Hence the conclusion may safely be drawn that the Abhīras were by no means connected with Krishna and his cowherds even as late as about A.D. 300, to which date the first of the two inscriptions mentioned above is to be assigned. Precisely the same conclusion is pointed to by the contents of the Harivansha and Bhagwat Purāna. The upbringing of Krishna among the cowherds and his flirtations with the milkmaids are again and again mentioned in these works, but the word Abhīra does not occur even once in this connection. The only words we find used are Gopa, Gopi and Vraja. This is indeed remarkable. For the descriptions of the removal of Krishna as an infant to Nanda, the cowherd's hut, of his childhood passed in playing with the cowherd boys, and of his youth spent in amorous sports with the milkmaids are set forth at great length, but the word Abhīra is not once met with. From this only one conclusion is possible, that is, that the Abhīras did not originally represent the Gopas of Krishna. The word Abhīra occurs for the first time in connection with the Krishna legend about A.D. 550, from which it follows that the Abhīras came to

be identified with the Gopas shortly before that date.”<sup>23</sup>

This argument is interesting as showing that Abhīra was not originally an occupational term for a herdsman, nor a caste name, but belonged to an immigrant tribe. Owing apparently to the fact that the Abhīras, like the Gūjars, devoted themselves to a pastoral mode of life in India, whereas the previous Aryan immigrants had settled down to cultivation, they gave their name to the great occupational caste of herdsmen which was subsequently developed, and of which they may originally have constituted the nucleus. The Gūjars, who came to India at a later period, form a parallel case; although the Gūjar caste, which is derived from them, is far less important than the Ahīr, the Gūjars have also been the parents of several Rājput clans. The reason why the early Mathura legends of Krishna make no mention of the Ahīrs may be that the deity Krishna is probably compounded of at least two if not more distinct personalities. One is the hero chief of the Yādavas, who fought in the battle of the Pandavas and Kauravas, migrated to Gujarāt and was killed there. As he was chief of the Yādavas this Krishna must stand for the actual or mythical personality of some leader of the immigrant nomad tribes. The other Krishna, the boy cowherd, who grazed cattle and sported with the milkmaids of Brindāban, may very probably be some hero of the indigenous non-Aryan tribes, who, then as now, lived in the forests and were shepherds and herdsmen. His lowly birth from a labouring cowherd, and the fact that

---

<sup>23</sup> *Bombay Ethnographic Survey.*

his name means black and he is represented in sculpture as being of a dark colour, lend support to this view. The cult of Krishna, Mr. Crooke points out, was comparatively late, and probably connected with the development of the worship of the cow after the decay of Buddhism. This latter Krishna, who is worshipped with his mother as a child-god, was especially attractive to women, both actual and prospective mothers. It is quite probable therefore that as his worship became very popular in Hindustān in connection with that of the cow, he was given a more illustrious origin by identification with the Yādava hero, whose first home was apparently in Gujarāt. In this connection it may also be noted that the episodes connected with Krishna in the Mahābhārata have been considered late interpolations.

### **5. The modern Ahīrs an occupational caste.**

But though the Ahīr caste takes its name and is perhaps partly descended from the Abhīra tribe, there is no doubt that it is now and has been for centuries a purely occupational caste, largely recruited from the indigenous tribes. Thus in Bengal Colonel Dalton remarks that the features of the Mathurāvāsi Goālas are high, sharp and delicate, and they are of light-brown complexion. Those of the Magadha subcaste, on the other hand, are undefined and coarse. They are dark-complexioned, and have large hands and feet. "Seeing the latter standing in a group with some Singhbhūm Kols, there is no distinguishing one from the other. There has doubtless been much mixture of blood."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Goāla.

Similarly in the Central Provinces the Ahīrs are largely recruited from the Gonds and other tribes. In Chānda the Gowāris are admittedly descended from the unions of Gonds and Ahīrs, and one of their subcastes, the Gond-Gowāris, are often classed as Gonds. Again, the Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla are descended from the unions of Ahīrs either with the Gonds or Kawars, and many of them are probably pure Gonds. They have Gond sept-names and eat pork. Members of one of their subdivisions, the Gond-Kaonra, will take water from Gonds, and rank below the other Kaonras, from whom they will accept food and water. As cattle have to go into the thick jungles to graze in the hot weather, the graziers attending them become intimate with the forest tribes who live there, and these latter are also often employed to graze the cattle, and are perhaps after a time admitted to the Ahīr caste. Many Ahīrs in Mandla are scarcely considered to be Hindus, living as they do in Gond villages in sole company with the Gonds.

## **6. Subcastes.**

The principal subcastes of the Ahīrs in northern India are the Jāduvansi, Nāndvansi and Gowālvansi. The Jāduvansi claimed to be descended from the Yādavas, who now form the Yādu and Jādon-Bhatti clans of Rājput̥s. The probability of a historical connection between the Abhīras and Yādavas has already been noticed. The Nāndvansi consider their first ancestor to have been Nānd, the cowherd, the foster-father of Krishna; while the name of the Gowālvansi is simply Goāla or Gauli, a milkman,



a common synonym for the caste. The Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla and the Kamarias of Jubbulpore are considered to belong to the Nāndvansi group. Other subcastes in the northern Districts are the Jijhotia, who, like the Jijhotia Brāhmans, take their name from Jajhoti, the classical term for Bundelkhand; the Bharotia, and the Narwaria from Narwar. The Rāwats of Chhattīsgarh are divided into the Jhadia, Kosaria and Kanaujia groups. Of these the Jhadia or 'jungly,' and Kosaria from Kosala, the ancient name of the Chhattīsgarh country, are the oldest settlers, while the Kanaujia are largely employed as personal servants in Chhattīsgarh, and all castes will take water from their hands. The superior class of them, however, refuse to clean household cooking vessels, and are hence known as Thethwār, or exact or pure, as distinguished from the other Rāwats, who will perform this somewhat derogatory work.

### **7. The Dauwa or wet-nurse Ahīrs. Fosterage.**

The Dauwa or wet-nurse Ahīrs are descended from the illegitimate offspring of Bundela Rājput fathers by Ahīr mothers who were employed in this capacity in their families. An Ahīr woman kept by a Bundela was known as Pardwārin, or one coming from another house. This is not considered a disgraceful origin; though the Dauwa Ahīrs are not recognised by the Ahīrs proper, they form a separate section of the caste, and Brāhmans will take water from them. The children of such mothers stood in the relation of foster-brothers to the Rājputs, whom their mothers had nursed. The giving of milk, in accordance with

the common primitive belief in the virtue attaching to an action in itself, was held to constitute a relation of quasi-maternity between the nurse and infant, and hence of fraternity between her own children and her foster-children. The former were called Dhai-bhais or foster-brothers by the Rājput̃s; they were often given permanent grants of land and employed on confidential missions, as for the arrangement of marriages. The minister of a Rāja of Karauli was his Dauwa or foster-father, the husband of his nurse. Similarly, Colonel Tod says that the Dhai-bhai or foster-brother of the Rāja of Boondi, commandant of the fortress of Tanagarh, was, like all his class, devotion personified.<sup>25</sup> A parallel instance of the tie of foster-kinship occurs in the case of the foster-brothers of Conachar or Hector in *The Fair Maid of Perth*. Thus the position of foster-brother of a Rājput̃ was an honourable one, even though the child might be illegitimate. Ahīr women were often employed as wet-nurses, because domestic service was a profession in which they commonly engaged. Owing to the comparatively humble origin of a large proportion of them they did not object to menial service, while the purity of their caste made it possible to use them for the supply of water and food. In Bengal the Uriya Ahīrs were a common class of servants in European houses.

The Gaolis or milkmen appear to form a distinct branch of the caste with subcastes of their own. Among them are the Nāndvans, common to the Ahīrs, the Mālwi from Mālwa and

---

<sup>25</sup> *Rājasthān*, ii. p. 639.

the Rāghuvānsi, called after the Rājput clan of that name. The Rānyas take their designation from *rān*, forest, like the Jhādia Rāwats.

### **8. Exogamy.**

The caste have exogamous sections, which are of the usual low-caste type, with titular or totemistic names. Those of the Chhattīsgarhi Rāwats are generally named after animals. A curious name among the Mahākul Ahīrs is Mathānkāta, or one who bit his mother's nipples. The marriage of persons belonging to the same section and of first cousins is prohibited. A man may marry his wife's younger sister while his wife is living, but not her elder sister. The practice of exchanging girls between families is permissible.

### **9. Marriage customs.**

As a rule, girls may be married before or after puberty, but the Golkars of Chānda insist on infant marriage, and fine the parents if an unmarried girl becomes adolescent. On the other hand, the Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla make a practice of not getting a girl married till the signs of puberty have appeared. It is said that in Mandla if an unmarried girl becomes pregnant by a man of the caste the *panchāyat* give her to him and fine him Rs. 20 or 30, which they appropriate themselves, giving nothing to the father. If an Ahīr girl is seduced by an outsider, she is made over to him, and a fine of Rs. 40 or 50 is exacted from him if possible. This is paid to the girl's father, who has to spend it on a penalty feast to the caste. Generally, sexual offences within

the community are leniently regarded. The wedding ceremony is of the type prevalent in the locality. The proposal comes from the boy's family, and a price is usually given for the bride. The Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla and the Jharia and Kosaria Rāwats of Chhattīsgarh employ a Brāhman only to write the *lagun* or paper fixing the date of the wedding, and the ceremony is conducted by the *sawāsins* or relatives of the parties. In Chhattīsgarh the bridegroom is dressed as a girl to be taken to the wedding. In Betūl the weddings of most Gaolis are held in Māgh (January), and that of the Rānya subcaste in the bright fortnight of Kārtik (October). At the ceremony the bride is made to stand on a small stone roller; the bridegroom then takes hold of the roller facing the bride and goes round in a circle seven times, turning the roller with him. Widow remarriage is permitted, and a widow is often expected to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband. If a bachelor wishes to marry a widow he first goes through the ceremony with a dagger or an earthen vessel. Divorce is freely permitted. In Hoshangābād a strip is torn off the clothes worn by husband and wife as a sign of their divorce. This is presumably in contrast to the knotting of the clothes of the couple together at a wedding.

### **10. Birth customs.**

Among the Rāwats of Chhattīsgarh, when a child is shortly to be born the midwife dips her hand in oil and presses it on the wall, and it is supposed that she can tell by the way in which the oil trickles down whether the child will be a boy or a girl. If a woman

is weak and ill during her pregnancy it is thought that a boy will be born, but if she is strong and healthy, a girl. A woman in advanced pregnancy is given whatever she desires to eat, and on one occasion especially delicate kinds of food are served to her, this rite being known as Sidhori. The explanation of the custom is that if the mother does not get the food she desires during pregnancy the child will long for it all through life. If delivery is delayed, a line of men and boys is sometimes made from the door of the house to a well, and a vessel is then passed from hand to hand from the house, filled with water, and back again. Thus the water, having acquired the quality of speed during its rapid transit, will communicate this to the woman and cause her quick delivery. Or they take some of the clay left unmoulded on the potter's wheel and give it her to drink in water; the explanation of this is exactly similar, the earth having acquired the quality of swiftness by the rapid transit on the wheel. If three boys or three girls have been born to a woman, they think that the fourth should be of the same sex, in order to make up two pairs. A boy or girl born after three of the opposite sex is called Titra or Titri, and is considered very unlucky. To avert this misfortune they cover the child with a basket, kindle a fire of grass all round it, and smash a brass pot on the floor. Then they say that the baby is the fifth and not the fourth child, and the evil is thus removed. When one woman gives birth to a male and another to a female child in the same quarter of a village on the same day and they are attended by the same midwife, it is thought that the boy child

will fall ill from the contagion of the girl child communicated through the midwife. To avoid this, on the following Sunday the child's maternal uncle makes a banghy, which is carried across the shoulders like a large pair of scales, and weighs the child in it against coddung. He then takes the banghy and deposits it at cross-roads outside the village. The father cannot see either the child or its mother till after the Chathi or sixth-day ceremony of purification, when the mother is bathed and dressed in clean clothes, the males of the family are shaved, all their clothes are washed, and the house is whitewashed; the child is also named on this day. The mother cannot go out of doors until after the Bārhi or twelfth-day ceremony. If a child is born at an unlucky astrological period its ears are pierced in the fifth month after birth as a means of protection.



Image of Krishna as Murlidhar or the flute-player, with attendant deities.

### **11. Funeral rites. Bringing back the soul.**

The dead are either buried or burnt. When a man is dying they put basil leaves and boiled rice and milk in his mouth, and a little piece of gold, or if they have not got gold they put a rupee in his mouth and take it out again. For ten days after a death, food in a leaf-cup and a lamp are set out in the house-yard every evening, and every morning water and a tooth-stick. On the tenth day they are taken away and consigned to a river. In Chhattisgarh on the third day after death the soul is brought back. The women put a

lamp on a red earthen pot and go to a tank or stream at night. The fish are attracted towards the light, and one of them is caught and put in the pot, which is then filled with water. It is brought home and set beside a small heap of flour, and the elders sit round it. The son of the deceased or other near relative anoints himself with turmeric and picks up a stone. This is washed with the water from the pot, and placed on the floor, and a sacrifice of a cock or hen is made to it according as the deceased was a man or a woman. The stone is then enshrined in the house as a family god, and the sacrifice of a fowl is repeated annually. It is supposed apparently that the dead man's spirit is brought back to the house in the fish, and then transferred to the stone by washing this with the water.

## **12. Religion. Krishna and other deified cowherds.**

The Ahīrs have a special relation to the Hindu religion, owing to their association with the sacred cow, which is itself revered as a goddess. When religion gets to the anthropomorphic stage the cowherd, who partakes of the cow's sanctity, may be deified as its representative. This was probably the case with Krishna, one of the most popular gods of Hinduism, who was a cowherd, and, as he is represented as being of a dark colour, may even have been held to be of the indigenous races. Though, according to the legend, he was really of royal birth, Krishna was brought up by Nānd, a herdsman of Gokul, and Jasoda or Dasoda his wife, and in the popular belief these are his parents, as they probably were in the original story. The substitution of Krishna,



born as a prince, for Jasoda's daughter, in order to protect him from destruction by the evil king Kānsa of Mathura, is perhaps a later gloss, devised when his herdsman parentage was considered too obscure for the divine hero. Krishna's childhood in Jasoda's house with his miraculous feats of strength and his amorous sports with Rādhā and the other milkmaids of Brindāwan, are among the most favourite Hindu legends. Govind and Gopāl, the protector or guardian of cows, are names of Krishna and the commonest names of Hindus, as are also his other epithets, Murlidhar and Bansidhar, the flute-player; for Krishna and Balārām, like Greek and Roman shepherds, were accustomed to divert themselves with song, to the accompaniment of the same instrument. The child Krishna is also very popular, and his birthday, the Janam-Ashtami on the 8th of dark Bhādon (August), is a great festival. On this day potsful of curds are sprinkled over the assembled worshippers. Krishna, however, is not the solitary instance of the divine cowherd, but has several companions, humble indeed compared to him, but perhaps owing their apotheosis to the same reasons. Bhīlat, a popular local godling of the Nerbudda Valley, was the son of an Ahīr or Gaoli woman; she was childless and prayed to Pārvati for a child, and the goddess caused her votary to have one by her own husband, the god Mahādeo. Bhīlat was stolen away from his home by Mahādeo in the disguise of a beggar, and grew up to be a great hero and made many conquests; but finally he returned and lived with his herdsman parents, who were

no doubt his real ones. He performed numerous miracles, and his devotees are still possessed by his spirit. Singāji is another godling who was a Gaoli by caste in Indore. He became a disciple of a holy Gokulastha Gosain or ascetic, and consequently a great observer of the Janam-Ashtami or Krishna's birthday.<sup>26</sup> On one occasion Singāji was late for prayers on this day, and the *guru* was very angry, and said to him, 'Don't show your face to me again until you are dead.' Singāji went home and told the other children he was going to die. Then he went and buried himself alive. The occurrence was noised abroad and came to the ears of the *guru*, who was much distressed, and proceeded to offer his condolences to Singāji's family. But on the way he saw Singāji, who had been miraculously raised from the dead on account of his virtuous act of obedience, grazing his buffaloes as before. After asking for milk, which Singāji drew from a male buffalo calf, the *guru* was able to inform the bereaved parents of their son's joyful reappearance and his miraculous powers; of these Singāji gave further subsequent demonstration, and since his death, said to have occurred 350 years ago, is widely venerated. The Gaolis pray to him for the protection of their cattle from disease, and make thank-offerings of butter if these prayers are fulfilled. Other pilgrims to Singāji's shrine offer unripe mangoes and sugar, and an annual fair is held at it, when it is said that for seven days no cows, flies or ants are to be

---

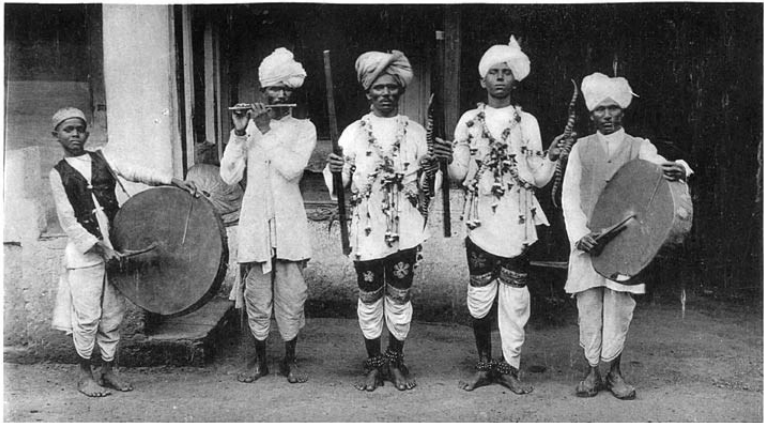
<sup>26</sup> Gokul was the place where Krishna was brought up, and the Gokulastha Gosains are his special devotees.

seen in the place. In the Betul district there is a village godling called Dait, represented by a stone under a tree. He is the spirit of any Ahir who in his lifetime was credited in the locality with having the powers of an exorcist. In Mandla and other Districts when any buffalo herdsman dies at a very advanced age the people make a platform for him within the village and call it Mahashi Deo or the buffalo god. Similarly, when an old cattle herdsman dies they do the same, and call it Balki Deo or the bullock god. Here we have a clear instance of the process of substituting the spirit of the herdsman for the cow or buffalo as an object of worship. The occupation of the Ahir also lends itself to religious imaginations. He stays in the forest or waste grass-land, frequently alone from morning till night, watching his herds; and the credulous and uneducated minds of the more emotional may easily hear the voices of spirits, or in a half-sleeping condition during the heat and stillness of the long day may think that visions have appeared to them. Thus they come to believe themselves selected for communication with the unseen deities or spirits, and on occasions of strong religious excitement work themselves into a frenzy and are held to be possessed by a spirit or god.

### **13. Caste deities.**

Among the special deities of the Ahirs is Kharak Deo, who is always located at the *khirkha*, or place of assembly of the cattle, on going to and returning from pasture. He appears to be the spirit or god of the *khirkha*. He is represented by a platform with an image of a horse on it, and when cattle fall ill the owners offer

flour and butter to him. These are taken by the Ahīrs in charge, and it is thought that the cattle will get well. Matar Deo is the god of the pen or enclosure for cattle made in the jungle. Three days after the Diwālī festival the Rāwats sacrifice one or more goats to him, cutting off their heads. They throw the heads into the air, and the cattle, smelling the blood, run together and toss them with their horns as they do when they scent a tiger. The men then say that the animals are possessed by Matar Deo. Guraya Deo is a deity who lives in the cattle-stalls in the village and is worshipped once a year. A man holds an egg in his hand, and walks round the stall pouring liquid over the egg all the way, so as to make a line round it. The egg is then buried beneath the shrine of the god, the rite being probably meant to ensure his aid for the protection of the cattle from disease in their stalls. A favourite saint of the Ahīrs is Haridās Bāba. He was a Jogi, and could separate his soul from his body at pleasure. On one occasion he had gone in spirit to Benāres, leaving his body in the house of one of his disciples, who was an Ahīr. When he did not return, and the people heard that a dead body was lying there, they came and insisted that it should be burnt. When he came back and found that his body was burnt, he entered into a man and spoke through him, telling the people what had happened. In atonement for their unfortunate mistake they promised to worship him.



Ahīr dancers in Diwāli costume.

#### **14. Other deities.**

The Mahākul Ahīrs of Jashpur have three deities, whom they call Mahādeo or Siva, Sahādeo, one of the five Pāndava brothers, and the goddess Lakshmi. They say that the buffalo is Mahādeo, the cow Sahādeo, and the rice Lakshmi. This also appears to be an instance of the personification of animals and the corn into anthropomorphic deities.

#### **15. The Diwāli festival.**

The principal festival of the Ahīrs is the Diwāli, falling about the beginning of November, which is also the time when the autumn crops ripen. All classes observe this feast by illuminating their houses with many small saucer-lamps and letting off crackers and fireworks, and they generally gamble with money to

bring them good luck during the coming year. The Ahīrs make a mound of earth, which is called Govardhan, that is the mountain in Mathura which Krishna held upside down on his finger for seven days and nights, so that all the people might gather under it and be protected from the devastating storms of rain sent by Indra. After dancing round the mound they drive their cattle over it and make them trample it to pieces. At this time a festival called Marhai is held, at which much liquor is drunk and all classes disport themselves. In Damoh on this day the Ahīrs go to the standing-place for village cattle, and after worshipping the god, frighten the cattle by waving leaves of the basil-plant at them, and then put on fantastic dresses, decorating themselves with cowries, and go round the village, singing and dancing. Elsewhere at the time of the Marhai they dance round a pole with peacock feathers tied to the top, and sometimes wear peacock feathers themselves, as well as aprons sewn all over with cowries. It is said that Krishna and Balārām used to wear peacock feathers when they danced in the jungles of Mathura, but this rite has probably some connection with the worship of the peacock. This bird might be venerated by the Ahīrs as one of the prominent denizens of the jungle. In Raipur they tie a white cock to the top of the pole and dance round it. In Mandla, Khila Mutha, the god of the threshing-floor, is worshipped at this time, with offerings of a fowl and a goat. They also perform the rite of *jagāna* or waking him up. They tie branches of a small shrub to a stick and pour milk over the stone which is his emblem, and sing, 'Wake

up, Khila Mutha, this is the night of Amāwas' (the new moon). Then they go to the cattle-shed and wake up the cattle, crying, 'Poraiya, god of the door, watchman of the window, open the door, Nānd Gowāl is coming.' Then they drive out the cattle and chase them with the branches tied to their sticks as far as their grazing-ground. Nānd Gowāl was the foster-father of Krishna, and is now said to signify a man who has a lakh (100,000) of cows. This custom of frightening the cattle and making them run is called *dhora jagāna* or *bichkāna*, that is, to wake up or terrify the cattle. Its meaning is obscure, but it is said to preserve the cattle from disease during the year. In Raipur the women make an image of a parrot in clay at the Diwālī and place it on a pole and go round to the different houses, singing and dancing round the pole, and receiving presents of rice and money. They praise the parrot as the bird who carries messages from a lover to his mistress, and as living on the mountains and among the green verdure, and sing:

“Oh, parrot, where shall we sow *gondla* grass and where shall we sow rice?

“We will sow *gondla* in a pond and rice in the field.

“With what shall we cut *gondla* grass, and with what shall we cut rice?

“We shall cut *gondla* with an axe and rice with a sickle.”

It is probable that the parrot is revered as a spirit of the forest, and also perhaps because it is destructive to the corn. The parrot is not, so far as is known, associated with any god, but the Hindus

do not kill it. In Bilāspur an ear of rice is put into the parrot's mouth, and it is said there that the object of the rite is to prevent the parrots from preying on the corn.

### **16. Omens.**

On the night of the full moon of Jesth (May) the Ahīrs stay awake all night, and if the moon is covered with clouds they think that the rains will be good. If a cow's horns are not firmly fixed in the head and seem to shake slightly, it is called Maini, and such an animal is considered to be lucky. If a bullock sits down with three legs under him and the fourth stretched out in front it is a very good omen, and it is thought that his master's cattle will increase and multiply. When a buffalo-calf is born they cover it at once with a black cloth and remove it from the mother's sight, as they think that if she saw the calf and it then died her milk would dry up. The calf is fed by hand. Cow-calves, on the other hand, are usually left with the mother, and many people allow them to take all the milk, as they think it a sin to deprive them of it.

### **17. Social customs.**

The Ahīrs will eat the flesh of goats and chickens, and most of them consume liquor freely. The Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla eat pork, and the Rāwats of Chhattīsgarh are said not to object to field-mice and rats, even when caught in the houses. The Kaonra Ahīrs are also said not to consider a woman impure during the period of menstruation. Nevertheless the Ahīrs enjoy a good social status, owing to their relations with the sacred cow. As remarked by Eha: "His family having been connected



for many generations with the sacred animal he enjoys a certain consciousness of moral respectability, like a man whose uncles are deans or canons.”<sup>27</sup> All castes will take water from the hands of an Ahīr, and in Chhattīsgarh and the Uriya country the Rāwats and Gahras, as the Ahīr caste is known respectively in these localities, are the only caste from whom Brāhmans and all other Hindus will take water. On this account, and because of their comparative purity, they are largely employed as personal servants. In Chhattīsgarh the ordinary Rāwats will clean the cooking-vessels even of Muhammadans, but the Thethwār or pure Rāwats refuse this menial work. In Mandla, when a man is to be brought back into caste after a serious offence, such as getting vermin in a wound, he is made to stand in the middle of a stream, while some elderly relative pours water over him. He then addresses the members of the caste *panchāyat* or committee, who are standing on the bank, saying to them, ‘Will you leave me in the mud or will you take me out?’ Then they tell him to come out, and he has to give a feast. At this a member of the Meliha sept first eats food and puts some into the offender’s mouth, thus taking the latter’s sin upon himself. The offender then addresses the *panchāyat* saying, ‘Rājas of the Panch, eat.’ Then the *panchāyat* and all the caste take food with him and he is readmitted. In Nāndgaon State the head of the caste *panchāyat* is known as Thethwār, the title of the highest subcaste, and is appointed by the Rāja, to whom he makes a present. In Jashpur,

---

<sup>27</sup> *Behind the Bungalow.*

among the Mahākul Ahīrs, when an offender is put out of caste he has on readmission to make an offering of Rs. 1–4 to Bālāji, the tutelary deity of the State. These Mahākuls desire to be considered superior to ordinary Ahīrs, and their social rules are hence very strict. A man is put out of caste if a dog, fowl or pig touches his water or cooking-pots, or if he touches a fowl. In the latter case he is obliged to make an offering of a fowl to the local god, and eight days are allowed for procuring it. A man is also put out of caste for beating his father. In Mandla, Ahīrs commonly have the title of Patel or headman of a village, probably because in former times, when the country consisted almost entirely of forest and grass land, they were accustomed to hold large areas on contract for grazing.

### **18. Ornaments.**

In Chhattīsgarh the Rāwat women are especially fond of wearing large *churas* or leg-ornaments of bell-metal. These consist of a long cylinder which fits closely to the leg, being made in two halves which lock into each other, while at each end and in the centre circular plates project outwards horizontally. A pair of these *churas* may weigh 8 or 10 lbs., and cost from Rs. 3 to Rs. 9. It is probable that some important magical advantage was expected to come from the wearing of these heavy appendages, which must greatly impede free progression, but its nature is not known.

### **19. Occupation.**

Only about thirty per cent of the Ahīrs are still occupied

in breeding cattle and dealing in milk and butter. About four per cent are domestic servants, and nearly all the remainder cultivators and labourers. In former times the Ahīrs had the exclusive right of milking the cow, so that on all occasions an Ahīr must be hired for this purpose even by the lowest castes. Any one could, however, milk the buffalo, and also make curds and other preparations from cow's milk.<sup>28</sup> This rule is interesting as showing how the caste system was maintained and perpetuated by the custom of preserving to each caste a monopoly of its traditional occupation. The rule probably applied also to the bulk of the cultivating and the menial and artisan castes, and now that it has been entirely abrogated it would appear that the gradual decay and dissolution of the caste organisation must follow. The village cattle are usually entrusted jointly to one or more herdsmen for grazing purposes. The grazier is paid separately for each animal entrusted to his care, a common rate being one anna for a cow or bullock and two annas for a buffalo per month. When a calf is born he gets four annas for a cow-calf and eight annas for a she-buffalo, but except in the rice districts nothing for a male buffalo-calf, as these animals are considered useless outside the rice area. The reason is that buffaloes do not work steadily except in swampy or wet ground, where they can refresh themselves by frequent drinking. In the northern Districts male buffalo-calves are often neglected and allowed to die, but the cow-buffaloes are extremely valuable, because their milk is the

---

<sup>28</sup> *Eastern India*, ii. p. 467.

principal source of supply of *ghī* or boiled butter. When a cow or buffalo is in milk the grazier often gets the milk one day out of four or five. When a calf is born the teats of the cow are first milked about twenty times on to the ground in the name of the local god of the Ahīrs. The remainder of the first day's milk is taken by the grazier, and for the next few days it is given to friends. The village grazier is often also expected to prepare the guest-house for Government officers and others visiting the village, fetch grass for their animals, and clean their cooking vessels. For this he sometimes receives a small plot of land and a present of a blanket annually from the village proprietor. Mālguzārs and large tenants have their private herdsmen. The pasturage afforded by the village waste lands and forest is, as a rule, only sufficient for the plough-bullocks and more valuable milch-animals. The remainder are taken away sometimes for long distances to the Government forest reserves, and here the herdsmen make stockades in the jungle and remain there with their animals for months together. The cattle which remain in the village are taken by the owners in the early morning to the *khirkha* or central standing-ground. Here the grazier takes them over and drives them out to pasture. He brings them back at ten or eleven, and perhaps lets them stand in some field which the owner wants manured. Then he separates the cows and milch-buffaloes and takes them to their masters' houses, where he milks them all. In the afternoon all the cattle are again collected and driven out to pasture. The cultivators are very much in the

grazier's hands, as they cannot supervise him, and if dishonest he may sell off a cow or calf to a friend in a distant village and tell the owner that it has been carried off by a tiger or panther. Unless the owner succeeds by a protracted search or by accident in finding the animal he cannot disprove the herdsman's statement, and the only remedy is to dispense with the latter's services if such losses become unduly frequent. On this account, according to the proverbs, the Ahīr is held to be treacherous and false to his engagements. They are also regarded as stupid because they seldom get any education, retain their rustic and half-aboriginal dialect, and on account of their solitary life are dull and slow-witted in company. 'The barber's son learns to shave on the Ahīr's head.' 'The cow is in league with the milkman and lets him milk water into the pail.' The Ahīrs are also hot-tempered, and their propensity for drinking often results in affrays, when they break each other's head with their cattle-staffs. 'A Gaoli's quarrel: drunk at night and friends in the morning.'

## **20. Preparations of milk.**

Hindus nearly always boil their milk before using it, as the taste of milk fresh from the cow is considered unpalatable. After boiling, the milk is put in a pot and a little old curds added, when the whole becomes *dahi* or sour curds. This is a favourite food, and appears to be exactly the same substance as the Bulgarian sour milk which is now considered to have much medicinal value. Butter is also made by churning these curds or *dahi*. Butter is never used without being boiled first, when it becomes converted

into a sort of oil; this has the advantage of keeping much better than fresh butter, and may remain fit for use for as long as a year. This boiled butter is known as *ghī*, and is the staple product of the dairy industry, the bulk of the surplus supply of milk being devoted to its manufacture. It is freely used by all classes who can afford it, and serves very well for cooking purposes. There is a comparatively small market for fresh milk among the Hindus, and as a rule only those drink milk who obtain it from their own animals. The acid residue after butter has been made from *dahi* (curds) or milk is known as *matha* or butter-milk, and is the only kind of milk drunk by the poorer classes. Milk boiled so long as to become solidified is known as *khīr*, and is used by confectioners for making sweets. When the milk is boiled and some sour milk added to it, so that it coagulates while hot, the preparation is called *chhana*. The whey is expressed from this by squeezing it in a cloth, and a kind of cheese is obtained.<sup>29</sup> The liquid which oozes out at the root of a cow's horns after death is known as *gaolochan* and sells for a high price, as it is considered a valuable medicine for children's cough and lung diseases.

---

<sup>29</sup> Buchanan, *Eastern India*, ii. pp. 924, 943.

# Andh

**Andh.** <sup>30</sup>—A low cultivating caste of Berār, who numbered 52,000 persons in 1911, and belong to the Yeotmal, Akola and Buldāna Districts. The Andhs appear to be a non-Aryan tribe of the Andhra or Tamil country, from which they derive their name. The territories of the Andhra dynasty extended across southern India from sea to sea in the early part of the Christian era. This designation may, however, have been given to them after migration, emigrants being not infrequently called in their new country by the name of the place from which they came, as Berāri, Purdesi, Audhia (from Oudh), and so on. At present there seems to be no caste called Andh in Madras. Mr. Kitts<sup>31</sup> notes that they still come from Hyderābād across the Penganga river.

The caste are divided into two groups, Vartāti or pure and Khaltāti or illegitimate, which take food together, but do not intermarry. They have a large number of exogamous septs, most of which appear to have Marāthi names, either taken from villages or of a titular character. A few are called after animals or plants, as Mājiria the cat, Ringni a kind of tree, Dumare from Dumar, an ant-hill, Dukare from Dukar, a pig, and Titawe from Titawa, a bird. Bāghmāre means tiger-killer or one killed by a tiger; members of this sept revere the tiger. Two septs, Bhoyar

---

<sup>30</sup> This article is mainly based on a paper by Mr. W. S. Slaney, E.A.C., Akola.

<sup>31</sup> *Berār Census Report* (1881).

and Wanjāri, are named after other castes.

Marriage between members of the same sept is prohibited, and also between first cousins, except that a sister's son may marry a brother's daughter. Until recently marriage has been adult, but girls are now wedded as children, and betrothals are sometimes arranged before they are born. The ceremony resembles that of the Kunbis. Betrothals are arranged between October and December, and the weddings take place three or four months later, from January to April. If the bride is mature she goes at once to her husband's house. Polygamy is allowed; and as only a well-to-do man can afford to obtain more than one wife, those who have several are held to be wealthy, and treated with respect. Divorce and the remarriage of widows are permitted, but the widow may not marry her husband's brother nor any member of his clan. If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant by a man of her own or a superior caste she is fined, and can then be married as a widow. Her feet are not washed nor besmeared with red powder at the wedding ceremony like those of other girls. In some localities Andh women detected in a criminal intimacy even with men of such impure castes as the Mahārs and Māngs have been readmitted into the community. A substantial fine is imposed on a woman detected in adultery according to her means and spent on a feast to the caste. All the members thus have a personal interest in the detection and punishment of such offences. The dead are usually buried, and water and sugar are placed in a dying man's mouth instead of the sacred objects used



by Hindus; nor are the dying urged to call on Rāma. The dead are buried with the head to the south, in opposition to the Hindu custom. The Andhs will eat the flesh of fowls and pigs, and even cats, rats and snakes in some localities, though the more civilised have abjured these latter. They are very fond of pork, and drink liquor, and will take food from Kunbis, Mālis and Kolis, but not from Gonds. They have a caste *panchāyat* or committee, with a headman called Mohtaria, and two officers known as Phopatia and Dukria. When a caste offence is committed the Dukria goes to call the offender, and is given the earthen pots used at the penalty-feast, while the Phopatia receives a new piece of cloth. The Mohtaria or headman goes from village to village to decide cases, and gets a share of the fine. The caste are *shikāris* or hunters, and cultivators. They catch antelope, hares, pig and nilgai in their nets, and kill them with sticks and stones, and they dam up streams and net fish. Birds are not caught. Generally, the customs of the Andhs clearly point to an aboriginal origin, but they are rapidly being Hinduised, and in some tracts can scarcely be distinguished from Kunbis.

They have Marāthi names; and though only one name is given at birth, Mr. Slaney notes that this is frequently changed for some pet name, and as often as not a man goes regularly by some name other than his real one.

# Arakh

**Arakh.**—A small caste of cultivators and labourers found principally in the Chānda District and Berār and scattered over other localities. The Arakhs are considered to be an offshoot of the Pāsi or Bahelia caste of hunters and fowlers. Mr. Crooke<sup>32</sup> writes of them: “All their traditions connect them with the Pāsis and Parasurāma, the sixth Avatāra of Vishnu. One story runs that Parasurāma was bathing in the sea, when a leech bit his foot and caused it to bleed. He divided the blood into two parts; out of one part he made the first Pāsi and out of the second the first Arakh. Another story is that the Pāsis were made out of the sweat (*pasīna*) of Parasurāma. While Parasurāma was away the Pāsi shot some animals with his bow, and the deity was so enraged that he cursed the Pāsi, and swore that his descendants should keep pigs. This accounts for the degradation of the Pāsis. Subsequently Parasurāma sent for some Pāsis to help him in one of his wars; but they ran away and hid in an *arhar*<sup>33</sup> field and were hence called Arakhs.” This connection with the Pāsis is also recognised in the case of the Arakhs of Berār, of whom Mr. Kitts writes:<sup>34</sup> “The Arakhs found in Morsi are a race akin to the Bahelias. Their regular occupation is bird-catching and

---

<sup>32</sup> *Tribes and Castes*, art. Arakh.

<sup>33</sup> *Cajanus indicus*.

<sup>34</sup> *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 157.

*shikār* (hunting). They do not follow Hindu customs in their marriages, but although they keep pigs, eat flesh and drink spirits, they will not touch a Chamār. They appear to be a branch of the Pāsi tribe, and are described as a semi-Hinduised class of aborigines.” In the Chānda District, however, the Arakhs are closely connected with the Gond tribe, as is evident from their system of exogamy. Thus they say that they are divided into the Mātia, Tekām, Tesli, Godām, Madai, Sayām and Chorliu septs, worshipping respectively three, four, five, six, seven, eight and twelve gods; and persons who worship the same number of gods cannot marry with one another. This system of divisions according to the different number of gods worshipped is found in the Central Provinces only among the Gonds and one or two other tribes like the Baigas, who have adopted it from them, and as some of the names given above are also Gondi words, no doubt need be entertained that the Arakhs of Chānda are largely of Gond descent. They are probably, in fact, the offspring of irregular connections between the Gonds and Pāsis, who, being both frequenters of the forests, would naturally come much into contact with each other. And being disowned by the true Pāsis on account of their defective pedigree, they have apparently set up as a separate caste and adopted the name of Arakh to hide the deficiencies of their ancestry.

The social customs of the Arakhs resemble those of other low Hindu castes, and need not be given in detail. Their weddings are held near a temple of Māroti, or if there be none such, then

at the place where the Holi fire was lit in the preceding year. A bride-price varying from Rs. 25 to Rs. 40 is usually paid. In the case of the marriage of a widow, the second husband goes to the house of the woman, where the couple are bathed and seated on two wooden boards, a branch of a cotton-plant being placed near them. The bridegroom then ties five strings of black glass beads round the woman's neck. The dead are mourned for one day only, and a funeral feast is given to the caste-fellows. The Arakhs are a very low caste, but their touch does not convey impurity.

# Atāri

## 1. General notice.

**Atāri,** <sup>35</sup> **Gandhi, Bukekāri.**—A small Muhammadan caste of retailers of scent, incense, tooth-powder and *kunku* or pink powder. Atāri is derived from *atar* or *itra*, attar of roses. Gandhi comes from *gandh*, a Sanskrit word for scent. Bukekāri is a Marāthi word meaning a seller of powder. The Atāris number about two hundred persons in Nāgpur, Wardha and Berār. Both Hindus and Muhammadans follow the profession, but the Hindu Atāris are not a separate caste, and belong to the Teli, Gurao and Beldār castes. The Muhammadan Atāris, to whom this article refers, may marry with other Muhammadans, with the exception of low-class tradesmen like the Pinjāras, Kasais and Kunjras. One instance of an Atāri marrying a Rangrez is known, but usually they decline to do so. But since they are not considered to be the equals of ordinary Muhammadans, they constitute more or less a distinct social group. They are of the same position as Muhammadan tin-workers, bangle-makers and pedlars, and sometimes intermarry with them. They admit Hindu converts into the community, but the women refuse to eat with them, and the better-class families will not intermarry with converts. A new convert must be circumcised, but if he is of advanced age, or if

---

<sup>35</sup> Based on papers by Mr. Bijai Bahādur Royzāda, Naib-Tahsildār Hinganghāt, and Munshi Kanhya Lāl of the Gazetteer office.

his foreskin is wanting, as sometimes happens, they take a rolled-up betel-leaf and cut it in two in substitution for the rite.

## **2. Marriage customs.**

It is essential that a girl should be married before adolescence, as it is said that when the signs of puberty appear in her before wedlock her parents commit a crime equivalent to the shedding of human blood. The father of the boy looks for a bride, and after dropping hints to the girl's family to see if his proposal is acceptable, he sends some female relatives or friends to discuss the marriage. Before the wedding the boy is presented with a *chhāp* or ring of gold or silver with a small cup-like attachment. A *mehar* or dowry must be given to the bride, the amount of which is not below Rs. 50 or above Rs. 250. The bride's parents give her cooking vessels, bedding and a bedstead. After the wedding, the couple are seated on a cot while the women sing songs, and they see each other's face reflected in a mirror. The procession returns after a stay of four days, and is received by the women of the bridegroom's family with some humorous ceremonies bearing on the nature of marriage. A feast called *Tāmm Walīma* follows, and the couple are shut up together in an inner room, even though they may be under age. The marriage includes some Hindu customs, such as the erection of the *pandal* or shed, rubbing the couple with turmeric and oil, and the tying on of *kankans* or wrist-bands. A girl going wrong before marriage may be wedded with full rites so long as she has not conceived, but after conception until her child is born she cannot go through

the ceremony at all. After the birth of the child she may be married simply with the rite for widows. She retains the child, but it has no claim to succeed to her husband's property. A widow may marry again after an interval of forty days from her first husband's death, and she may wed her younger brother-in-law. Divorce is permitted at the instance of either party, and for mere disagreement. A man usually divorces his wife by vowing in the presence of two witnesses that he will in future consider intercourse with her as incestuous in the same degree as with his mother. A divorced woman has a claim to her *mehar* or dowry if not already paid, but forfeits it if she marries again. A man can marry the daughter of his paternal uncle. The services of a Kāzi at weddings are paid for with a fee of Rs. 1–4, and well-to-do persons also give him a pair of turbans.

### **3. Religion.**

The Atāris are Muhammadans of the Sunnī sect. They revere the Muhammadan saints, and on the night of Shabrāt they let off fireworks in honour of their ancestors and make offerings of *halwa*<sup>36</sup> to them and place lamps and scent on their tombs. They swear by the pig and abstain from eating its flesh. The dog is considered an unclean animal and its tail, ears and tongue are especially defiling. If the hair of a dog falls on the ground they cannot pray in that place because the souls of the prophets cannot come there. To see a dog flapping its ears is a bad omen, and a person starting on a journey should postpone his departure. They

---

<sup>36</sup> A preparation of raisins and other fruits and rice.

esteem the spider, because they say it spread its web over the mouth of the cave where Hasan and Husain lay concealed from their enemies and thus prevented it from being searched. Some of them have Pīrs or spiritual preceptors, these being Muhammadan beggars, not necessarily celibate. The ceremony of adhesion is that a man should drink sherbet from the cup from which his preceptor has drunk. They do not observe impurity after a death nor bathe on returning from a funeral.

#### **4. Social customs.**

Liquor is of course prohibited to the Atāris as to other Muhammadans, but some of them drink it nevertheless. Some of them eat beef and others abstain. The blood of animals killed must flow before death according to the rite of *halāl*, but they say that fish are an exception, because when Abraham was offering up his son Ishmael and God substituted a goat, the goat bleated before it was killed, and this offended Abraham, who threw his sacrificial knife into the sea: the knife struck and killed a fish, and on this account all fish are considered to be *halāl* or lawful food without any further rite. The Atāris observe the Hindu law of inheritance, and some of them worship Hindu deities, as Māta the goddess of smallpox. As a rule their women are not secluded. The Atāris make *missi* or tooth-powder from myrobalans, cloves and cardamoms, and other constituents. This has the effect of blackening the teeth. They also sell the *kunku* or red powder which women rub on their foreheads, its constituents being turmeric, borax and the juice of limes. They sell scent and



sometimes deal in tobacco. The scents most in demand are *gulāb-pāni* or rose-water and *phulel* or essence of tilli or sesamum. Scents are usually sold by the tola of 18 annas silver weight,<sup>37</sup> and a tola of attar may vary in price from 8 annas to Rs. 80. Other scents are made from *khas-khas* grass, the mango, henna and musk, the *bela* flower,<sup>38</sup> the champak<sup>39</sup> and cucumber. Scent is manufactured by distillation from the flowers boiled in water, and the drops of congealed vapour fall into sandalwood oil, which they say is the basis of all scents. Fragrant oils are also sold for rubbing on the hair, made from orange flowers, jasmine, cottonseed and the flowers of the *aonla* tree.<sup>40</sup> Scent is sold in tiny circular glass bottles, and the oils in little bottles made from thin leather. The Atāris also retail the little black sticks of incense which are set up and burnt at the time of taking food and in temples, so that the smell and smoke may keep off evil spirits. When professional exorcists are called upon to clear any building, such as a hospital, supposed to be haunted by spirits or the ghosts of the dead, they commence operations by placing these sticks of incense at the entrance and setting them alight as in a temple.

---

<sup>37</sup> The ordinary tola is a rupee weight or two-fifths of an ounce.

<sup>38</sup> *Jasminum zambac*.

<sup>39</sup> *Michelia champaca*.

<sup>40</sup> *Phyllanthus emblica*.

# Audhelia

## 1. Origin.

**Audhelia (Audhalia).**—A small hybrid caste found almost exclusively in the Bilāspur District, where they number about 1000 persons. The name is derived from the word Udharia, meaning a person with clandestine sexual intimacies. The Audheliyas are a mixed caste and trace their origin from a Daharia Rājput ancestor, by one Bhūri Bāndi, a female slave of unknown caste. This couple is supposed to have resided in Ratanpur, the old capital of Chhattīsgarh, and the female ancestors of the Audheliyas are said to have been prostitutes until they developed into a caste and began to marry among themselves. Their proper avocation at present is the rearing of pigs, while some of them are also tenants and farm-labourers. Owing to the base descent and impure occupation of the caste they are held in very low esteem, and their touch is considered to convey pollution.

## 2. Marriage.

The caste have at present no endogamous divisions and still admit members of other castes with the exception of the very lowest. But social gradations exist to a certain extent among the members according to the position of their male ancestors, a Daharia Audhelia, for instance, being reluctant to eat or intermarry with a Panka Audhelia. Under these circumstances it has become a rule among the Audheliyas not to eat with their

caste-fellows excepting their own relations. On the occasion of a caste feast, therefore, each guest prepares his own food, taking only uncooked grain from his host. At present seven *gotras* or exogamous divisions appear to have been formed in the caste with the names of Pachbhaiya, Chhahri, Kālkhori, Bachhāwat, Dhanāwat, Bhainsa and Limuān. The following story exists as to the origin of these *gotras*: There were formerly three brothers, Sahasmān, Budha and Mangal, who were Sānsis or robbers. One evening the three brothers halted in a forest and went to look for food. One brought back a buffalo-horn, another a peacock's feather and the youngest, Mangal, brought plums. The other brothers asked Mangal to let them share his plums, to which he agreed on condition that one of the brothers should give his daughter to him in marriage. As Mangal and his brothers were of one *gotra* or section, and the marriage would thus involve splitting up the *gotra*, the brothers were doubtful whether it could be performed. They sought about for some sign to determine this difficult question, and decided that if Mangal succeeded in breaking in pieces an iron image of a cat simply by blows of his naked fist, it would be a sufficient indication that they might split up their *gotra*. Mangal was therefore put to the ordeal and succeeded in breaking the image, so the three brothers split up their *gotra*, the eldest assuming the *gotra* name of Bhainsa because he had found a buffalo-horn, the second that of Kālkhori, which is stated to mean peacock, and the third that of Chhahri, which at any rate does not mean a plum. The

word Chhahri means either 'shadow,' or 'one who washes the clothes of a woman in confinement.' If we assume it to have the latter meaning, it may be due to the fact that Mangal had to wash the clothes of his own wife, not being able to induce a professional washerman to do so on account of the incestuous nature of the connection. As the eldest brother gave his daughter in an incestuous marriage he was also degraded, and became the ancestor of the Kanjars or prostitutes, who, it is said, to the present day do not solicit Audheliyas in consideration of the consanguinity existing between them. The story itself sufficiently indicates the low and mixed descent of the Audheliyas, and its real meaning may possibly be that when they first began to form a separate caste they permitted incestuous marriages on account of the paucity of their members. A curious point about the story is that the incestuous nature of the connection is not taken to be the most pressing objection to the marriage of Mangal with his own niece, but the violation of the caste rule prohibiting marriage within the same *gotra*. Bachhāwat and Dhanāwat are the names of sections of the Banjāra caste, and the persons of these *gotras* among the Audheliyas are probably the descendants of illicit connections among Banjāras. The word Pachbhaiya means 'five brothers,' and this name possibly commemorates a polyandrous connection of some Audhelia woman. Limuān means a tortoise, which is a section of many castes. Several of the section-names are thus totemistic, and, as in other castes, some reverence is paid to the animal from whom the name is derived. At present

the Audheliās forbid marriage within the same *gotra* and also the union of first cousins. Girls are married between five and seven years of age as their numbers are scarce, and they are engaged as early as possible. Unless weddings are arranged by exchanging girls between two families, a high bride-price, often amounting to as much as Rs. 60, is paid. No stigma is incurred, however, if a girl should remain unmarried till she arrives at adolescence, but, on the contrary, a higher price is then obtained for her. Sexual licence either before or after marriage is considered a venial offence, but a woman detected in a *liaison* with a man of one of the lowest castes is turned out of caste. Widow marriage and divorce are freely allowed.

### **3. Religion, birth and death.**

The Audheliās venerate Dulha Deo and Devi, to whom they usually offer pigs. Their principal festival is the Holi, at which their women were formerly engaged to perform as professional dancers. They usually burn their dead and remove the ashes on the third day, throwing them into the nearest stream. A few of the bones are picked up and buried under a pīpal tree, and a pitcher with a hole in the bottom is hung on the tree so that water may trickle down on to them. On the tenth day the caste-people assemble and are shaved and bathe and rub their bodies with oil under the tree. Unmarried men and persons dying of cholera are buried, the head being placed to the north. They consider that if they place the corpse in the reverse position it would be an insult to the Ganges equivalent to kicking the holy river, as the feet of

the body would then be turned towards it.

# Badhak

## 1. Introductory notice.

**Badhak, Bāgri, Baoria.**—A famous tribe of dacoits who flourished up to about 1850, and extended their depredations over the whole of Northern and Central India. The Bāgris and Baorias or Bāwarias still exist and are well known to the police as inveterate criminals; but their operations are now confined to ordinary burglary, theft and cheating, and their more interesting profession of armed gang-robbery on a large scale is a thing of the past. The first part of this article is entirely compiled from the Report on their suppression drawn up by Colonel Sleeman,<sup>41</sup> who may be regarded as the virtual founder of the Thuggee and Dacoity Department. Some mention of the existing Bāgri and Baoria tribes is added at the end.

## 2. The Badhak dacoits.

The origin of the Badhaks is obscure, but they seem to have belonged to Gujarāt, as their peculiar dialect, still in use, is a form of Gujarāti. The most striking feature in it is the regular substitution of *kh* for *s*. They claimed to be Rājput̃s and were divided into clans with the well-known Rājput̃ names of Solanki, Panwār, Dhundhel, Chauhān, Rāthor, Gahlot, Bhatti and Chāran. Their ancestors were supposed to have fled from Chitor on one

---

<sup>41</sup> *Report on the Badhak or Bāgri Dacoits and the Measures adopted by the Government of India for their Suppression*, printed in 1849.

of the historical occasions on which it was assaulted and sacked. But as they spoke Gujarāṭi it seems more probable that they belonged to Gujarāt, a fertile breeding-place of criminals, and they may have been descended from the alliances of Rājput̃s with the primitive tribes of this locality, the Bhīls and Kolis. The existing Bāgrīs are of short stature, one writer stating that none of them exceed five feet two inches in height; and this seems to indicate that they have little Rājput̃ blood. It may be surmised that the Badhaks rose into importance and found scope for their predatory instincts during the period of general disorder and absence of governing authority through which northern India passed after the decline of the Mughal Empire. And they lived and robbed with the connivance or open support of the petty chiefs and landholders, to whom they gave a liberal share of their booty. The principal bands were located in the Oudh forests, but they belonged to the whole of northern India including the Central Provinces; and as Colonel Sleeman's Report, though of much interest, is now practically unknown, I have thought it not out of place to compile an article by means of short extracts from his account of the tribe.

In 1822 the operations of the Badhaks were being conducted on such a scale that an officer wrote: "No District between the Brahmaputra, the Nerbudda, the Satlej and the Himalayas is free from them; and within this vast field hardly any wealthy merchant or manufacturer could feel himself secure for a single night from the depredations of Badhak dacoits. They had



successfully attacked so many of the treasuries of our native Sub-Collectors that it was deemed necessary, all over the North-Western Provinces, to surround such buildings with extensive fortifications. In many cases they carried off our public treasure from strong parties of our regular troops and mounted police, and none seemed to know whence they came or whither they fled with the booty acquired.”<sup>42</sup>

### **3. Instances of dacoities.**

Colonel Sleeman thus described a dacoity in the town of Narsinghpur when he was in charge of that District.<sup>43</sup> “In February 1822, in the dusk of the evening, a party of about thirty persons, with nothing seemingly but walking-sticks in their hands, passed the piquet of sepoy on the bank of the rivulet which separates the cantonment from the town of Narsinghpur. On being challenged by the sentries they said they were cowherds and that their cattle were following close behind. They walked up the street; and coming opposite the houses of the most wealthy merchants, they set their torches in a blaze by blowing suddenly on pots filled with combustibles, stabbed everybody who ventured to move or make the slightest noise, plundered the houses, and in ten minutes were away with their booty, leaving about twelve persons dead and wounded on the ground. No trace of them was discovered.” Another well-known exploit of the Badhaks was the attack on the palace of the ex-Peshwa, Bāji Rao,

---

<sup>42</sup> Sleeman, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Sleeman, p. 10.

at Bithūr near Cawnpore. This was accomplished by a gang of about eighty men, who proceeded to the locality in the disguise of carriers of Ganges water. Having purchased a boat and a few muskets to intimidate the guard they crossed the Ganges about six miles below Bithūr, and reached the place at ten o'clock at night; and after wounding eighteen persons who attempted resistance they possessed themselves of property, chiefly in gold, to the value of more than two and a half lakhs of rupees; and retiring without loss made their way in safety to their homes in the Oudh forests. The residence of this gang was known to a British police officer in the King of Oudh's service, Mr. Orr, and after a long delay on the part of the court an expedition was sent which recovered a portion of the treasure and captured two or three hundred of the Badhaks. But none of the recovered property reached the hands of Bāji Rao and the prisoners were soon afterwards released.<sup>44</sup> Again in 1839, a gang of about fifty men under a well-known leader, Gajrāj, scaled the walls of Jhānsi and plundered the Surāfa or bankers' quarter of the town for two hours, obtaining booty to the value of Rs. 40,000, which they carried off without the loss of a man. The following account of this raid was obtained by Colonel Sleeman from one of the robbers:<sup>45</sup> "The spy (*hirrowa*) having returned and reported that he had found a merchant's house in Jhānsi which contained a good deal of property, we proceeded to a grove where we took

---

<sup>44</sup> Sleeman, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Sleeman, p. 95.

the auspices by the process of *akūt* (counting of grains) and found the omens favourable. We then rested three days and settled the rates according to which the booty should be shared. Four or five men, who were considered too feeble for the enterprise, were sent back, and the rest, well armed, strong and full of courage, went on. In the evening of the fourth day we reached a plain about a mile from the town, where we rested to take breath for an hour; about nine o'clock we got to the wall and remained under it till midnight, preparing the ladders from materials which we had collected on the road. They were placed to the wall and we entered and passed through the town without opposition. A marriage procession was going on before us and the people thought we belonged to it. We found the bankers' shops closed. Thāna and Saldewa, who carried the axes, soon broke them open, while Kulean lighted up his torch. Gajrāj with twenty men entered, while the rest stood posted at the different avenues leading to the place. When all the property they could find had been collected, Gajrāj hailed the god Hanumān and gave orders for the retreat. We got back safely to Mondegri in two days and a half, and then reposed for two or three days with the Rāja of Narwar, with whom we left five or six of our stoutest men as a guard, and then returned home with our booty, consisting chiefly of diamonds, emeralds, gold and silver bullion, rupees and about sixty pounds of silver wire. None of our people were either killed or wounded, but whether any of the bankers' people were I know not."

#### 4. Further instances of dacoities.

Colonel Sleeman writes elsewhere<sup>46</sup> of the leader of the above exploit: “This Gajrāj had risen from the vocation of a *bandarwāla* (monkey showman) to be the Robin Hood of Gwālior and the adjacent States; he was the governor-general of banditti in that country of banditti and kept the whole in awe; he had made himself so formidable that the Durbar appointed him to keep the *ghāts* or ferries over the Chambal, which he did in a very profitable manner to them and to himself, and none entered or quitted the country without paying blackmail.” A common practice of the Badhaks, when in need of a little ready money, was to lie in wait for money-changers on their return from the markets. These men take their bags of money with them to the important bazārs at a distance from their residence and return home with them after dusk. The dacoits were accustomed to watch for them in the darkest and most retired places on the roads and fell them to the ground with their bludgeons. This device was often practised and usually succeeded.<sup>47</sup> Of another Badhak chief, Meherbān, it is stated<sup>48</sup> that he hired a discharged sepoy to instruct his followers in the European system of drill, that they might travel with him in the disguise of regular soldiers, well armed and accoutred. During the rains Meherbān’s spies (*hirrowa*) were sent to visit the great commercial towns and

---

<sup>46</sup> Sleeman, p. 231.

<sup>47</sup> Sleeman, p. 217.

<sup>48</sup> Sleeman, p. 20.

report any despatches of money or other valuables, which were to take place during the following open season. His own favourite disguise was that of a Hindu prince, while the remainder of the gang constituted his retinue and escort. On one occasion, assuming this character, he followed up a boat laden with Spanish dollars which was being sent from Calcutta to Benāres; and having attacked it at its moorings at Makrai, he killed one and wounded ten men of the guard and made off with 25,000 Spanish dollars and Rs. 2600 of the Company's coinage. A part of the band were sent direct to the rendezvous previously arranged, while Meherbān returned to the grove where he had left his women and proceeded with them in a more leisurely fashion to the same place. Retaining the character of a native prince he halted here for two days to celebrate the Holi festival. Marching thence with his women conveyed in covered litters by hired bearers who were changed at intervals, he proceeded to his bivouac in the Oudh forests; and at Seosāgar, one of his halting-places, he gave a large sum of money to a gardener to plant a grove of mango trees near a tank for the benefit of travellers, in the name of Rāja Meherbān Singh of Gaur in Oudh; and promised him further alms on future occasions of pilgrimage if he found the work progressing well, saying that it was a great shame that travellers should be compelled as he had been to halt without shade for themselves or their families during the heat of the day. He arrived safely at his quarters in the forest and was received in the customary fashion by a procession of women in

their best attire, who conducted him with dancing and music, like a victorious Roman Proconsul, to his fort.<sup>49</sup>

### **5. Disguise of religious mendicants.**

But naturally not all the Badhaks could do things in the style of Meherbān Singh. The disguise which they most often assumed in the north was that of carriers of Ganges water, while in Central India they often pretended to be Banjāras travelling with pack-bullocks, or pilgrims, or wedding-parties going to fetch the bride or bridegroom. Sometimes also they took the character of religious mendicants, the leader being the high priest and all the rest his followers and disciples. One such gang, described by Colonel Sleeman,<sup>50</sup> had four or five tents of white and dyed cloth, two or three pairs of *nakkāras* or kettle-drums and trumpets, with a great number of buffaloes, cows, goats, sheep and ponies. Some were clothed, but the bodies of the greater part were covered with nothing but ashes, paint and a small cloth waistband. But they always provided themselves with five or six real Bairāgis, whose services they purchased at a very high price. These men were put forward to answer questions in case of difficulty and to bully the landlords and peasantry; and if the people demurred to the demands of the Badhaks, to intimidate them by tricks calculated to play upon the fears of the ignorant. They held in their hands a preparation of gunpowder resembling common ashes; and when they found the people very

---

<sup>49</sup> Sleeman, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Sleeman, p. 81.

stubborn they repeated their *mantras* over this and threw it upon the thatch of the nearest house, to which it set fire. The explosion was caused by a kind of fusee held in the hand which the people could not see, and taking it for a miracle they paid all that was demanded. Another method was to pretend to be carrying the bones of dead relatives to the Ganges. The bones or ashes of the deceased, says<sup>51</sup> Colonel Sleeman, are carried to the Ganges in bags, coloured red for females and white for males. These bags are considered holy, and are not allowed to touch the ground upon the way, and during halts in the journey are placed on poles or triangles. The carriers are regarded with respect as persons engaged upon a pious duty, and seldom questioned on the road. When a gang assumed this disguise they proceeded to their place of rendezvous in small parties, some with red and some with white bags, in which they carried the bones of animals most resembling those of the human frame. These were supported on triangles formed of the shafts on which the spear-heads would be fitted when they reached their destination and had prepared for action.

## **6. Countenance and support of landowners.**

It would have been impossible for the Badhaks to exist and flourish as they did without the protection of the landowners on whose estates they lived; and this they received in full measure in return for a liberal share of their booty. When the chief of Karauli was called upon to dislodge a gang within his territory, he

---

<sup>51</sup> Sleeman, p. 82.

expressed apprehension that the coercion of the Badhaks might cause a revolution in the State. He was not at all singular, says Colonel Sleeman, in his fear of exasperating this formidable tribe of robbers. It was common to all the smaller chiefs and the provincial governors of the larger ones. They everywhere protected and fostered the Badhaks, as did the landholders; and the highest of them associated with the leaders of gangs on terms of equality and confidence. It was very common for a chief or the governor of a district in times of great difficulty and personal danger to require from one of the leaders of such gangs a night-guard or *palang ki chauki*: and no less so to entertain large bodies of them in the attack and defence of forts and camps whenever unusual courage and skill were required. The son of the Rājā of Charda exchanged turbans with a Badhak leader, Mangal Singh, as a mark of the most intimate friendship. This episode recalls an alliance of similar character in *Lorna Doone*; and indeed it would not be difficult to find several points of resemblance between the careers of the more enterprising Badhak leaders and the Doones of Bagworthy; but India produced no character on the model of John Ridd, and it was reserved for an Englishman, Colonel Sleeman, to achieve the suppression of the Badhaks as well as that of the Thugs. After the fortress and territory of Garhākota in Saugor had been taken by the Mahārāja Sindhia, Zālīm Singh, a cousin of the dispossessed Bundela chief, collected a force of Bundelas and Pindāris and ravaged the country round Garhākota in 1813. In the course of his raid he sacked and burnt the town



of Deori, and 15,000 persons perished in the flames. Colonel Jean Baptiste, Sindhia's general, obtained a number of picked Badhaks from Rājputāna and offered them a rich reward for the head of Zālim Singh; and after watching his camp for three months they managed to come on him asleep in the tent of a dancing-girl, who was following his camp, and stabbed him to the heart. For this deed they received Rs. 20,000 from Baptiste with other valuable presents. Their reputation was indeed such that they were frequently employed at this period both by chiefs who desired to take the lives of others and by those who were anxious for the preservation of their own. When it happened that a gang was caught after a robbery in a native State, the custom was not infrequently to make them over to the merchant whose property they had taken, with permission to keep them in confinement until they should refund his money; and in this manner by giving up the whole or a part of the proceeds of their robbery they were enabled to regain their liberty. Even if they were sent before the courts, justice was at that time so corrupt as to permit of easy avenues of escape for those who could afford to pay; and Colonel Sleeman records the deposition of a Badhak describing their methods of bribery: "When police officers arrest Badhaks their old women get round them and give them large sums of money; and they either release them or get their depositions so written that their release shall be ordered by the magistrates. If they are brought to court, their old women, dressed in rags, follow them at a distance of three or four miles with a thousand or two thousand

rupees upon ponies; and these rupees they distribute among the native officers of the court and get the Badhaks released. These old women first ascertain from the people of the villages who are the Nāzirs and Munshis of influence, and wait upon them at their houses and make their bargains. If the officials cannot effect their release, they take money from the old women and send them off to the Sadar Court, with letters of introduction to their friends, and advice as to the rate they shall pay to each according to his supposed influence. This is the way that all our leaders get released, and hardly any but useless men are left in confinement.”<sup>52</sup>

### **7. Pride in their profession.**

It may be noticed that these robbers took the utmost pleasure in their calling, and were most averse to the idea of giving it up and taking to honest pursuits. “Some of the men with me,” one magistrate wrote,<sup>53</sup> “have been in jail for twenty, and one man for thirty years, and still do not appear to have any idea of abandoning their illegal vocation; even now, indeed, they look on what we consider an honest means of livelihood with the most marked contempt; and in relating their excursions talk of them with the greatest pleasure, much in the way an eager sportsman describes a boar-chase or fox-hunt. While talking of their excursions, which were to me really very interesting, their eyes gleamed with pleasure; and beating their hands on

---

<sup>52</sup> Sleeman, p. 152.

<sup>53</sup> Sleeman, p. 127. This passage is from a letter written by a magistrate, Mr. Ramsay.

their foreheads and breasts and muttering some ejaculation they bewailed the hardness of their lot, which now ensured their never again being able to participate in such a joyous occupation.” Another Badhak, on being examined, said he could not recall a case of one of the community having ever given up the trade of dacoity. “None ever did, I am certain of it,” he continued.<sup>54</sup> “After having been arrested, on our release we frequently take lands, to make it appear we have left off dacoity, but we never do so in reality; it is only done as a feint and to enable our zamīndārs (landowners) to screen us.” They sometimes paid rent for their land at the rate of thirty rupees an acre, in return for the countenance and protection afforded by the zamīndārs. “Our profession,” another Badhak remarked,<sup>55</sup> “has been a *Pādshāhi Kām* (a king’s trade); we have attacked and seized boldly the thousands and hundreds of thousands that we have freely and nobly spent; we have been all our lives wallowing in wealth and basking in freedom, and find it hard to manage with the few copper pice a day we get from you.” At the time when captures were numerous, and the idea was entertained of inducing the dacoits to settle in villages and supporting them until they had been trained to labour, several of them, on being asked how much they would require to support themselves, replied that they could not manage on less than two rupees a day, having earned quite that sum by dacoity. This amount would be more than twenty

---

<sup>54</sup> Sleeman, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> Sleeman, p. 112.

times the wages of an ordinary labourer at the same period. Another witness put the amount at one to two rupees a day, remarking, 'We are great persons for eating and drinking, and we keep several wives according to our means.' Of some of them Colonel Sleeman had a high opinion, and he mentions the case of one man, Ajīt Singh, who was drafted into the native army and rose to be commander of a company. "I have seldom seen a man," he wrote,<sup>56</sup> "whom I would rather have with me in scenes of peril and difficulty." An attempt of the King of Oudh's, however, to form a regiment of Badhaks had ended in failure, as after a short time they mutinied, beat their commandant and other officers and turned them out of the regiment, giving as their reason that the officers had refused to perform the same duties as the men. And they visited with the same treatment all the other officers sent to them, until they were disbanded by the British on the province of Allahābād being made over to the Company. Colonel Sleeman notes that they were never known to offer any other violence or insult to females than to make them give up any gold ornaments that they might have about their persons. "In all my inquiries into the character, habits and conduct of these gangs, I have never found an instance of a female having been otherwise disgraced or insulted by them. They are all Hindūs, and this reverence for the sex pervades all Hindū society."<sup>57</sup> According to their own account also they

---

<sup>56</sup> Sleeman, p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> Sleeman, p. 125.

never committed murder; if people opposed them they struck and killed like soldiers, but this was considered to be in fair fight. It may be noted, nevertheless, that they had little idea of clan loyalty, and informed very freely against their fellows when this course was to their advantage. They also stated that they could not settle in towns; they had always been accustomed to live in the jungles and commit dacoities upon the people of the towns as a kind of *shikār* (sport); they delighted in it, and they felt living in towns or among other men as a kind of prison, and got quite confused (*ghabrāye*), and their women even more than the men.

### **8. Caste rules and admission of outsiders.**

The Badhaks had a regular caste organisation, and members of the different clans married with each other like the Rājputs after whom they were named. They admitted freely into the community members of any respectable Hindu caste, but not the impure castes or Muhammadans. But at least one instance of the admission of a Muhammadan is given.<sup>58</sup> The Badhaks were often known to the people as Siārkhawa or jackal-eaters, or Sabkhawa, those who eat everything. And the Muhammadan in question was given jackal's flesh to eat, and having partaken of it was considered to have become a member of the community. This indicates that the Badhaks were probably accustomed to eat the flesh of the jackal at a sacrificial meal, and hence that they worshipped the jackal, revering it probably as the deity of the forests where they lived. Such a veneration would account

---

<sup>58</sup> Sleeman, p. 147.

for the importance attached to the jackal's cry as an omen. The fact of their eating jackals also points to the conclusion that the Badhaks were not Rājput, but a low hunting caste like the Pārdhis and Bahelias. The Pārdhis have Rājput sept names as well as the Badhaks. No doubt a few outcaste Rājputs may have joined the gangs and become their leaders. Others, however, said that they abstained from the flesh of jackals, snakes, foxes and cows and buffaloes. Children were frequently adopted, being purchased in large numbers in time of famine, and also occasionally kidnapped. They were brought up to the trade of dacoity, and if they showed sufficient aptitude for it were taken out on expeditions, but otherwise left at home to manage the household affairs. They were married to other adopted children and were known as Ghulāmi or Slave Badhaks, like the Jāngar Banjāras; and like them also, after some generations, when their real origin had been forgotten, they became full Badhaks. It was very advantageous to a Badhak to have a number of children, because all plunder obtained was divided in regularly apportioned shares among the whole community. Men who were too old to go on dacoity also received their share, and all children, even babies born during the absence of the expedition. The Badhaks said that this rule was enforced because they thought it an advantage to the community that families should be large and their numbers should increase; from which statement it must be concluded that they seldom suffered any stringency from lack of spoil. They also stated that Badhak widows would go and find

a second husband from among the regular population, and as a rule would sooner or later persuade him to join the Badhaks.

### **9. Religion: offerings to ancestors.**

Like other Indian criminals the Badhaks were of a very religious or superstitious disposition. They considered the gods of the Hindu creed as favouring their undertakings so long as they were suitably propitiated by offering to their temples and priests, and the spirits of the most distinguished of their ancestors as exercising a vicarious authority under these deities in guiding them to their prey and warning them of danger.<sup>59</sup> The following is an account of a Badhak sacrifice given to Colonel Sleeman by the Ajīt Singh already mentioned. It was in celebration of a dacoity in which they had obtained Rs. 40,000, out of which Rs. 4500 were set aside for sacrifices to the gods and charity to the poor. Ajīt Singh said: "For offerings to the gods we purchase goats, sweet cakes and spirits; and having prepared a feast we throw a handful of the savoury food upon the fire in the name of the gods who have most assisted us; but of the feast so consecrated no female but a virgin can partake. The offering is made through the man who has successfully invoked the god on that particular occasion; and, as my god had guided us this time, I was employed to prepare the feast for him and to throw the offering upon the fire. The offering must be taken up before the feast is touched and put upon the fire, and a little water must be sprinkled on it. The savoury smell of the food as it burns reaches the nostrils of

---

<sup>59</sup> Sleeman, p. 104.

the god and delights him. On this as on most occasions I invoked the spirit of Ganga Singh, my grandfather, and to him I made the offering. I considered him to be the greatest of all my ancestors as a robber, and him I invoked on this solemn occasion. He never failed me when I invoked him, and I had the greatest confidence in his aid. The spirits of our ancestors can easily see whether we shall succeed in what we are about to undertake; and when we are to succeed they order us on, and when we are not they make signs to us to desist.” Their mode<sup>60</sup> of ascertaining which of their ancestors interested himself most in their affairs was commonly this, that whenever a person talked incoherently in a fever or an epileptic fit, the spirit of one or other of his ancestors was supposed to be upon him. If they were in doubt as to whose spirit it was, one of them threw down some grains of wheat or coloured glass beads, a pinch at a time, saying the name of the ancestor he supposed the most likely to be at work and calling odd or even as he pleased. If the number proved to be as he called it several times running while that name was repeated, they felt secure of their family god, and proceeded at once to sacrifice a goat or something else in his name. When they were being hunted down and arrested by Colonel Sleeman and his assistants, they ascribed their misfortunes to the anger of the goddess Kālī, because they had infringed her rules and disregarded her signs, and said that their forefathers had often told them they would one

---

<sup>60</sup> Sleeman, p. 110.



day be punished for their disobedience.<sup>61</sup>

### **10. The wounded haunted by spirits.**

Whenever one of the gang was wounded and was taken with his wounds bleeding near a place haunted by a spirit, they believed the spirit got angry and took hold of him,<sup>62</sup> in the manner described by Ajīt Singh as follows: “The spirit comes upon him in all kinds of shapes, sometimes in that of a buffalo, at others in that of a woman, sometimes in the air above and sometimes from the ground below; but no one can see him except the wounded person he is angry with and wants to punish. Upon such a wounded person we always place a naked sword or some other sharp steel instrument, as spirits are much afraid of weapons of this kind. If there be any good conjurer at hand to charm away the spirits from the person wounded he recovers, but nothing else can save him.” In one case a dacoit named Ghīsa had been severely wounded in an encounter and was seized by the spirit of a banyan tree as he was being taken away: “We made a litter with our ropes and cloaks thrown over them and on this he was carried off by four of our party; at half a mile distant the road passed under a large banyan tree and as the four men carried him along under the tree, the spirit of the place fell upon him and the four men who carried him fell down with the shock. They could not raise him again, so much were they frightened, and four other men were obliged to lift him and carry him off.”

---

<sup>61</sup> Sleeman, p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> Sleeman, p. 205.

The man died of his wounds soon after they reached the halting-place, and in commenting on this Ajīt Singh continued: “When the spirit seized Ghīsa under the tree we had unfortunately no conjurer, and he, poor fellow, died in consequence. It was evident that a spirit had got hold of him, for he could not keep his head upright; it always fell down upon his right or left shoulder as often as we tried to put it right; and he complained much of a pain in the region of the liver. We therefore concluded that the spirit had broken his neck and was consuming his liver.”

### **11. Pious funeral observances.**

Like pious Hindus as they were, the Badhaks were accustomed, whenever it was possible, to preserve the bones of their dead after the body had been burnt and carry them to the Ganges. If this was not possible, however, and the exigencies of their profession obliged them to make away with the body without the performance of due funeral rites, they cut off two or three fingers and sent these to the Ganges to be deposited instead of the whole body.<sup>63</sup> In one case a dacoit, Kundana, was killed in an affray, and the others carried off his body and thrust it into a porcupine’s hole after cutting off three of the fingers. “We gave Kundana’s fingers to his mother,” Ajīt Singh stated, “and she sent them with due offerings and ceremonies to the Ganges by the hands of the family priest. She gave this priest money to purchase a cow, to be presented to the priests in the name of her deceased son, and to distribute in charity to the poor and to holy

---

<sup>63</sup> Sleeman, p. 106.

men. She got from us for these purposes eighty rupees over and above her son's share of the booty, while his widow and children continued to receive their usual share of the takings of the gang so long as they remained with us."

## **12. Taking the omens.**

Before setting out on an expedition it was their regular custom to take the omens, and the following account may be quoted of the preliminaries to an expedition of the great leader, Meherbān Singh, who has already been mentioned: "In the latter end of that year, Meherbān and his brother set out and assembled their friends on the bank of the Bisori river, where the rate at which each member of the party should share in the spoil was determined in order to secure to the dependants of any one who should fall in the enterprise their due share, as well as to prevent inconvenient disputes during and after the expedition. The party assembled on this occasion, including women and children, amounted to two hundred, and when the shares had been determined the goats were sacrificed for the feast. Each leader and member of the gang dipped his finger in the blood and swore fidelity to his engagements and his associates under all circumstances. The whole feasted together and drank freely till the next evening, when Meherbān advanced with about twenty of the principal persons to a spot chosen a little way from the camp on the road they proposed to take in the expedition, and lifting up his hands in supplication said aloud, 'If it be thy will, O God, and thine, Kālī, to prosper our undertaking for the sake of

the blind and the lame, *the widow and the orphan*, who depend upon our exertions for subsistence, vouchsafe, we pray thee, the call of the female jackal.' All his followers held up their hands in the same manner and repeated these words after him. All then sat down and waited in silence for the reply or spoke only in whispers. At last the cry of the female jackal was heard three times on the left, and believing her to have been inspired by the deity for their guidance they were all much rejoiced." The following was another more elaborate method of taking omens described by Ajīt Singh: "When we speak of seeking omens from our gods or Devi Deota, we mean the spirits of those of our ancestors who performed great exploits in dacoity in their day, gained a great name and established lasting reputations. For instance, Mahājīt, my grandfather, and Sāhiba, his father, are called gods and admitted to be so by us all. We have all of us some such gods to be proud of among our ancestors; we propitiate them and ask for favourable omens from them before we enter upon any enterprise. We sometimes propitiate the Sūraj Deota (sun god) and seek good omens from him. We get two or three goats or rams, and sometimes even ten or eleven, at the place where we determine to take the auspices, and having assembled the principal men of the gang we put water into the mouth of one of them and pray to the sun and to our ancestors thus: 'O thou Sun God! And O all ye other Gods! If we are to succeed in the enterprise we are about to undertake we pray you to cause these goats to shake their bodies.' If they do not shake them after

the gods have been thus duly invoked, the enterprise must not be entered upon and the goats are not sacrificed. We then try the auspices with wheat. We burn frankincense and scented wood and blow a shell; and taking out a pinch of wheat grains, put them on the cloth and count them. If they come up odd the omen is favourable, and if even it is bad. After this, which we call the auspices of the Akūt, we take that of the Siārni or female jackal. If it calls on the left it is good, but if on the right bad. If the omens turn out favourable in all three trials then we have no fear whatever, but if they are favourable in only one trial out of the three the enterprise must be given up.”

### **13. Suppression of dacoity.**

Between 1837 and 1849 the suppression of the regular practice of armed dacoity was practically achieved by Colonel Sleeman. A number of officers were placed under his orders, and with small bodies of military and police were set to hunt down different bands of dacoits, following them all over India when necessary. And special Acts were passed to enable the offence of dacoity, wherever committed, to be tried by a competent magistrate in any part of India as had been done in the case of the Thugs. Many of the Badhaks received conditional pardons, and were drafted into the police in different stations, and an agricultural labour colony was also formed, but does not seem to have been altogether successful. During these twelve years more than 1200 dacoits in all were brought to trial, while some were killed during the operations, and no doubt many others escaped

and took to other avocations, or became ordinary criminals when their armed gangs were broken up. In 1825 it had been estimated that the Oudh forests alone contained from 4000 to 6000 dacoits, while the property stolen in 1811 from known dacoities was valued at ten lakhs of rupees.

#### **14. The Badhaks or Baoris at the present time.**

The Badhaks still exist, and are well known as one of the worst classes of criminals, practising ordinary house-breaking and theft. The name Badhak is now less commonly used than those of Bāgri and Baori or Bāwaria, both of which were borne by the original Badhaks. The word Bāgri is derived from a tract of country in Mālwa which is known as the Bāgar or ‘hedge of thorns,’ because it is surrounded on all sides by wooded hills.<sup>64</sup> There are Bāgri Jāts and Bāgri Rājput̃s, many of whom are now highly respectable landholders. Bāwaria or Baori is derived from *bānwar*, a creeper, or the tendril of a vine, and hence a noose made originally from some fibrous plant and used for trapping animals, this being one of the primary occupations of the tribe.<sup>65</sup> The term Badhak signifies a hunter or fowler, hence a robber or murderer (Platts). The Bāgris and Bāwarias are sometimes considered to be separate communities, but it is doubtful whether there is any real distinction between them. In Bombay the Bāgris are known as Vāghris by the common change of *b* into *v*. A good description of them is contained in Appendix C to Mr. Bhimbai

---

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm's *Memoir of Central India*, ii. p. 479.

<sup>65</sup> Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Bāwaria.

Kirpārām's volume *Hindus of Gujarat* in the *Bombay Gazetteer*. He divides them into the Chunaria or lime-burners, the Dātonia or sellers of twig tooth-brushes, and two other groups, and states that, "They also keep fowls and sell eggs, catch birds and go as *shikāris* or hunters. They traffic in green parrots, which they buy from Bhīls and sell for a profit."

### **15. Lizard-hunting.**

Their strength and powers of endurance are great, the same writer states, and they consider that these qualities are obtained by the eating of the *goh* and *sāndha* or iguana lizards, which a Vāghri prizes very highly. This is also the case with the Bāwarias of the Punjab, who go out hunting lizards in the rains and may be seen returning with baskets full of live lizards, which exist for days without food and are killed and eaten fresh by degrees. Their method of hunting the lizard is described by Mr. Wilson as follows:<sup>66</sup> "The lizard lives on grass, cannot bite severely, and is sluggish in his movements, so that he is easily caught. He digs a hole for himself of no great depth, and the easiest way to take him is to look out for the scarcely perceptible airhole and dig him out; but there are various ways of saving oneself this trouble. One, which I have seen, takes advantage of a habit the lizard has in cold weather (when he never comes out of his hole) of coming to the mouth for air and warmth. The Chūhra or other sportsman puts off his shoes and steals along the prairie till he sees signs of a lizard's hole. This he approaches on tiptoe, raising over his head

---

<sup>66</sup> *Sirsa Settlement Report*.

with both hands a mallet with a round sharp point, and fixing his eyes intently upon the hole. When close enough he brings down his mallet with all his might on the ground just behind the mouth of the hole, and is often successful in breaking the lizard's back before he awakes to a sense of his danger. Another plan, which I have not seen, is to tie a wisp of grass to a long stick and move it over the hole so as to make a rustling noise. The lizard within thinks, 'Oh here's a snake! I may as well give in,' and comes to the mouth of the hole, putting out his tail first so that he may not see his executioner. The sportsman seizes his tail and snatches him out before he has time to learn his mistake." This common fondness for lizards is a point in favour of a connection between the Gujarāt Vāghris and the Punjab Bāwarias.

## **16. Social observances.**

In Sirsa the great mass of the Bāwarias are not given to crime, and in Gujarāt also they do not appear to have special criminal tendencies. It is a curious point, however, that Mr. Bhimbhai Kirpārām emphasises the chastity of the women of the Gujarāt Vāghris.<sup>67</sup> "When a family returns home after a money-making tour to Bombay or some other city, the women are taken before Vihāt (Devi), and with the women is brought a buffalo or a sheep that is tethered in front of Vihāt's shrine. They must confess all, even their slightest shortcomings, such as the following: 'Two weeks ago, when begging in Pārsi Bazār-street, a drunken sailor

---

<sup>67</sup> It would appear that the Gujarāt Vāghris are a distinct class from the criminal section of the tribe.



caught me by the hand. Another day a Mīyan or Musalmān ogled me, and forgive me, Devi, my looks encouraged him.’ If Devi is satisfied the sheep or buffalo shivers, and is then sacrificed and provides a feast for the caste.”<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Mr. Crooke states<sup>69</sup> that in northern India, “The standard of morality is very low because in Muzaffarnagar it is extremely rare for a Bāwaria woman to live with her husband. Almost invariably she lives with another man: but the official husband is responsible for the children.” The great difference in the standard of morality is certainly surprising.

In Gujarāt<sup>70</sup> the Vāghris have *gurus* or religious preceptors of their own. These men take an eight-anna silver piece and whisper in the ear of their disciples “Be immortal.”... “The Bhuvas or priest-mediums play an important part in many Vāghri ceremonies. A Bhuvā is a male child born after the mother has made a vow to the goddess Vihāt or Devi that if a son be granted to her she will devote him to the service of the goddess. No Bhuvā may cut or shave his hair on pain of a fine of ten rupees, and no Bhuvā may eat carrion or food cooked by a Muhammadan.”

### **17. Criminal practices.**

The criminal Bāgrīs still usually travel about in the disguise of Gosains and Bairāgis, and are very difficult of detection except to real religious mendicants. Their housebreaking implement or

---

<sup>68</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarāt Hindus*, p. 514.

<sup>69</sup> Art. Bawaria, quoting from *North Indian Notes and Queries*, i. 51.

<sup>70</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Hindus of Gujarāt*, p. 574.

jemmy is known as *Gyān*, but in speaking of it they always add *Dās*, so that it sounds like the name of a Bairāgi.<sup>71</sup> They are usually very much afraid of the *gyān* being discovered on their persons, and are careful to bury it in the ground at each halting-place, while on the march it may be concealed in a pack-saddle. The means of identifying them, Mr. Kennedy remarks,<sup>72</sup> is by their family *deo* or god, which they carry about when wandering with their families. It consists of a brass or copper box containing grains of wheat and the seeds of a creeper, both soaked in *ghī* (melted butter). The box with a peacock's feather and a bell is wrapped in two white and then in two red cloths, one of the white cloths having the print of a man's hand dipped in goat's blood upon it. The grains of wheat are used for taking the omens, a few being thrown up at sun-down and counted afterwards to see whether they are odd or even. When even, two grains are placed on the right hand of the omen-taker, and if this occurs three times running the auspices are considered to be favourable.<sup>73</sup> Mr. Gayer<sup>74</sup> notes that the Badhaks have usually from one to three brands from a hot iron on the inside of their left wrist. Those of them who are hunters brand the muscles of the left wrist in order to steady the hand when firing their matchlocks. The customs of wearing a peculiar necklace of small wooden beads and a

---

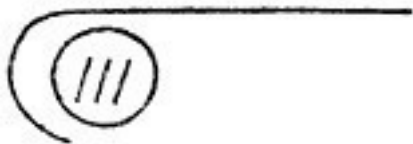
<sup>71</sup> Gunthorpe's *Criminal Tribes*.

<sup>72</sup> *Criminal Classes in the Bombay Presidency*, p. 151.

<sup>73</sup> Gunthorpe's *Criminal Tribes*, art. Badhak.

<sup>74</sup> *C. P. Police Lectures*, art. Badhak.

kind of gold pin fixed to the front teeth, which Mr. Crooke<sup>75</sup> records as having been prevalent some years ago, have apparently been since abandoned, as they are not mentioned in more recent accounts. The Dehliwāl and Mālpura Baorias have, Mr. Kennedy states,<sup>76</sup> an interesting system of signs, which they mark on the walls of buildings at important corners, bridges and cross-roads and on the ground by the roadside with a stick, if no building is handy. The commonest is a loop, the straight line indicating the direction a gang or individual has taken:



The addition of a number of vertical strokes inside the loop signifies the number of males in a gang. If these strokes are enclosed by a circle it means that the gang is encamped in the vicinity; while a square inside a circle and line as below means that property has been secured by friends who have left in the direction pointed by the line. It is said that Baorias will follow one another up for fifty or even a hundred miles by means of these hieroglyphics. The signs are bold marks, sometimes even

---

<sup>75</sup> Art. Bāwaria, para. 12.

<sup>76</sup> *Criminal Classes in the Bombay Presidency*, p. 179.

a foot or more in length, and are made where they will at once catch the eye. When the Mārwāri Baorias desire to indicate to others of their caste, who may follow in their footsteps, the route taken, a member of the gang, usually a woman, trails a stick in the dust as she walks along, leaving a spiral track on the ground. Another method of indicating the route taken is to place leaves under stones at intervals along the road.<sup>77</sup> The form of crime most in favour among the ordinary Baoris is housebreaking by night. Their common practice is to make a hole in the wall beside the door through which the hand passes to raise the latch; and only occasionally they dig a hole in the base of the wall to admit of the passage of a man, while another favoured alternative is to break in through a barred window, the bars being quickly and forcibly bent and drawn out.<sup>78</sup> One class of Mārwāri Bāgris are also expert coiners.



---

<sup>77</sup> Kennedy, *loc. cit.* p. 208.

<sup>78</sup> Kennedy, *loc. cit.* p. 185.

# Bahna

## 1. Nomenclature and internal structure.

**Bahna, Pinjāra, Dhunia.** <sup>79</sup>—The occupational caste of cotton-cleaners. The Bahnas numbered 48,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār in 1911. The large increase in the number of ginning-factories has ruined the Bahna's trade of cleaning hand-ginned cotton, and as no distinction attaches to the name of Bahna it is possible that members of the caste who have taken to other occupations may have abandoned it and returned themselves simply as Muhammadans. The three names Bahna, Pinjāra, Dhunia appear to be used indifferently for the caste in this Province, though in other parts of India they are distinguished. Pinjāra is derived from the word *pinjan* used for a cotton-bow, and Dhunia is from *dhunna*, to card cotton. The caste is also known as Dhunak Pathāni. Though professing the Muhammadan religion, they still have many Hindu customs and ceremonies, and in the matter of inheritance our courts have held that they are subject to Hindu and not Muhammadan law.<sup>80</sup> In Raipur a girl receives half the share of a boy in the division of inherited property. The caste appears to be a mixed occupational group, and is split into many territorial subcastes

---

<sup>79</sup> This article is partly based on a paper by Munshi Kanhya Lāl of the Gazetteer office.

<sup>80</sup> Sir B. Robertson's *C.P. Census Report* (1891), p. 203.

named after the different parts of the country from which its members have come, as Badharia from Badhas in Mīrzāpur, Sarsūtia from the Sāraswati river, Berāri of Berār, Dakhni from the Deccan, Telangi from Madras, Pardeshi from northern India, and so on. Two groups are occupational, the Newāris of Saugor, who make the thick *newār* tape used for the webbing of beds, and the Kanderas, who make fireworks and generally constitute a separate caste. There is considerable ground for supposing that the Bahnas are mainly derived from the caste of Telis or oil-pressers. In the Punjab Sir D. Ibbetson says<sup>81</sup> that the Penja or cotton-scutchers is an occupational name applied to Telis who follow this profession; and that the Penja, Kasai and Teli are all of the same caste. Similarly in Nāsik the Telis and Pinjāras are said to form one community, under the government of a single *panchāyat*. In cases of dispute or misconduct the usual penalty is temporary excommunication, which is known as the stopping of food and water.<sup>82</sup> The Telis are an enterprising community of very low status, and would therefore be naturally inclined to take to other occupations; many of them are shopkeepers, cultivators and landholders, and it is quite probable that in past times they took up the Bahna's profession and changed their religion with the hope of improving their social status. The Telis are generally considered to be quarrelsome and talkative, and the Bahnas or Dhunias have the same characteristics. If one man

---

<sup>81</sup> *Punjab Census Report* (1881), paras. 646, 647.

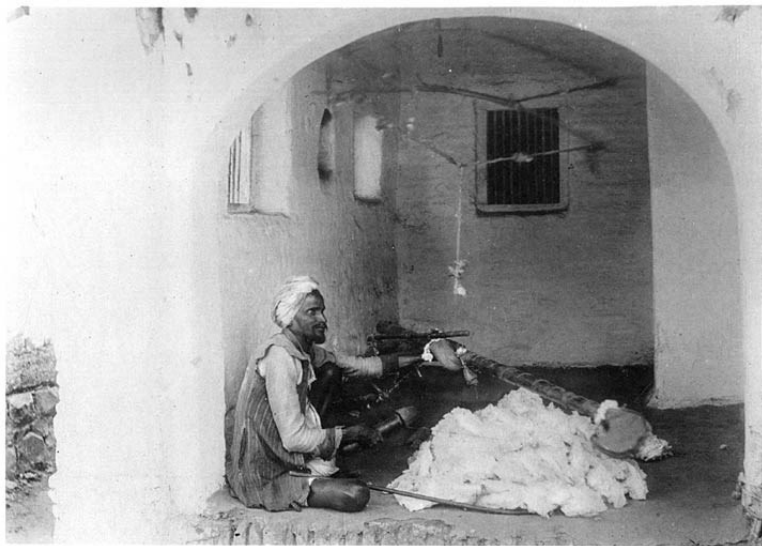
<sup>82</sup> *Nāsik Gazetteer*, pp. 84, 85.

abusing another lapses into Billingsgate, the other will say to him, ‘*Hamko Julāha Dhunia neh jāno,*’ or ‘Don’t talk to me as if I was a Julāha or a Dhunia.’

## **2. Marriage.**

Some Bahnas have exogamous sections with Hindu names, while others are without these, and simply regulate their marriages by rules of relationship. They have the primitive Hindu custom of allowing a sister’s son to marry a brother’s daughter, but not *vice versa*. A man cannot marry his wife’s younger sister during her lifetime, nor her elder sister at any time. Children of the same foster-mother are also not allowed to marry. Their marriages are performed by a Kāzi with an imitation of the Nikāh rite. The bridegroom’s party sit under the marriage-shed, and the bride with the women of her party inside the house. The Kāzi selects two men, one from the bride’s party, who is known as the Nikāhi Bāp or ‘Marriage Father,’ and the other from the bridegroom’s, who is called the Gowāh or ‘Witness.’ These two men go to the bride and ask her whether she accepts the bridegroom, whose name is stated, for her husband. She answers in the affirmative, and mentions the amount of the dowry which she is to receive. The bridegroom, who has hitherto had a veil (*mukhna*) over his face, now takes it off, and the men go to him and ask him whether he accepts the bride. He replies that he does, and agrees to pay the dowry demanded by her. The Kāzi reads some texts and the guests are given a meal of rice and sugar. Many of the preliminaries to a Hindu marriage are

performed by the more backward members of the caste, and until recently they erected a sacred post in the marriage-shed, but now they merely hang the green branch of a mango tree to the roof. The minimum amount of the *mehar* or dowry is said to be Rs. 125, but it is paid to the girl's parents as a bride-price and not to herself, as among the Muhammadans. A widow is expected, but not obliged, to marry her deceased husband's younger brother. Divorce is permitted by means of a written deed known as 'Fārkhati.'



Pinjāra cleaning cotton.



### 3. Religious and other customs.

The Bahnas venerate Muhammad, and also worship the tombs of Muhammadan saints or *Pīrs*. A green sheet or cloth is spread over the tomb and a lamp is kept burning by it, while offerings of incense and flowers are made. When the new cotton crop has been gathered they lay some new cotton by their bow and mallet and make an offering of *malīda* or cakes of flour and sugar to it. They believe that two angels, one good and one bad, are perched continually on the shoulders of every man to record his good and evil deeds. And when an eclipse occurs they say that the sun and moon have gone behind a pinnacle or tower of the heavens. For exorcising evil spirits they write texts of the Korān on paper and burn them before the sufferer. The caste bury the dead with the feet pointing to the south. On the way to the grave each one of the mourners places his shoulder under the bier for a time, partaking of the impurity communicated by it. Incense is burnt daily in the name of a deceased person for forty days after his death, with the object probably of preventing his ghost from returning to haunt the house. Muhammadan beggars are fed on the tenth day. Similarly, after the birth of a child a woman is unclean for forty days, and cannot cook for her husband during that period. A child's hair is cut for the first time on the tenth or twelfth day after birth, this being known as *Jhālar*. Some parents leave a lock of hair to grow on the head in the name of the famous saint Sheikh Farīd, thinking that they will thus ensure a long life for the child. It is probably in reality a way of preserving the Hindu *choti* or

scalp-lock.

#### 4. Occupation.

The hereditary calling<sup>83</sup> of the Bahna is the cleaning or scutching of cotton, which is done by subjecting it to the vibration of a bow-string. The seed has been previously separated by a hand-gin, but the ginned cotton still contains much dirt, leaf-fibre and other rubbish, and to remove this is the Bahna's task. The bow is somewhat in the shape of a harp, the wide end consisting of a broad piece of wood over which the string passes, being secured to a straight wooden bar at the back. At the narrow end the bar and string are fixed to an iron ring. The string is made of the sinew of some animal, and this renders the implement objectionable to Hindus, and may account for the Bahnas being Muhammadans. The club or mallet is a wooden implement shaped like a dumb-bell. The bow is suspended from the roof so as to hang just over the pile of loose cotton; and the worker twangs the string with the mallet and then draws the mallet across the string, each three or four times. The string strikes a small portion of the cotton, the fibre of which is scattered by the impact and thrown off in a uniform condition of soft fluff, all dirt being at the same time removed. This is the operation technically known as teasing. Buchanan remarked that women frequently did the work themselves at home, using a smaller kind of bow called *dhunkara*. The clean cotton is made up into balls, some of which are passed on to the spinner, while others are used for the

---

<sup>83</sup> Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Bahna.

filling of quilts and the padded coats worn in the cold weather. The ingenious though rather clumsy method of the Bahna has been superseded by the ginning-factory, and little or no cotton destined for the spindle is now cleaned by him. The caste have been forced to take to cultivation or field labour, while many have become cartmen and others are brokers, peons or constables. Nearly every house still has its *pinjan* or bow, but only a desultory use is made of this during the winter months. As it is principally used by a Muhammadan caste it seems a possible hypothesis that the cotton-bow was introduced into India by invaders of that religion. The name of the bow, *pinjan*, is, however, a Sanskrit derivative, and this is against the above theory. It has already been seen that the fact of animal sinew being used for the string would make it objectionable to Hindus. The Bahnas are subjected to considerable ridicule on account of their curious mixture of Hindu and Muhammadan ceremonies, amounting in some respects practically to a caricature of the rites of Islām; and further, they share with the weaver class the contempt shown to those who follow a calling considered more suitable for women than men. It is related that when the Mughal general Asaf Khān first made an expedition into the north of the Central Provinces he found the famous Gond-Rājput queen Durgāvati of the Garha-Mandla dynasty governing with success a large and prosperous state in this locality. He thought a country ruled by a woman should fall an easy prey to the Muhammadan arms, and to show his contempt for her power he sent her a golden spindle. The

queen retorted by a present of a gold cotton-cleaner's bow, and this so enraged the Mughal that he proceeded to attack the Gond kingdom. The story indicates that cotton-carding is considered a Muhammadan profession, and also that it is held in contempt.

### **5. Proverbs about Bahnas.**

Various sayings show that the Bahna is not considered a proper Muhammadan, as

Turuk to Turuk  
Aur Bahna Turuk,

or 'A Muhammadan (Turk) is a Muhammadan and the Bahna is also a Muhammadan'; and again—

Achera,<sup>84</sup> Kachera, Pinjāra,  
Muhammad se dūr, Dīn se niyāra,

or 'The Kachera and Pinjāra are lost to Muhammad and far from the faith'; and again—

Adho Hindu adho Musalmān  
Tinkhon kahen Dhunak Pathān,

or 'Half a Hindu and half a Muhammadan, that is he who is a Dhunak Pathān.' They have a grotesque imitation of the

---

<sup>84</sup> The word Achera is merely a jingle put in to make the rhyme complete. Kachera is a maker of glass bangles.

Muhammadan rite of *halāl*, or causing an animal's blood to flow on to the ground with the repetition of the *kalma* or invocation; thus it is said that when a Bahna is about to kill a fowl he addresses it somewhat as follows:

Kāhe karkarāt hai?

Kāhe barbarāt hai?

Kāhe jai jai logon ka dāna khāt hāi?

Tor kiāmat mor niāmat,

Bismillāh hai tuch,

or “Why do you cackle? Why do you crow? Why do you eat other people's grain? Your death is my feast; I touch you in the name of God.” And saying this he puts a knife to the fowl's throat. The vernacular verse is a good imitation of the cackling of a fowl. And again, they slice off the top of an egg as if they were killing an animal and repeat the formula, “White dome, full of moisture, I know not if there is a male or female within; in the name of God I kill you.” A person whose memory is not good enough to retain these texts will take a knife and proceed to one who knows them. Such a man will repeat the texts over the knife, blowing on it as he does so, and the Bahna considers that the knife has been sanctified and retains its virtue for a week. Others do not think this necessary, but have a special knife, which having once been consecrated is always kept for killing animals, and descends as an heirloom in the family, the use of this sacred knife being considered to make the repetition of the

*kalma* unnecessary. These customs are, however, practised only by the ignorant members of the caste in Raipur and Bilāspur, and are unknown in the more civilised tracts, where the Bahnas are rapidly conforming to ordinary Muhammadan usage. Such primitive Bahnas perform their marriages by walking round the sacred post, keep the Hindu festivals, and feed Brāhmans on the tenth day after a death. They have a priest whom they call their Kāzi, but elect him themselves. In some places when a Bahna goes to the well to draw water he first washes the parapet of the well to make it ceremonially clean, and then draws his water. This custom can only be compared with that of the Rāj-Gonds who wash the firewood with which they are about to cook their food, in order to make it more pure. Respectable Muhammadans naturally look down on the Bahnas, and they retaliate by refusing to take food or water from any Muhammadan who is not a Bahna. By such strictness the more ignorant think that they will enhance their ceremonial purity and hence their social consideration; but the intelligent members of the caste know better and are glad to improve themselves by learning from educated Muhammadans. The other menial artisan castes among the Muhammadans have similar ideas, and it is reported that a Rangrez boy who took food in the house of one of the highest Muhammadan officers of Government in the Province was temporarily put out of caste. Another saying about the Bahnas is—

Sheikhon kī Sheikhi,

Pathānon kī tarr,  
Turkon kī Turkshāhi,  
Bahnon kī bharr ...

or ‘Proud as a Sheikh, obstinate as a Pathān, royal as a Turk, buzzing like a Bahna.’ This refers to the noise of the cotton-cleaning bow, the twang of which as it is struck by the club is like a quail flying; and at the same time to the Bahna’s loquacity. Another story is that a Bahna was once going through the forest with his cotton-cleaning bow and club or mallet, when a jackal met him on the path. The jackal was afraid that the Bahna would knock him on the head, so he said, “With thy bow on thy shoulder and thine arrow in thy hand, whither goest thou, O King of Delhi?” The Bahna was exceedingly pleased at this and replied, ‘King of the forest, eater of wild plums, only the great can recognise the great.’ But when the jackal had got to a safe distance he turned round and shouted, “With your cotton-bow on your shoulder and your club in your hand, there you go, you sorry Bahna.” It is said also that although the Bahnas as good Muhammadans wear beards, they do not cultivate them very successfully, and many of them only have a growth of hair below the chin and none on the under-lip, in the fashion known as a goat’s beard. This kind of beard is thus proverbially described as ‘*Bahna kaisi dārhi*’ or ‘A Bahna’s beard.’ It may be repeated in conclusion that much of the ridicule attaching to the Bahnas arises simply from the fact that they follow what is

considered a feminine occupation, and the remainder because in their ignorance they parody the rites of Islām. It may seem ill-natured to record the sayings in which they are lampooned, but the Bahnas cannot read English, and these have an interest as specimens of popular wit.



# Baiga

## 1. The tribe and its offshoots.

**Baiga.** <sup>85</sup>—A primitive Dravidian tribe whose home is on the eastern Satpūra hills in the Mandla, Bālāghāt and Bilāspur Districts. The number of the Baigas proper was only 30,000 in 1911. But the Binjhāls or Binjhwārs, a fairly numerous caste in the Chhattīsgarh Division, and especially in the Sambalpur District, appear to have been originally Baigas, though they have dropped the original caste name, become Hinduised, and now disclaim connection with the parent tribe. A reason for this may be found in the fact that Sambalpur contains several Binjhwār zamīndārs, or large landowners, whose families would naturally desire a more respectable pedigree than one giving them the wild Baigas of the Satpūras for their forefathers. And the evolution of the Binjhwār caste is a similar phenomenon to the constitution of the Rāj-Gonds, the Rāj-Korkus, and other aristocratic subdivisions among the forest tribes, who have been admitted to a respectable position in the Hindu social community. The Binjhwārs, however, have been so successful as to cut themselves off almost completely from connection with the

---

<sup>85</sup> This article is based largely on a monograph by the Rev. J. Lampard, missionary, Baihar, and also on papers by Muhammad Hanīf Siddīqī, forest ranger, Bilāspur, and Mr. Muhammad Ali Haqqāni, B.A., Tahsildār, Dindori. Some extracts have been made from Colonel Ward's *Mandla Settlement Report* (1869), and from Colonel Bloomfield's *Notes on the Baigas*.

original tribe, owing to their adoption of another name. But in Bālāghāt and Mandla the Binjhwār subtribe is still recognised as the most civilised subdivision of the Baigas. The Bhainas, a small tribe in Bilāspur, are probably another offshoot, Kath-Bhaina being the name of a subtribe of Baigas in that District, and Rai-Bhaina in Bālāghāt, though the Bhainas too no longer admit identity with the Baigas. A feature common to all three branches is that they have forgotten their original tongue, and now speak a more or less corrupt form of the Indo-Aryan vernaculars current around them. Finally, the term Bhumia or 'Lord of the soil' is used sometimes as the name of a separate tribe and sometimes as a synonym for Baiga. The fact is that in the Central Provinces<sup>86</sup> Bhumia is the name of an office, that of the priest of the village and local deities, which is held by one of the forest tribes. In the tract where the Baigas live, they, as the most ancient residents, are usually the priests of the indigenous gods; but in Jubbulpore the same office is held by another tribe, the Bharias. The name of the office often attaches itself to members of the tribe, who consider it as somewhat more respectable than their own, and it is therefore generally true to say that the people known as Bhumias in Jubbulpore are really Bharias, but in Mandla and Bilāspur they are Baigas.

In Mandla there is also found a group called Bharia-Baigas. These are employed as village priests by Hindus, and worship certain Hindu deities and not the Gond gods. They may perhaps

---

<sup>86</sup> In Bengal the Bhumia or Bhumīj are an important tribe.

be members of the Bharia tribe of Jubbulpore, originally derived from the Bhars, who have obtained the designation of Baiga, owing to their employment as village priests. But they now consider themselves a part of the Baiga tribe and say they came to Mandla from Rewah. In Mandla the decision of a Baiga on a boundary dispute is almost always considered as final, and this authority is of a kind that commonly emanates from recognised priority of residence.<sup>87</sup> There seems reason to suppose that the Baigas are really a branch of the primitive Bhuiya tribe of Chota Nāgpur, and that they have taken or been given the name of Baiga, the designation of a village priest, on migration into the Central Provinces. There is reason to believe that the Baigas were once dominant in the Chhattīsgarh plain and the hills surrounding it which adjoin Chota Nāgpur, the home of the Bhuiyas. The considerations in favour of this view are given in the article on Bhuiya, to which reference may be made.

## **2. Tribal legends.**

The Baigas, however, are not without some conceit of themselves, as the following legend will show. In the beginning, they say, God created Nanga Baiga and Nangi Baigin, the first of the human race, and asked them by what calling they would choose to live. They at once said that they would make their living by felling trees in the jungle, and permission being accorded, have done so ever since. They had two sons, one of whom remained a Baiga, while the other became a Gond and a tiller

---

<sup>87</sup> Colonel Ward's *Mandla Settlement Report* (1868–69), p. 153.

of the soil. The sons married their own two sisters who were afterwards born, and while the elder couple are the ancestors of the Baigas, from the younger are descended the Gond and all the remainder of the human race. In another version of the story the first Baiga cut down two thousand old *sāl*<sup>88</sup> trees in one day, and God told him to sprinkle a few grains of kutki on the ashes, and then to retire and sleep for some months, when on his return he would be able to reap a rich harvest for his children. In this manner the habit of shifting cultivation is accorded divine sanction. According to Binjhawār tradition Nanga Baiga and Nangi Baigin dwelt on the *kajli ban pahār*, which being interpreted is the hill of elephants, and may well refer to the ranges of Mandla and Bilāspur. It is stated in the *Ain-i-Akbari*<sup>89</sup> that the country of Garha-Mandla abounded in wild elephants, and that the people paid their tribute in these and gold mohurs. In Mandla the Baigas sometimes hang out from their houses a bamboo mat fastened to a long pole to represent a flag which they say once flew from the palace of a Baiga king. It seems likely that the original home of the tribe may have been the Chhattīsgarh plain and the hill-ranges surrounding it. A number of estates in these hills are held by landowners of tribes which are offshoots of the Baigas, as the Bhainas and Binjhawārs. The point is further discussed in the article on Bhuiya. Most of the Baigas speak a corrupt form of the Chhattīsgarhi

---

<sup>88</sup> *Shorea robusta*.

<sup>89</sup> Jarrett's *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. ii. p. 196.

dialect. When they first came under the detailed observation of English officers in the middle of the nineteenth century, the tribe were even more solitary and retired than at present. Their villages, it is said, were only to be found in places far removed from all cleared and cultivated country. No roads or well-defined paths connected them with ordinary lines of traffic and more thickly inhabited tracts, but perched away in snug corners in the hills, and hidden by convenient projecting spurs and dense forests from the country round, they could not be seen except when nearly approached, and were seldom visited unless by occasional enterprising Banias and vendors of country liquor. Indeed, without a Baiga for a guide many of the villages could hardly be discovered, for nothing but occasional notches on the trees distinguished the tracks to them from those of the sāmbar and other wild animals.

### **3. Tribal subdivisions.**

The following seven subdivisions or subtribes are recognised: Binjhwār, Bharotia, Narotia or Nāhar, Raibhaina, Kathbhaina, Kondwān or Kundi, and Gondwaina. Of these the Binjhwār, Bharotia and Narotia are the best-known. The name of the Binjhwārs is probably derived from the Vindhyan range, which in turn comes from the Sanskrit *vindhya*, a hunter. The rule of exogamy is by no means strictly observed, and in Kawardha it is said that these three subcastes intermarry though they do not eat together, while in Bālāghāt the Bharotias and Narotias both eat together and intermarry. In both places the Binjhwārs occupy

the highest position, and the other two subtribes will take food from them. The Binjhwārs consider themselves as Hindus and abjure the consumption of buffalo's and cow's flesh and rats, while the other Baigas will eat almost anything. The Bharotias partially shave their heads, and in Mandla are apparently known as Mundia or Mudia, or "shaven." The Gondwainas eat both cow's flesh and monkeys, and are regarded as the lowest subcaste. As shown by their name they are probably the offspring of unions between Baigas and Gonds. Similarly the Kondwāns apparently derive their name from the tract south of the Mahānadi which is named after the Khond tribe, and was formerly owned by them.

Each subtribe is divided into a number of exogamous septs, the names of which are identical in many cases with those of the Gonds, as Markām, Marāvi, Netām, Tekām and others. Gond names are found most frequently among the Gondwainas and Narotias, and these have adopted from the Gonds the prohibition of marriage between worshippers of the same number of gods. Thus the four septs above mentioned worship seven gods and may not intermarry. But they may marry among other septs such as the Dhurua, Pusām, Bania and Mawār who worship six gods. The Baigas do not appear to have assimilated the further division into worshippers of five, four, three and two gods which exist among the Gonds in some localities, and the system is confined to the lower subtribes. The meanings of the sept names have been forgotten and no instances of totemism are known. And the Binjhwārs and Bharotias, who are more or less Hinduised, have

now adopted territorial names for their septs, as Lapheya from Lāpha zamīndāri, Ghugharia from Ghughri village in Mandla, and so on. The adoption of Gond names and septs appears to indicate that Gonds were in former times freely admitted into the Baiga tribe; and this continues to be the case at present among the lower subtribes, so far that a Gond girl marrying a Baiga becomes a regular member of the community. But the Binjhawārs and Bharotias, who have a somewhat higher status than the others, refuse to admit Gonds, and are gradually adopting the strict rule of endogamy within the subtribe.

#### **4. Marriage.**

A Baiga must not take a wife from his own sept or from another one worshipping the same number of gods. But he may marry within his mother's sept, and in some localities the union of first cousins is permitted. Marriage is adult and the proposal comes from the parents of the bride, but in some places the girl is allowed to select a husband for herself. A price varying from five to twenty rupees is usually paid to the bride's parents, or in lieu of this the prospective husband serves his father-in-law for a period of about two years, the marriage being celebrated after the first year if his conduct is satisfactory. Orphan boys who have no parents to arrange their marriages for them often take service for a wife. Three ceremonies should precede the marriage. The first, which may take place at any time after the birth of both children, consists merely in the arrangement for their betrothal. The second is only a ratification of the first, feasts being provided

by the boy's parents on both occasions. While on the approach of the children to marriageable age the final betrothal or *barokhi* is held. The boy's father gives a large feast at the house of the girl and the date of the wedding is fixed. To ascertain whether the union will be auspicious, two grains of rice are dropped into a pot of water, after various preliminary solemnities to mark the importance of the occasion. If the points of the grains meet almost immediately it is considered that the marriage will be highly auspicious. If they do not meet, a second pair of grains are dropped in, and should these meet it is believed that the couple will quarrel after an interval of married life and that the wife will return to her father's house. While if neither of the two first essays are successful and a third pair is required, the regrettable conclusion is arrived at that the wife will run away with another man after a very short stay with her husband. But it is not stated that the betrothal is on that account annulled. The wedding procession starts from the bridegroom's house<sup>90</sup> and is received by the bride's father outside the village. It is considered essential that he should go out to meet the bride's party riding on an elephant. But as a real elephant is not within the means of a Baiga, two wooden bedsteads are lashed together and covered with blankets with a black cloth trunk in front, and this arrangement passes muster for an elephant. The elephant makes pretence to charge and trample down the marriage procession, until a rupee

---

<sup>90</sup> Colonel Ward gives the bride's house as among the Gonds. But inquiry in Mandla shows that if this custom formerly existed it has been abandoned.



is paid, when the two parties embrace each other and proceed to the marriage-shed. Here the bride and bridegroom throw fried rice at each other until they are tired, and then walk three or seven times round the marriage-post with their clothes tied together. It is stated by Colonel Ward that the couple always retired to the forest to spend the wedding night, but this custom has now been abandoned. The expenditure on a marriage varies between ten and fifty rupees, of which only about five rupees fall on the bride's parents. The remarriage of widows is permitted, and the widow is expected, though not obliged, to wed her late husband's younger brother, while if she takes another husband he must pay her brother-in-law the sum of five rupees. The ceremony consists merely of the presentation of bangles and new clothes by the suitor, in token of her acceptance of which the widow pours some tepid water stained with turmeric over his head. Divorce may be effected by the husband and wife breaking a straw in the presence of the caste *panchāyat* or committee. If the woman remains in the same village and does not marry again, the husband is responsible for her maintenance and that of her children, while a divorced woman may not remarry without the sanction of the *panchāyat* so long as her husband is alive and remains single. Polygamy is permitted.

### **5. Birth and funeral rites.**

A woman is unclean for a month after childbirth, though the Binjhawārs restrict the period to eight days. At the ceremony of purification a feast is given and the child is named, often

after the month or day of its birth, as Chaitu, Phāgu, Saoni, and so on, from the months of Chait, Phāgun and Shrāwan. Children who appear to be physically defective are given names accordingly, such as Langra (lame), or Bahira (deaf). The dead are usually buried, the bodies of old persons being burnt as a special honour and to save them from the risk of being devoured by wild animals. Bodies are laid naked in the grave with the head pointing to the south. In the grave of a man of importance two or three rupees and some tobacco are placed. In some places a rupee is thrust into the mouth of the dying man, and if his body is burnt, the coin is recovered from the pyre by his daughter or sister, who wears it as an amulet. Over the grave a platform is made on which a stone is erected. This is called the Bhīri of the deceased and is worshipped by his relatives in time of trouble. If one of the family has to be buried elsewhere, the relatives go to the Bhīri of the great dead and consign his spirit to be kept in their company. At a funeral the mourners take one black and one white fowl to a stream and kill and eat them there, setting aside a portion for the dead man. Mourning is observed for a period of from two to nine days, and during this time labour and even household work are stopped, food being supplied by the friends of the family. When a man is killed by a tiger the Baiga priest goes to the spot and there makes a small cone out of the blood-stained earth. This must represent a man, either the dead man or one of his living relatives. His companions having retired a few paces, the priest goes on his hands and knees and performs

a series of antics which are supposed to represent the tiger in the act of destroying the man, at the same time seizing the lump of blood-stained earth in his teeth. One of the party then runs up and taps him on the back with a small stick. This perhaps means that the tiger is killed or otherwise rendered harmless; and the Baiga immediately lets the mud cone fall into the hands of one of the party. It is then placed in an ant-hill and a pig is sacrificed over it. The next day a small chicken is taken to the place, and after a mark supposed to be the dead man's name is made on its head with red ochre, it is thrown back into the forest, the priest exclaiming, 'Take this and go home.' The ceremony is supposed to lay the dead man's spirit and at the same time to prevent the tiger from doing any further damage. The Baigas believe that the ghost of the victim, if not charmed to rest, resides on the head of the tiger and incites him to further deeds of blood, rendering him also secure from harm by his preternatural watchfulness.<sup>91</sup>

They also think that they can shut up the tiger's *dār* or jaws, so that he cannot bite them, by driving a nail into a tree. The forest track from Kānha to Kisli in the Banjar forest reserve of Mandla was formerly a haunt of man-eating tigers, to whom a number of the wood-cutters and Baiga coolies, clearing the jungle paths, fell victims every year. In a large tree, at a dangerous point in the track, there could recently be seen a nail, driven into the trunk by a Baiga priest, at some height from the ground. It was said that this nail shut the mouth of a famous man-eating tiger of the

---

<sup>91</sup> Forsyth's *Highlands of Central India*, p. 377.

locality and prevented him from killing any more victims. As evidence of the truth of the story there were shown on the trunk the marks of the tiger's claws, where he had been jumping up the tree in the effort to pull the nail out of the trunk and get his man-eating powers restored.

## 6. Religion.

Although the Binjhawār subcaste now profess Hinduism, the religion of the Baigas is purely animistic. Their principal deity is Bura Deo,<sup>92</sup> who is supposed to reside in a *sāj* tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*); he is worshipped in the month of Jeth (May), when goats, fowls, cocoanuts, and the liquor of the new mahua crop are offered to him. Thākur Deo is the god of the village land and boundaries, and is propitiated with a white goat. The Baigas who plough the fields have a ceremony called Bidri, which is performed before the breaking of the rains. A handful of each kind of grain sown is given by each cultivator to the priest, who mixes the grains together and sows a little beneath the tree where Thākur Deo lives. After this he returns a little to each cultivator, and he sows it in the centre of the land on which crops are to be grown, while the priest keeps the remainder. This ceremony is believed to secure the success of the harvest. Dulha Deo is the god who averts disease and accident, and the offering made to him should consist of a fowl or goat of reddish colour. Bhīmsen is the deity of rainfall, and Dharti Māta or Mother Earth is considered to be the wife of Thākur Deo, and must also

---

<sup>92</sup> The Great God. The Gonds also worship Bura Deo, resident in a *sāj* tree.

be propitiated for the success of the crops. The grain itself is worshipped at the threshing floor by sprinkling water and liquor on to it. Certain Hindu deities are also worshipped by the Baigas, but not in orthodox fashion. Thus it would be sacrilege on the part of a Hindu to offer animal sacrifices to Nārāyan Deo, the sun-god, but the Baigas devote to him a special oblation of the most unclean animal, the pig. The animal to be sacrificed is allowed to wander loose for two or three years, and is then killed in a most cruel manner. It is laid across the threshold of a doorway on its back, and across its stomach is placed a stout plank of *sāj*-wood. Half a dozen men sit or stand on the ends of this, and the fore and hind feet of the pig are pulled backwards and forwards alternately over the plank until it is crushed to death, while all the men sing or shout a sacrificial hymn. The head and feet are cut off and offered to the deity, and the body is eaten. The forests are believed to be haunted by spirits, and in certain localities *pāts* or shrines are erected in their honour, and occasional offerings are made to them. The spirits of married persons are supposed to live in streams, while trees afford a shelter to the souls of the unmarried, who become *bhūts* or malignant spirits after death. Nāg Deo or the cobra is supposed to live in an ant-hill, and offerings are made to him there. Demoniocal possession is an article of faith, and a popular remedy is to burn human hair mixed with chillies and pig's dung near the person possessed, as the horrible smell thus produced will drive away the spirit. Many and weird, Mr. Low writes, are the simples which the Baiga's

travelling scrip contains. Among these a dried bat has the chief place; this the Baiga says he uses to charm his nets with, that the prey may catch in them as the bat's claws catch in whatever it touches. As an instance of the Baiga's pantheism it may be mentioned that on one occasion when a train of the new Satpūra railway<sup>93</sup> had pulled up at a wayside forest station, a Baiga was found offering a sacrifice to the engine. Like other superstitious people they are great believers in omens. A single crow bathing in a stream is a sign of death. A cock which crows in the night should be instantly killed and thrown into the darkness, a custom which some would be glad to see introduced into much more civilised centres. The woodpecker and owl are birds of bad omen. The Baigas do not appear to have any idea of a fresh birth, and one of their marriage songs says, "O girl, take your pleasure in going round the marriage-post once and for all, for there is no second birth." The Baigas are generally the priests of the Gonds, probably because being earlier residents of the country they are considered to have a more intimate acquaintance with the local deities. They have a wide knowledge of the medicinal properties of jungle roots and herbs, and are often successful in effecting cures when the regular native doctors have failed. Their village priests have consequently a considerable reputation as skilled sorcerers and persons conversant with the unseen world. A case is known of a Brāhman transferred to a jungle station, who immediately after his arrival called in a Baiga priest and

---

<sup>93</sup> Opened in 1905.

asked what forest gods he should worship, and what other steps he should take to keep well and escape calamity. Colonel Ward states that in his time Baigas were commonly called in to give aid when a town or village was attacked by cholera, and further that he had seen the greatest benefit to result from their visit. For the people had so much confidence in their powers and ceremonies that they lost half their fright at once, and were consequently not so much predisposed to an attack of the disease. On such an occasion the Baiga priest goes round the village and pulls out a little straw from each house-roof, afterwards burning the whole before the shrine of Khermāta, the goddess of the village, to whom he also offers a chicken for each homestead. If this remedy fails goats are substituted for chickens, and lastly, as a forlorn hope, pigs are tried, and, as a rule, do not fail, because by this time the disease may be expected to have worked itself out. It is suggested that the chicken represents a human victim from each house, while the straw stands for the house itself, and the offering has the common idea of a substituted victim.

### **7. Appearance and mode of life.**

In stature the Baigas are a little taller than most other tribes, and though they have a tendency to the flat nose of the Gonds, their foreheads and the general shape of their heads are of a better mould. Colonel Ward states that the members of the tribe inhabiting the Maikal range in Mandla are a much finer race than those living nearer the open country.<sup>94</sup> Their figures are

---

<sup>94</sup> *Mandla Settlement Report* (1868–69), p. 153.

very nearly perfect, says Colonel Bloomfield,<sup>95</sup> and their wiry limbs, unburdened by superfluous flesh, will carry them over very great distances and over places inaccessible to most human beings, while their compact bodies need no other nutriment than the scanty fare afforded by their native forests. They are born hunters, hardy and active in the chase, and exceedingly bold and courageous. In character they are naturally simple, honest and truthful, and when their fear of a stranger has been dissipated are most companionable folk. A small hut, 6 or 7 feet high at the ridge, made of split bamboos and mud, with a neat veranda in front thatched with leaves and grass, forms the Baiga's residence, and if it is burnt down, or abandoned on a visitation of epidemic disease, he can build another in the space of a day. A rough earthen vessel to hold water, leaves for plates, gourds for drinking-vessels, a piece of matting to sleep on, and a small axe, a sickle and a spear, exhaust the inventory of the Baiga's furniture, and the money value of the whole would not exceed a rupee.<sup>96</sup> The Baigas never live in a village with other castes, but have their huts some distance away from the village in the jungle. Unlike the other tribes also, the Baiga prefers his house to stand alone and at some little distance from those of his fellow-tribesmen. While nominally belonging to the village near which they dwell, so separate and distinct are they from the rest of people that in the famine of 1897 cases were found of starving Baiga hamlets

---

<sup>95</sup> *Notes on the Baigas*, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Mr. Lampard's monograph.



only a few hundred yards away from the village proper in which ample relief was being given. On being questioned as to why they had not caused the Baigas to be helped, the other villagers said, 'We did not remember them'; and when the Baigas were asked why they did not apply for relief, they said, 'We did not think it was meant for Baigas.'



Baiga village, Bālāghāt District.

### **8. Dress and food.**

Their dress is of the most simple description, a small strip of rag between the legs and another wisp for a head-covering sufficing for the men, though the women are decently covered from their shoulders to half-way between the thighs and knees. A Baiga may be known by his scanty clothing and tangled hair, and

his wife by the way in which her single garment is arranged so as to provide a safe sitting-place in it for her child. Baiga women have been seen at work in the field transplanting rice with babies comfortably seated in their cloth, one sometimes supported on either hip with their arms and legs out, while the mother was stooping low, hour after hour, handling the rice plants. A girl is tattooed on the forehead at the age of five, and over her whole body before she is married, both for the sake of ornament and because the practice is considered beneficial to the health. The Baigas are usually without blankets or warm clothing, and in the cold season they sleep round a wood fire kept burning or smouldering all night, stray sparks from which may alight on their tough skins without being felt. Mr. Lampard relates that on one occasion a number of Baiga men were supplied by the Mission under his charge with large new cloths to cover their bodies with and make them presentable on appearance in church. On the second Sunday, however, they came with their cloths burnt full of small holes; and they explained that the damage had been done at night while they were sleeping round the fire.

A Baiga, Mr. Lampard continues, is speedily discerned in a forest village bazār, and is the most interesting object in it. His almost nude figure, wild, tangled hair innocent of such inventions as brush or comb, lithe wiry limbs and jungly and uncivilised appearance, mark him out at once. He generally brings a few mats or baskets which he has made, or fruits, roots, honey, horns of animals, or other jungle products which he has collected,

for sale, and with the sum obtained (a few pice or annas at the most) he proceeds to make his weekly purchases, changing his pice into cowrie shells, of which he receives eighty for each one. He buys tobacco, salt, chillies and other sundries, besides as much of kodon, kutki, or perhaps rice, as he can afford, always leaving a trifle to be expended at the liquor shop before departing for home. The various purchases are tied up in the corners of the bit of rag twisted round his head. Unlike pieces of cloth known to civilisation, which usually have four corners, the Baiga's headgear appears to be nothing but corners, and when the shopping is done the strip of rag may have a dozen minute bundles tied up in it.

In Baihar of Bālāghāt buying and selling are conducted on perhaps the most minute scale known, and if a Baiga has one or two pice<sup>97</sup> to lay out he will spend no inconsiderable time over it. Grain is sold in small measures holding about four ounces called *baraiyas*, but each of these has a layer of mud at the bottom of varying degrees of thickness, so as to reduce its capacity. Before a purchase can be made it must be settled by whose *baraiya* the grain is to be measured, and the seller and purchaser each refuse the other's as being unfair to himself, until at length after discussion some neutral person's *baraiya* is selected as a compromise. Their food consists largely of forest fruits and roots with a scanty allowance of rice or the light millets, and they can go without nourishment for periods which appear extraordinary

---

<sup>97</sup> Farthings.

to civilised man. They eat the flesh of almost all animals, though the more civilised abjure beef and monkeys. They will take food from a Gond but not from a Brāhman. The Baiga dearly loves the common country liquor made from the mahua flower, and this is consumed as largely as funds will permit of at weddings, funerals and other social gatherings, and also if obtainable at other times. They have a tribal *pañchāyat* or committee which imposes penalties for social offences, one punishment being the abstention from meat for a fixed period. A girl going wrong with a man of the caste is punished by a fine, but cases of unchastity among unmarried Baiga girls are rare. Among their pastimes dancing is one of the chief, and in their favourite dance, known as *karma*, the men and women form long lines opposite to each other with the musicians between them. One of the instruments, a drum called *māṇḍar*, gives out a deep bass note which can be heard for miles. The two lines advance and retire, everybody singing at the same time, and when the dancers get fully into the time and swing, the pace increases, the drums beat furiously, the voices of the singers rise higher and higher, and by the light of the bonfires which are kept burning the whole scene is wild in the extreme.

### **9. Occupation.**

The Baigas formerly practised only shifting cultivation, burning down patches of jungle and sowing seed on the ground fertilised by the ashes after the breaking of the rains. Now that this method has been prohibited in Government forest, attempts

have been made to train them to regular cultivation, but with indifferent success in Bālāghāt. An idea of the difficulties to be encountered may be obtained from the fact that in some villages the Baiga cultivators, if left unwatched, would dig up the grain which they had themselves sown as seed in their fields and eat it; while the plough-cattle which were given to them invariably developed diseases in spite of all precautions, as a result of which they found their way sooner or later to the Baiga's cooking-pot. But they are gradually adopting settled habits, and in Mandla, where a considerable block of forest was allotted to them in which they might continue their destructive practice of shifting sowings, it is reported that the majority have now become regular cultivators. One explanation of their refusal to till the ground is that they consider it a sin to lacerate the breast of their mother earth with a ploughshare. They also say that God made the jungle to produce everything necessary for the sustenance of men and made the Baigas kings of the forest, giving them wisdom to discover the things provided for them. To Gonds and others who had not this knowledge, the inferior occupation of tilling the land was left. The men never become farmservants, but during the cultivating season they work for hire at uprooting the rice seedlings for transplantation; they do no other agricultural labour for others. Women do the actual transplantation of rice and work as harvesters. The men make bamboo mats and baskets, which they sell in the village weekly markets. They also collect and sell honey and other forest products, and are most expert at all work

that can be done with an axe, making excellent woodcutters. But they show no aptitude in acquiring the use of any other implement, and dislike steady continuous labour, preferring to do a few days' work and then rest in their homes for a like period before beginning again. Their skill and dexterity in the use of the axe in hunting is extraordinary. Small deer, hares and peacocks are often knocked over by throwing it at them, and panthers and other large animals are occasionally killed with a single blow. If one of two Baigas is carried off by a tiger, the survivor will almost always make a determined and often successful attempt to rescue him with nothing more formidable than an axe or a stick. They are expert trackers, and are also clever at setting traps and snares, while, like Korkus, they catch fish by damming streams in the hot weather and throwing into the pool thus formed some leaf or root which stupefies them. Even in a famine year, Mr. Low says, a Baiga can collect a large basketful of roots in a single day; and if the bamboo seeds he is amply provided for. Nowadays Baiga cultivators may occasionally be met with who have taken to regular cultivation and become quite prosperous, owning a number of cattle.

### **10. Language.**

As already stated, the Baigas have completely forgotten their own language, and in the Satpūra hills they speak a broken form of Hindi, though they have a certain number of words and expressions peculiar to the caste.

# Bairāgi

## 1. Definition of name and statistics.

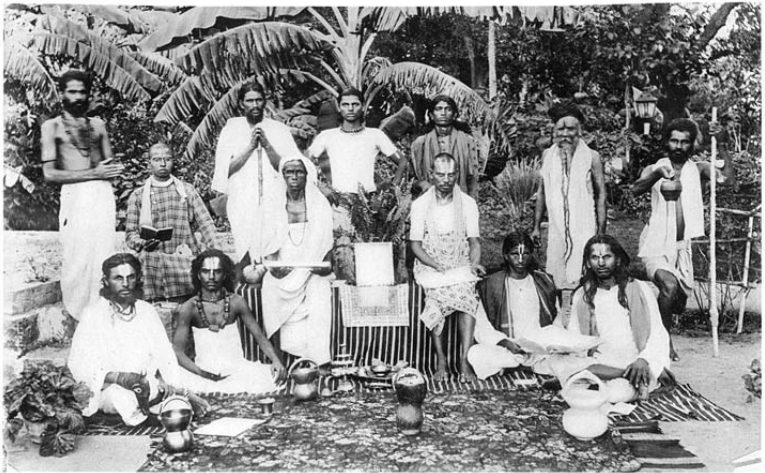
**Bairāgi,**<sup>98</sup> **Sādhū.**—The general term for members of the Vishnuite religious orders, who formerly as a rule lived by mendicancy. The Bairāgis have now, however, become a caste. In 1911 they numbered 38,000 persons in the Provinces, being distributed over all Districts and States. The name Bairāgi is supposed to come from the Sanskrit Vairāgya and to signify one who is free from human passions. Bairāga is also the term for the crutched stick which such mendicants frequently carry about with them and lean upon, either sitting or standing, and which in case of need would serve them as a weapon. Platts considers<sup>99</sup> that the name of the order comes from the Sanskrit abstract term, and the crutch therefore apparently obtained its name from being used by members of the order. Properly, a religious mendicant of any Vishnuite sect should be called a Bairāgi. But the term is not generally applied to the more distinctive sects as the Kabīrpanthi, Swāmi-Nārāyan, Satnāmi and others, some of which are almost separated from Hinduism, nor to the Sikh religious orders, nor the Chaitanya sect of Bengal. A proper Bairāgi is one whose principal deity is either Vishnu or either of his great incarnations,

---

<sup>98</sup> This article contains material from Sir E. Maclagan's *Punjab Census Report* (1891), and Dr. J. N. Bhattachārya's *Hindu Castes and Sects* (Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta).

<sup>99</sup> *Dictionary*, s.v.

# Rāma and Krishna.



Hindu mendicants with sect-marks.

## **2. The four Sampradāyas or main orders.**

It is generally held that there are four Sampradāyas or main sects of Bairāgis. These are—

(a) The Rāmānujis, the followers of the first prominent Vishnuite reformer Rāmānuj in southern India, with whom are classed the Rāmānandis or adherents of his great disciple Rāmānand in northern India. Both these are also called Sri Vaishnava, that is, the principal or original Vaishnava sect.

(b) The Nīmānandi, Nīmāt or Nīmbāditya sect, followers of a saint called Nīmānand.



(c) The Vishnu-Swāmi or Vallabhachārya sect, worshippers of Krishna and Rādhā.

(d) The Mādhavachārya sect of southern India.

It will be desirable to give a few particulars of each of these, mainly taken from Wilson's *Hindu Sects* and Dr. Bhattachārya's *Hindu Castes and Sects*.

### **3. The Rāmānujis.**

Rāmānuj was the first great Vishnuite prophet, and lived in southern India in the eleventh or twelfth century on an island in the Kāveri river near Trichinopoly. He preached the worship of a supreme spirit, Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi, and taught that men also had souls or spirits, and that matter was lifeless. He was a strong opponent of the cult of Siva, then predominant in southern India, and of phallic worship. He, however, admitted only the higher castes into his order, and cannot therefore be considered as the founder of the liberalising principle of Vishnuism. The superiors of the Rāmānuja sect are called Achārya, and rank highest among the priests of the Vishnuite orders. The most striking feature in the practice of the Rāmānujis is the separate preparation and scrupulous privacy of their meals. They must not eat in cotton garments, but must bathe, and then put on wool or silk. The teachers allow their select pupils to assist them, but in general all the Rāmānujis cook for themselves, and should the meal during this process, or while they are eating, attract even the look of a stranger, the operation is instantly stopped and the viands buried in the

ground. The Rāmānujis address each other with the salutation Dasoham, or 'I am your slave,' accompanied with the Pranām or slight inclination of the head and the application of joined hands to the forehead. To the Achāryas or superiors the other members of the sect perform the Ashtanga or prostration of the body with eight parts touching the ground. The *tilak* or sect-mark of the Rāmānujis consists of two perpendicular white lines from the roots of the hair to the top of the eyebrows, with a connecting white line at the base, and a third central line either of red or yellow. The Rāmānujis do not recognise the worship of Rādha, the consort of Krishna. The mendicant orders of the Sātanis and Dasaris of southern India are branches of this sect.

#### **4. The Rāmānandis**

Rāmānand, the great prophet of Vishnuism in northern India, and the real founder of the liberal doctrines of the cult, lived at Benāres at the end of the fourteenth century, and is supposed to have been a follower of Rāmānuj. He introduced, however, a great extension of his predecessor's gospel in making his sect, nominally at least, open to all castes. He thus initiated the struggle against the social tyranny and exclusiveness of the caste system, which was carried to greater lengths by his disciples and successors, Kabīr, Nānak, Dādu, Rai Dās and others. These afterwards proclaimed the worship of one unseen god who could not be represented by idols, and the religious equality of all men, their tenets no doubt being considerably influenced by their observance of Islām, which had now become a principal religion

of India. Rāmānand himself did not go so far, and remained a good Hindu, inculcating the special worship of Rāma and his consort Sīta. The Rāmaāndis consider the Rāmāyana as their most sacred book, and make pilgrimages to Ajodhia and Rāmnaṭh.<sup>100</sup> Their sect-mark consists of two white lines down the forehead with a red one between, but they are continued on to the nose, ending in a loop, instead of terminating at the line of the eyebrows, like that of the Rāmānujis. The Rāmānandis say that the mark on the nose represents the Singāsun or lion's throne, while the two white lines up the forehead are Rāma and Lakshman, and the centre red one is Sīta. Some of their devotees wear ochre-coloured clothes like the Sivite mendicants.

### **5. The Nīmānandis.**

The second of the four orders is that of the Nīmānandis, called after a saint Nīmānand. He lived near Mathura Brindāban, and on one occasion was engaged in religious controversy with a Jain ascetic till sunset. He then offered his visitor some refreshment, but the Jain could not eat anything after sunset, so Nīmānand stopped the sun from setting, and ordered him to wait above a *nīm* tree till the meal was cooked and eaten under the tree, and this direction the sun duly obeyed. Hence Nīmānand, whose original name was Bhāskarachārya, was called by his new name after the tree, and was afterwards held to have been an incarnation of Vishnu or the Sun.

---

<sup>100</sup> Sir E. Maclagan's *Punjab Census Report* (1891), p. 122.

The doctrines of the sect, Mr. Growse states,<sup>101</sup> are of a very enlightened character. Thus their tenet of salvation by faith is thought by many scholars to have been directly derived from the Gospels; while another article in their creed is the continuance of conscious individual existence in a future world, when the highest reward of the good will not be extinction, but the enjoyment of the visible presence of the divinity whom they have served while on earth. The Nīmānandis worship Krishna, and were the first sect, Dr. Bhattachārya states,<sup>102</sup> to associate with him as a divine consort Rādha, the chief partner of his illicit loves.

Their headquarters are at Muttra, and their chief festival is the Janam-Ashtami<sup>103</sup> or Krishna's birthday. Their sect-mark consists of two white lines down the forehead with a black patch in the centre, which is called Shiāmbindini. Shiām means black, and is a name of Krishna. They also sometimes have a circular line across the nose, which represents the moon.

## **6. The Mādhavachāryas.**

The third great order is that of the Mādhavas, named after a saint called Mādhavachārya in southern India. He attempted to reconcile the warring Sivites and Vishnuites by combining the worship of Krishna with that of Siva and Pārvati. The doctrine of the sect is that the human soul is different from the divine soul, and its members are therefore called dualists. They admit a

---

<sup>101</sup> *Memoir of Mathura.*

<sup>102</sup> *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 449.

<sup>103</sup> Lit. the birth on the eighth day, as Krishna was born on the 8th of dark Bhādon.

distinction between the divine soul and the universe, and between the human soul and the material world. They deny also the possibility of Nirvāna or the absorption and extinction of the human soul in the divine essence. They destroy their thread at initiation, and also wear red clothes like the Sivite devotees, and like them also they carry a staff and water-pot. The *tilak* of the Mādhavachāryas is said to consist of two white lines down the forehead and continued on to the nose where they meet, with a black vertical line between them.

### **7. The Vallabhachāryas.**

The fourth main order is the Vishnu-Swāmi, which is much better known as the Vallabhachārya sect, called after its founder Vallabha, who was born in A.D. 1479. The god Krishna appeared to him and ordered him to marry and set up a shrine to the god at Gokul near Mathura (Muttra). The sect worship Krishna in his character of Bāla Gopāla or the cowherd boy. Their temples are numerous all over India, and especially at Mathura and Brindāban, where Krishna was brought up as a cowherd. The temples at Benāres, Jagannāth and Dwārka are rich and important, but the most celebrated shrine is at Sri Nāthadwāra in Mewār. The image is said to have transported itself thither from Mathura, when Aurāngzeb ordered its temple at Mathura to be destroyed. Krishna is here represented as a little boy in the act of supporting the mountain Govardhan on his finger to shelter the people from the storms of rain sent by Indra. The image is splendidly dressed and richly decorated with ornaments

to the value of several thousand pounds. The images of Krishna in the temples are commonly known as Thākurji, and are either of stone or brass. At all Vallabhachārya temples there are eight daily services: the Mangala or morning *levée*, a little after sunrise, when the god is taken from his couch and bathed; the Sringāra, when he is attired in his jewels and seated on his throne; the Gwāla, when he is supposed to be starting to graze his cattle in the woods of Braj; the Rāj Bhog or midday meal, which, after presentation, is consumed by the priests and votaries who have assisted at the ceremonies; the Uttāpan, about three o'clock, when the god awakes from his siesta; the Bhog or evening collation; the Sandhiya or disrobing at sunset; and the Sayan or retiring to rest. The ritual is performed by the priests and the lay worshipper is only a spectator, who shows his reverence by the same forms as he would to a human superior.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Mr. Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Vallabhachārya.



Anchorite sitting on iron nails.

The priests of the sect are called Gokalastha Gosain or Mahārāja. They are considered to be incarnations of the god, and divine honours are paid to them. They always marry, and avow that union with the god is best obtained by indulgence in all bodily enjoyments. This doctrine has led to great licentiousness in some groups of the sect, especially on the part of the priests or Mahārājas. Women were taught to believe that the service of and contact with the priest were the most real form of worshipping the god, and that intercourse with him was equivalent to being united with the god. Dr. Bhattachārya quotes<sup>105</sup> the following tariff for the privilege of obtaining different degrees of contact with the body of the Mahārāja or priest:

For homage by sight	Rs. 5.
For homage by touch	Rs. 20.
For the honour of washing the Mahārāja's foot	Rs. 35.
For swinging him	Rs. 40.
For rubbing sweet unguents on his body	Rs. 42.
For being allowed to sit with him on the same couch	Rs. 60.
For the privilege of dancing with him	Rs. 100 to 200.
For drinking the water in which he has bathed	Rs. 17.
For being closeted with him in the same room	Rs. 50 to 500.

The public disapprobation caused by these practices and their

---

<sup>105</sup> *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 457.



bad effect on the morality of women culminated in the great Mahārāj libel suit in the Bombay High Court in 1862. Since then the objectionable features of the cult have to a large extent disappeared, while it has produced some priests of exceptional liberality and enlightenment. The *tilak* of the Vallabhachāryas is said to consist of two white lines down the forehead, forming a half-circle at its base and a white dot between them. They will not admit the lower castes into the order, but only those from whom a Brāhman can take water.

### **8. Minor sects.**

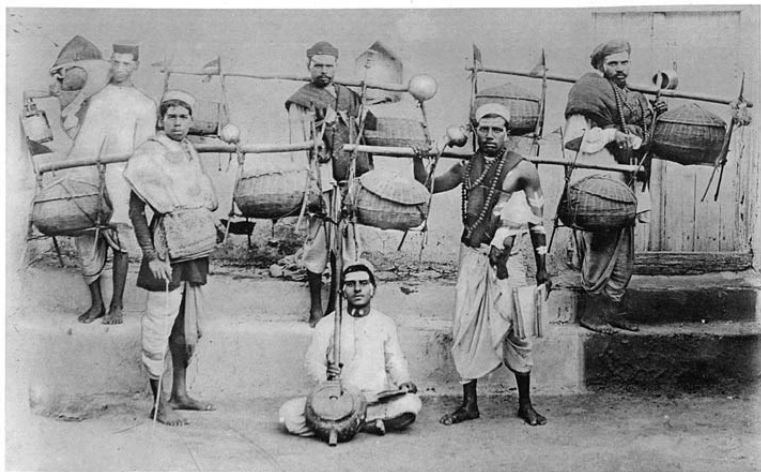
Besides the main sects as described above, Vaishnavism has produced many minor sects, consisting of the followers of some saint of special fame, and mendicants belonging to these are included in the body of Bairāgis. One or two legends concerning such saints may be given. A common order is that of the Bendiwāle, or those who wear a dot. Their founder began putting a red dot on his forehead between the two white lines in place of the long red line of the Rāmānandis. His associates asked him why he had dared to alter his *tilak* or sect-mark. He said that the goddess Jānki had given him the dot, and as a test he went and bathed in the Sarju river, and rubbed his forehead with water, and all the sect-mark was rubbed out except the dot. So the others recognised the special intervention of the goddess, and he founded a sect. Another sect is called the Chaturbhujī or four-armed, Chaturbhuj being an epithet of Vishnu. He was taking part in a feast when his loin-cloth came undone behind,

and the others said to him that as this had happened, he had become impure at the feast. He replied, 'Let him to whom the *dhoti* belongs tie it up,' and immediately four arms sprang from his body, and while two continued to take food, the other two tied up his loin-cloth behind. Thus it was recognised that the Chaturbhuji Vishnu had appeared in him, and he was venerated.

### **9. The seven Akhāras.**

Among the Bairāgis, besides the four Sampradāyas or main orders, there are seven Akhāras. These are military divisions or schools for training, and were instituted when the Bairāgis had to fight with the Gosains. Any member of one of the four Sampradāyas can belong to any one of the seven Akhāras, and a man can change his Akhāra as often as he likes, but not his Sampradāya. The Akhāras, with the exception of the Lasgaris, who change the red centre line of the Rāmanāndis into a white line, have no special sect-marks. They are distinguished by their flags or standards, which are elaborately decorated with gold thread embroidered on silk or sometimes with jewels, and cost two or three hundred rupees to prepare. These standards were carried by the Nāga or naked members of the Akhāra, who went in front and fought. Once in twelve years a great meeting of all the seven Akhāras is held at Allahābād, Nāsik, Ujjain or Hardwār, where they bathe and wash the image of the god in the water of the holy rivers. The quarrels between the Bairāgis and Gosains usually occurred at the sacred rivers, and the point of contention was which sect should bathe first. The following is

a list of the seven Akhāras: Digambari, Khāki, Munjia, Kathia, Nirmohi, Nirbāni or Niranjani and Lasgari.



Pilgrims carrying water of the river Nerbudda.

The name of the Digamber or Meghdamber signifies sky-clad or cloud-clad, that is naked. They do penance in the rainy season by sitting naked in the rain for two or three hours a day with an earthen pot on the head and the hands inserted in two others so that they cannot rub the skin. In the dry season they wear only a little cloth round the waist and ashes over the rest of the body. The ashes are produced from burnt cowdung picked up off the ground, and not mixed with straw like that which is prepared for fuel.

The Khāki Bairāgis also rub ashes on the body. During the four hot months they make five fires in a circle, and kneel between them with the head and legs and arms stretched towards the fires. The fires are kindled at noon with little heaps of cowdung cakes, and the penitent stays between them till they go out. They also have a block of wood with a hole through it, into which they insert the organ of generation and suspend it by chains in front and behind. They rub ashes on the body, from which they probably get their name of Khāki or dust-colour.

The Munjia Akhāra have a belt made of *munj* grass round the waist, and a little apron also of grass, which is hung from it, and passed through the legs. Formerly they wore no other clothes, but now they have a cloth. They also do penance between the fires.

The Kathias have a waist-belt of bamboo fibre, to which is suspended the wooden block for the purpose already described. Their name signifies wooden, and is probably given to them on account of this custom.

The Nirmohi carry a *lota* or brass vessel and a little cup, in which they receive alms.

The Nirbāni wear only a piece of string or rope round the waist, to which is attached a small strip of cloth passing through the legs. When begging, they carry a *kawar* or banghy, holding two baskets covered with cloth, and into this they put all their alms. They never remove the cloth, but plunge their hands into the basket at random when they want something to eat. They call the basket Kāmdhenu, the name of the cow which

gave inexhaustible wealth. These Bairāgis commonly marry and accumulate property.

The Lasgari are soldiers, as the name denotes.<sup>106</sup> They wear three straight lines of sandalwood up the forehead. It is said that on one occasion the Bairāgis were suddenly attacked by the Gosains when they had only made the white lines of the sect-mark, and they fought as they were. In consequence of this, they have ever since worn three white lines and no red one.

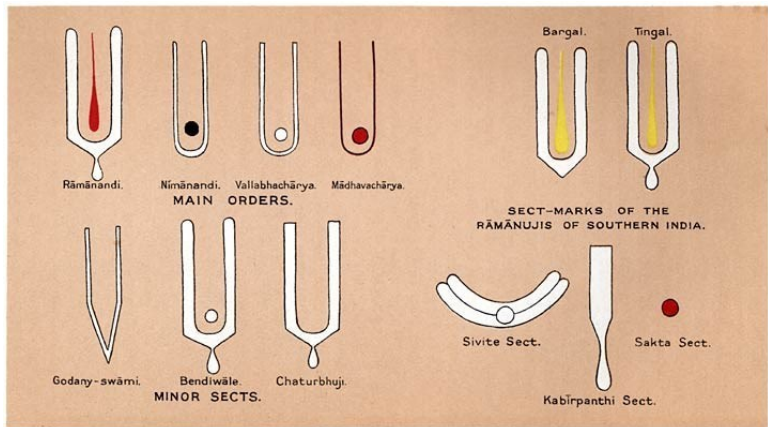
Others say that the Lasgari are a branch of the Digambari Akhāra, and that the Munjia and Kathia are branches of the Khāki Akhāra. They give three other Akhāras—Nīralankhi, Mahānirbāni and Santokhi—about which nothing is known.

### **10. The Dwāras.**

Besides the Akhāras, the Bairāgis are said to have fifty-two Dwāras or doors, and every man must be a member of a Dwāra as well as of a Sampradāya and Akhāra. The Dwāras seem to have no special purpose, but in the case of Bairāgis who marry, they now serve as exogamous sections, so that members of the same Dwāra do not intermarry.

---

<sup>106</sup> From *laskkar*, an army.



Examples of Tilaks or sect-marks worn on the forehead.

## 11. Initiation, appearance and customs.

A candidate for initiation has his head shaved, is invested with a necklace of beads of the *tulsi* or basil, and is taught a *mantra* or text relating to Vishnu by his preceptor. The initiation text of the Rāmānandis is said to be *Om Rāmāya Nāmah*, or *Om*, Salutation to Rāma. *Om* is a very sacred syllable, having much magical power. Thereafter the novice must journey to Dwārka in Gujarāt and have his body branded with hot iron or copper in the shape of Vishnu's four implements: the *chakra* or discus, the *guda* or club, the *shank* or conch-shell and the *padma* or lotus. Sometimes these are not branded but are made daily on the arms with clay. The sect-mark should be made with Gopichandan or the milkmaid's sandalwood. This is supposed to be clay taken

from a tank at Dwārka, in which the Gopis or milkmaids who had been Krishna's companions drowned themselves when they heard of his death. But as this can seldom be obtained any suitable whitish clay is used instead. The Bairāgis commonly let their hair grow long, after being shaved at initiation, to imitate the old forest ascetics. If a man makes a pilgrimage on foot to some famous shrine he may have his head shaved there and make an offering of his hair. Others keep their hair long and shave it only at the death of their *guru* or preceptor. They usually wear white clothes, and if a man has a cloth on the upper part of the body it should be folded over the shoulders and knotted at the neck. He also has a *chimta* or small pair of tongs, and, if he can obtain it, the skin of an Indian antelope, on which he will sit while taking his food. The skin of this animal is held to be sacred. Every Bairāgi before he takes his food should dip a sprig of *tulsi* or basil into it to sanctify it, and if he cannot get this he uses his necklace of *tulsi*-beads for the purpose instead. The caste abstain from flesh and liquor, but are addicted to the intoxicating drugs, *gānja* and *bhāng* or preparations of Indian hemp. A Hindu on meeting a Bairāgi will greet him with the phrase 'Jai Sītārām,' and the Bairāgi will answer, 'Sītārām.' This word is a conjunction of the names of Rāma and his consort Sīta. When a Bairāgi receives alms he will present to the giver a flower and a sprig of *tulsi*.

## **12. Recruitment of the order and its character.**

A man belonging to any caste except the impure ones can be initiated as a Bairāgi, and the order is to a large extent recruited

from the lower castes. Theoretically all members of the order should eat together; but the Brāhmans and other high castes belonging to it now eat only among themselves, except on the occasion of a Ghosti or special religious assembly, when all eat in common. As a matter of fact the order is a very mixed assortment of people. Many persons who lost their caste in the famine of 1897 from eating in Government poor-houses, joined the order and obtained a respectable position. Debtors who have become hopelessly involved sometimes find in it a means of escape from their creditors. Women of bad character, who have been expelled from their caste, are also frequently enrolled as female members, and in monasteries live openly with the men. The caste is also responsible for a good deal of crime. Not only is the disguise a very convenient one for thieves and robbers to assume on their travels, but many regular members of the order are criminally disposed. Nevertheless large numbers of Bairāgis are men who have given up their caste and families from a genuine impulse of self-sacrifice, and the desire to lead a religious life.

### **13. Social position and customs.**

On account of their sanctity the Bairāgis have a fairly good social position, and respectable Hindu castes will accept cooked food from them. Brāhmans usually, but not always, take water. They act as *gurus* or spiritual guides to the laymen of all castes who can become Bairāgis. They give the Rām and Gopāl Mantras, or the texts of Rāma and Krishna, to their disciples of the three twice-born castes, and the Sheo Mantra or Siva's



text to other castes. The last is considered to be of smaller religious efficacy than the others, and is given to the lower castes and members of the higher ones who do not lead a particularly virtuous life. They invest boys with the sacred thread, and make the sect-mark on their foreheads. When they go and visit their disciples they receive presents, but do not ask them to confess their sins nor impose penalties.

If a mendicant Bairāgi keeps a woman it is stated that he is expelled from the community, but this rule does not seem to be enforced in practice. If he is detected in a casual act of sexual intercourse a fine should be imposed, such as feeding two or three hundred Bairāgis. The property of an unmarried Bairāgi descends to a selected *chela* or disciple. The bodies of the dead are usually burnt, but those of saints specially famous for their austerities or piety are buried, and salt is put round the body to preserve it. Such men are known as Bhakta.

#### **14. Bairāgi monasteries.**

The Bairāgis<sup>107</sup> have numerous *maths* or monasteries, scattered over the country and usually attached to temples. The Math comprises a set of huts or chambers for the Mahant or superior and his permanent pupils; a temple and often the Samādhi or tomb of the founder, or of some eminent Mahant; and a Dharmśāla or charitable hostel for the accommodation of wandering members of the order, and of other travellers

---

<sup>107</sup> This paragraph is taken from Professor Wilson's *Account of Hindu Sects in the Asiatic Researches*.

who are constantly visiting the temple. Ingress and egress are free to all, and, indeed, a restraint on personal liberty seems never to have entered into the conception of any Hindu religious legislator. There are, as a rule, a small number of resident *chelas* or disciples who are scholars and attendants on the superiors, and also out-members who travel over the country and return to the monastery as a headquarters. The monastery has commonly some small endowment in land, and the resident *chelas* go out and beg for alms for their common support. If the Mahant is married the headship may descend in his family; but when he is unmarried his successor is one of his disciples, who is commonly chosen by election at a meeting of the Mahants of neighbouring monasteries. Formerly the Hindu governor of the district would preside at such an election, but it is now, of course, left entirely to the Bairāgis themselves.

### **15. Married Bairāgis.**

Large numbers of Bairāgis now marry and have children, and have formed an ordinary caste. The married Bairāgis are held to be inferior to the celibate mendicants, and will take food from them, but the mendicants will not permit the married Bairāgis to eat with them in the *chauka* or place purified for the taking of food. The customs of the married Bairāgis resemble those of ordinary Hindu castes such as the Kurmis. They permit divorce and the remarriage of widows, and burn the dead. Those who have taken to cultivation do not, as a rule, plough with their own hands. Many Bairāgis have acquired property and

become landholders, and others have extensive moneylending transactions. Two such men who had acquired possession of extensive tracts of zamīndāri land in Chhattīsgarh, in satisfaction of loans made to the Gond zamīndārs, and had been given the zamīndāri status by the Marāthas, were subsequently made Feudatory Chiefs of the Nāndgaon and Chhuikhadan States. These chiefs now marry and the States descend in their families by primogeniture in the ordinary manner. As a rule, the Bairāgi landowners and moneylenders are not found to be particularly good specimens of their class.

# Balāhi

## 1. General notice.

**Balāhi.** <sup>108</sup>—A low functional caste of weavers and village watchmen found in the Nimār and Hoshangābād Districts and in Central India. They numbered 52,000 persons in the Central Provinces in 1911, being practically confined to the two Districts already mentioned. The name is a corruption of the Hindi *bulāhi*, one who calls, or a messenger. The Balāhis seem to be an occupational group, probably an offshoot of the large Kori caste of weavers, one of whose subdivisions is shown as Balāhi in the United Provinces. In the Central Provinces they have received accretions from the spinner caste of Katias, themselves probably a branch of the Koris, and from the Mahārs, the great menial caste of Bombay. In Hoshangābād they are known alternatively as Mahār, while in Burhānpur they are called Bunkar or weaver by outsiders. The following story which they tell about themselves also indicates their mixed origin. They say that their ancestors came to Nimār as part of the army of Rāja Mān of Jodhpur, who invaded the country when it was under Muhammadan rule. He was defeated, and his soldiers were captured and ordered to be killed.<sup>109</sup> One of the Balāhis

---

<sup>108</sup> This article is based on papers by Mr. Habīb Ullah, Pleader, Burhānpur, Mr. W. Bagley, Subdivisional Officer, and Munsh Kanhya Lāl, of the Gazetteer office.

<sup>109</sup> This legend is probably a vague reminiscence of the historical fact that a Mālwa

among them won the favour of the Muhammadan general and asked for his own freedom and that of the other Balāhis from among the prisoners. The Musalmān replied that he would be unable to determine which of the prisoners were really Balāhis. On this the Balāhi, whose name was Ganga Kochla, replied that he had an effective test. He therefore killed a cow, cooked its flesh and invited the prisoners to partake of it. So many of them as consented to eat were considered to be Balāhis and liberated; but many members of other castes thus obtained their freedom, and they and their descendants are now included in the community. The subcastes or endogamous groups distinctly indicate the functional character of the caste, the names given being Nimāri, Gannore, Katia, Kori and Mahār. Of these Katia, Kori and Mahār are the names of distinct castes, Nimāri is a local subdivision indicating those who speak the peculiar dialect of this tract, and the Gannore are no doubt named after the Rājput clan of that name, of whom their ancestors were not improbably the illegitimate offspring. The Nimāri Balāhis are said to rank lower than the rest, as they will eat the flesh of dead cattle which the others refuse to do. They may not take water from the village well, and unless a separate one can be assigned to them, must pay others to draw water for them. Partly no doubt in the hope of escaping from this degraded position, many of the

---

army was misled by a Gond guide in the Nimār forests and cut up by the local Muhammadan ruler. The well-known Rāja Mān of Jodhpur was, it is believed, never in Nimār.

Nimāri group became Christians in the famine of 1897. They are considered to be the oldest residents of Nimār. At marriages the Balāhi receives as his perquisite the leaf-plates used for feasts with the leavings of food upon them; and at funerals he takes the cloth which covers the corpse on its way to the burning-*ghāt*. In Nimār the Korkus and Balāhis each have a separate burying-ground which is known as Murghāta.<sup>110</sup> The Katias weave the finer kinds of cloth and rank a little higher than the others. In Burhānpur, as already stated, the caste are known as Bunkar, and they are probably identical with the Bunkars of Khāndesh; Bunkar is simply an occupational term meaning a weaver.

## 2. Marriage.

The caste have the usual system of exogamous groups, some of which are named after villages, while the designations of others are apparently nicknames given to the founder of the clan, as Bagmār, a tiger-killer, Bhagoria, a runaway, and so on. They employ a Brāhman to calculate the horoscopes of a bridal couple and fix the date of their wedding, but if he says the marriage is inauspicious, they merely obtain the permission of the caste *panchāyat* and celebrate it on a Saturday or Sunday. Apparently, however, they do not consult real Brāhmans, but merely priests of their own caste whom they call Balāhi Brāhmans. These Brāhmans are, nevertheless, said to recite the Satya Nārāyan Katha. They also have *gurus* or spiritual preceptors, being members of the caste who have joined the mendicant orders;

---

<sup>110</sup> The *ghāt* or river-bank for the disposal of corpses.

and Bhāts or genealogists of their own caste who beg at their weddings. They have the practice of serving for a wife, known as Gharjamai or Lamjhana. When the pauper suitor is finally married at the expense of his wife's father, a marriage-shed is erected for him at the house of some neighbour, but his own family are not invited to the wedding.

After marriage a girl goes to her husband's house for a few days and returns. The first Diwālī or Akha-tīj festival after the wedding must also be passed at the husband's house, but consummation is not effected until the *aina* or *gauna* ceremony is performed on the attainment of puberty. The cost of a wedding is about Rs. 80 to the bridegroom's family and Rs. 20 to the bride's family. A widow is forbidden to marry her late husband's brother or other relatives. At the wedding she is dressed in new clothes, and the foreheads of the couple are marked with cowdung as a sign of purification. They then proceed by night to the husband's village, and the woman waits till morning in some empty building, when she enters her husband's house carrying two water-pots on her head in token of the fertility which she is to bring to it.

### **3. Other customs.**

Like the Mahārs, the Balāhis must not kill a dog or a cat under pain of expulsion; but it is peculiar that in their case the bear is held equally sacred, this being probably a residue of some totemistic observance. The most binding form of oath which they can use is by any one of these animals. The Balāhis will

admit any Hindu into the community except a man of the very lowest castes, and also Gonds and Korkus. The head and face of the neophyte are shaved clean, and he is made to lie on the ground under a string-cot; a number of the Balāhis sit on this and wash themselves, letting the water drip from their bodies on to the man below until he is well drenched; he then gives a feast to the caste-fellows, and is considered to have become a Balāhi. It is reported also that they will receive back into the community Balāhi women who have lived with men of other castes and even with Jains and Muhammadans. They will take food from members of these religions and of any Hindu caste, except the most impure.



# Baliya

## 1. Origin and traditions.

**Baliya, Balji, Gurusthulu, Naidu.**—A large trading caste of the Madras Presidency, where they number a million persons. In the Central Provinces 1200 were enumerated in 1911, excluding 1500 Perikis, who though really a subcaste and not a very exalted one of Baliyas,<sup>111</sup> claim to be a separate caste. They are mainly returned from places where Madras troops have been stationed, as Nāgpur, Jubbulpore and Raipur. The caste are frequently known as Naidu, a corruption of the Telugu word Nāyakdu, a prince or leader. Their ancestors are supposed to have been Nāyaks or kings of Madura, Tanjore and Vijayanagar. The traditional occupation of the caste appears to have been to make bangles and pearl and coral ornaments, and they have still a subcaste called Gāzulu, or a bangle-seller. In Madras they are said to be an offshoot of the great cultivating castes of Kamma and Kāpu and to be a mixed community recruited from these and other Telugu castes. Another proof of their mixed descent may be inferred from the fact that they will admit persons of other castes or the descendants of mixed marriages into the community without much scruple in Madras.<sup>112</sup> The name of Baliya seems also to have been applied to a mixed caste started by Bāsava,

---

<sup>111</sup> *Madras Census Report* (1891), p. 277.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem* (1891), p. 226.

the founder of the Lingāyat sect of Sivites, these persons being known in Madras as Linga Baliyas.

## **2. Marriage.**

The Baliyas have two main divisions, Desa or Kota, and Peta, the Desas or Kotas being those who claim descent from the old Baliya kings, while the Petas are the trading Baliyas, and are further subdivided into groups like the Gāzulu or bangle-sellers and the Periki or salt-sellers. The subdivisions are not strictly endogamous. Every family has a surname, and exogamous groups or *gotras* also exist, but these have generally been forgotten, and marriages are regulated by the surnames, the only prohibition being that persons of the same surname may not intermarry. Instances of such names are: Singiri, Gūdāri, Jadal, Sangnād and Dāsiri. In fact the rules of exogamy are so loose that an instance is known of an uncle having married his niece. Marriage is usually infant, and the ceremony lasts for five days. On the first day the bride and bridegroom are seated on a yoke in the *pandal* or marriage pavilion, where the relatives and guests assemble. The bridegroom puts a pair of silver rings on the bride's toes and ties the *mangal-sūtram* or flat circular piece of gold round her neck. On the next three days the bridegroom and bride are made to sit on a plank or cot face to face with each other and to throw flowers and play together for two hours in the mornings and evenings. On the fourth day, at dead of night, they are seated on a cot and the jewels and gifts for the bride are presented, and she is then formally handed over to the

bridegroom's family. In Madras Mr. Thurston<sup>113</sup> states that on the last day of the marriage ceremony a mock ploughing and sowing rite is held, and during this, the sister of the bridegroom puts a cloth over the basket containing earth, wherein seeds are to be sown by the bridegroom, and will not allow him to go on with the ceremony till she has extracted a promise that his first-born daughter shall marry her son. No bride-price is paid, and the remarriage of widows is forbidden.

### **3. Occupation and social status.**

The Balijas bury their dead in a sitting posture. In the Central Provinces they are usually Lingāyats and especially worship Gauri, Siva's wife. Jangams serve them as priests. They usually eat flesh and drink liquor, but in Chānda it is stated that both these practices are forbidden. In the Central Provinces they are mainly cultivators, but some of them still sell bangles and salt. Several of them are in Government service and occupy a fairly high social position.

In Madras a curious connection exists between the Kāpus and Balijas and the impure Māla caste. It is said that once upon a time the Kāpus and Balijas were flying from the Muhammadans and came to the northern Pallār river in high flood. They besought the river to go down and let them across, but it demanded the sacrifice of a first-born child. While the Kāpus and Balijas were hesitating, the Mālas who had followed them boldly sacrificed one of their children. Immediately the river divided before them

---

<sup>113</sup> *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, p. 16.

and they all crossed in safety. Ever since then the Kāpus and Balijas have respected the Mālas, and the Balijas formerly even deposited the images of the goddess Gauri, of Ganesha, and of Siva's bull with the Mālas, as the hereditary custodians of their gods.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> *Madras Census Report* (1891), p. 277.

# Bania

## 1. General notice.

**Bania, Bāni, Vāni, Mahājan, Seth, Sāhukār.**—The occupational caste of bankers, moneylenders and dealers in grain, *ghī* (butter), groceries and spices. The name Bania is derived from the Sanskrit *vanij*, a merchant. In western India the Banias are always called Vānia or Vāni. Mahājan literally means a great man, and being applied to successful Banias as an honorific title has now come to signify a banker or moneylender; Seth signifies a great merchant or capitalist, and is applied to Banias as an honorific prefix. The words *Sāhu*, *Sao* and *Sāhukār* mean upright or honest, and have also, curiously enough, come to signify a moneylender. The total number of Banias in the Central Provinces in 1911 was about 200,000, or rather over one per cent of the population. Of the above total two-thirds were Hindus and one-third Jains. The caste is fairly distributed over the whole Province, being most numerous in Districts with large towns and a considerable volume of trade.



Group of Mār wāri Bania women.

## **2. The Banias a true caste: use of the name.**

There has been much difference of opinion as to whether the name Bania should be taken to signify a caste, or whether it is merely an occupational term applied to a number of distinct castes. I venture to think it is necessary and scientifically correct to take it as a caste. In Bengal the word Banian, a corruption of Bania, has probably come to be a general term meaning simply a banker, or person dealing in money. But this does not seem to be the case elsewhere. As a rule the name Bania is used only as a caste name for groups who are considered both by themselves and outsiders to belong to the Bania caste. It may occasionally be applied to members of other castes, as in the

case of certain Teli-Banias who have abandoned oil-pressing for shop-keeping, but such instances are very rare; and these Telis would probably now assert that they belonged to the Bania caste. That the Banias are recognised as a distinct caste by the people is shown by the number of uncomplimentary proverbs and sayings about them, which is far larger than in the case of any other caste.<sup>115</sup> In all these the name Bania is used and not that of any subdivision, and this indicates that none of the subdivisions are looked upon as distinctive social groups or castes. Moreover, so far as I am aware, the name Bania is applied regularly to all the groups usually classified under the caste, and there is no group which objects to the name or whose members refuse to describe themselves by it. This is by no means always the case with other important castes. The Rāthor Telis of Mandla entirely decline to answer to the name of Teli, though they are classified under that caste. In the case of the important Ahīr or grazier caste, those who sell milk instead of grazing cattle are called Gaoli, but remain members of the Ahīr caste. An Ahīr in Chhattīsgarh would be called Rāwat and in the Maratha Districts Gowāri, but might still be an Ahīr by caste. The Barai caste of betel-vine growers and sellers is in some localities called Tamboli and not Barai; elsewhere it is known only as Pansāri, though the name Pansāri is correctly an occupational term, and, where it is not applied to the Barais, means a grocer or druggist by profession and not a caste. Bania, on the other hand, over the

---

<sup>115</sup> See [para. 19](#) below.

greater part of India is applied only to persons who acknowledge themselves and are generally recognised by Hindu society to be members of the Bania caste, and there is no other name which is generally applied to any considerable section of such persons. Certain of the more important subcastes of Bania, as the Agarwāla, Oswāl and Parwār, are, it is true, frequently known by the subcaste name. But the caste name is as often as not, or even more often, affixed to it. Agarwāla, or Agarwāla Bania, are names equally applied to designate this subcaste, and similarly with the Oswāls and Parwārs; and even so the subcaste name is only applied for greater accuracy and for compliment, since these are the best subcastes; the Bania's quarter of a town will be called Bania Mahalla, and its residents spoken of as Banias, even though they may be nearly all Agarwāls or Oswāls. Several Rājput clans are similarly spoken of by their clan names, as Rāthor, Panwār, and so on, without the addition of the caste name Rājput. Brāhman subcastes are usually mentioned by their subcaste name for greater accuracy, though in their case too it is usual to add the caste name. And there are subdivisions of other castes, such as the Jaiswār Chamārs and the Somvansi Mehras, who invariably speak of themselves only by their subcaste name, and discard the caste name altogether, being ashamed of it, but are nevertheless held to belong to their parent castes. Thus in the matter of common usage Bania conforms in all respects to the requirements of a proper caste name.

### **3. Their distinctive occupation.**



The Banias have also a distinct and well-defined traditional occupation,<sup>116</sup> which is followed by many or most members of practically every subcaste so far as has been observed. This occupation has caused the caste as a body to be credited with special mental and moral characteristics in popular estimation, to a greater extent perhaps than any other caste. None of the subcastes are ashamed of their traditional occupation or try to abandon it. It is true that a few subcastes such as the Kasaundhans and Kasarwānis, sellers of metal vessels, apparently had originally a somewhat different profession, though resembling the traditional one; but they too, if they once only sold vessels, now engage largely in the traditional Bania's calling, and deal generally in grain and money. The Banias, no doubt because it is both profitable and respectable, adhere more generally to their traditional occupation than almost any great caste, except the cultivators. Mr. Marten's analysis<sup>117</sup> of the occupations of different castes shows that sixty per cent of the Banias are still engaged in trade; while only nineteen per cent of Brāhmans follow a religious calling; twenty-nine per cent of Ahīrs are graziers, cattle-dealers or milkmen; only nine per cent of Telis are engaged in all branches of industry, including their traditional occupation of oil-pressing; and similarly only twelve per cent of Chamārs work at industrial occupations, including that of curing hides. In respect of occupation therefore the Banias

---

<sup>116</sup> See commencement of article.

<sup>117</sup> *C.P. Census Report* (1911), Occupation Chapter, Subsidiary Table I. p. 234.

strictly fulfil the definition of a caste.

#### **4. Their distinctive status.**

The Banias have also a distinctive social status. They are considered, though perhaps incorrectly, to represent the Vaishyas or third great division of the Aryan twice-born; they rank just below Rājapūts and perhaps above all other castes except Brāhmans; Brāhmans will take food cooked without water from many Banias and drinking-water from all. Nearly all Banias wear the sacred thread; and the Banias are distinguished by the fact that they abstain more rigorously and generally from all kinds of flesh food than any other caste. Their rules as to diet are exceptionally strict, and are equally observed by the great majority of the subdivisions.

#### **5. The endogamous divisions of the Banias.**

Thus the Banias apparently fulfil the definition of a caste, as consisting of one or more endogamous groups or subcastes with a distinct name applied to them all and to them only, a distinctive occupation and a distinctive social status; and there seems no reason for not considering them a caste. If on the other hand we examine the subcastes of Bania we find that the majority of them have names derived from places,<sup>118</sup> not indicating any separate origin, occupation or status, but only residence in separate tracts. Such divisions are properly

---

<sup>118</sup> For examples, the subordinate articles on Agarwāl, Oswāl, Maheshri, Khandelwāl, Lād, Agrahari, Ajudhiabāsi, and Srimāli may be consulted. The census lists contain numerous other territorial names.

termed subcastes, being endogamous only, and in no other way distinctive. No subcaste can be markedly distinguished from the others in respect of occupation or social status, and none apparently can therefore be classified as a separate caste. There are no doubt substantial differences in status between the highest subcastes of Bania, the Agarwāls, Oswāls and Parwārs, and the lower ones, the Kasaundhan, Kasarwāni, Dosar and others. But this difference is not so great as that which separates different groups included in such important castes as Rājput and Bhāt. It is true again that subcastes like the Agarwāls and Oswāls are individually important, but not more so than the Marātha, Khedawāl, Kanaujia and Maithil Brāhmans, or the Sesodia, Rāthor, Panwār and Jādon Rājputs. The higher subcastes of Bania themselves recognise a common relationship by taking food cooked without water from each other, which is a very rare custom among subcastes. Some of them are even said to have intermarried. If on the other hand it is argued, not that two or three or more of the important subdivisions should be erected into independent castes, but that Bania is not a caste at all, and that every subcaste should be treated as a separate caste, then such purely local groups as Kanaujia, Jaiswār, Gujarāti, Jaunpuri and others, which are found in forty or fifty other castes, would have to become separate castes; and if in this one case why not in all the other castes where they occur? This would result in the impossible position of having forty or fifty castes of the same name, which recognise no connection of any kind with

each other, and make any arrangement or classification of castes altogether impracticable. And in 1911 out of 200,000 Banias in the Central Provinces, 43,000 were returned with no subcaste at all, and it would therefore be impossible to classify these under any other name.



Image of the god Ganpati carried in procession.

## **6. The Banias derived from the Rājput̄s.**

The Banias have been commonly supposed to represent the Vaishyas or third of the four classical castes, both by Hindu society generally and by leading authorities on the subject. It is perhaps this view of their origin which is partly responsible for the tendency to consider them as several castes and not one. But its accuracy is doubtful. The important Bania groups appear to be of Rājput̄ stock. They nearly all come from Rājputāna, Bundelkhand or Gujarāt, that is from the homes of the principal Rājūt clans. Several of them have legends of Rājput̄ descent. The Agarwālas say that their first ancestor was a Kshatriya king, who married a Nāga or snake princess; the Nāga race is supposed to have signified the Scythian immigrants, who were snake-worshippers and from whom several clans of Rājput̄s were probably derived. The Agarwālas took their name from the ancient city of Agroha or possibly from Agra. The Oswāls say that their ancestor was the Rājput̄ king of Osnagar in Mārwar, who with his followers was converted by a Jain mendicant. The Nemas state that their ancestors were fourteen young Rājput̄ princes who escaped the vengeance of Parasurāma by abandoning the profession of arms and taking to trade. The Khandelwāls take their name from the town of Khandela in Jaipur State of Rājputāna. The Kasarwānis say they immigrated from Kara Mānikpur in Bundelkhand. The origin of the Umre Banias is not known, but in Gujarāt they are also called Bāgaria

from the Bāgar or wild country of the Dongarpur and Pertābgarh States of Rājputāna, where numbers of them are still settled; the name Bāgaria would appear to indicate that they are supposed to have immigrated thence into Gujarāt. The Dhūsar Banias ascribe their name to a hill called Dhūsi or Dhosi on the border of Alwar State. The Asātis say that their original home was Tīkamgarh State in Bundelkhand. The name of the Maheshris is held to be derived from Maheshwar, an ancient town on the Nerbudda, near Indore, which is traditionally supposed to have been the earliest settlement of the Yādava Rājput̃s. The headquarters of the Gahoi Banias is said to have been at Kharagpur in Bundelkhand, though according to their own legend they are of mixed origin. The home of the Srimālīs was the old town of Srimāl, now Bhinmāl in Mārwar. The Palliwāl Banias were from the well-known trading town of Pālī in Mārwar. The Jaiswāl are said to take their name from Jaisalmer State, which was their native country. The above are no doubt only a fraction of the Bania subcastes, but they include nearly all the most important and representative ones, from whom the caste takes its status and character. Of the numerous other groups the bulk have probably been brought into existence through the migration and settlement of sections of the caste in different parts of the country, where they have become endogamous and obtained a fresh name. Other subcastes may be composed of bodies of persons who, having taken to trade and prospered, obtained admission to the Bania caste through the efforts of their Brāhman priests. But a number of mixed

groups of the same character are also found among the Brāhmans and Rājputs, and their existence does not invalidate arguments derived from a consideration of the representative subcastes. It may be said that not only the Banias, but many of the low castes have legends showing them to be of Rājput descent of the same character as those quoted above; and since in their case these stories have been adjudged spurious and worthless, no greater importance should be attached to those of the Banias. But it must be remembered that in the case of the Banias the stories are reinforced by the fact that the Bania subcastes certainly come from Rājputāna; no doubt exists that they are of high caste, and that they must either be derived from Brāhmans or Rājputs, or themselves represent some separate foreign group; but if they are really the descendants of the Vaishyas, the main body of the Aryan immigrants and the third of the four classical castes, it might be expected that their legends would show some trace of this instead of being unitedly in favour of their Rājput origin.

Colonel Tod gives a catalogue of the eighty-four mercantile tribes, whom he states to be chiefly of Rājput descent.<sup>119</sup> In this list the Agarwāl, Oswāl, Srimāl, Khandelwāl, Palliwāl and Lād subcastes occur; while the Dhākar and Dhūsar subcastes may be represented by the names Dhākarwāl and Dusora in the lists. The other names given by Tod appear to be mainly small territorial groups of Rājputāna. Elsewhere, after speaking of the claims of certain towns in Rājputāna to be centres of

---

<sup>119</sup> *Rājasthān*, i. pp. 76, 109.



trade, Colonel Tod remarks: "These pretensions we may the more readily admit, when we recollect that nine-tenths of the bankers and commercial men of India are natives of Mārudesh,<sup>120</sup> and these chiefly of the Jain faith. The Oswāls, so termed from the town of Osi, near the Luni, estimate one hundred thousand families whose occupation is commerce. All these claim a Rājput descent, a fact entirely unknown to the European inquirer into the peculiarities of Hindu manners."<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, Sir D. Ibbetson states that the Maheshri Banias claim Rājput origin and still have subdivisions bearing Rājput names.<sup>122</sup> Elliot also says that almost all the mercantile tribes of Hindustān are of Rājput descent.<sup>123</sup>

It would appear, then, that the Banias are an offshoot from the Rājputs, who took to commerce and learnt to read and write for the purpose of keeping accounts. The Chārans or bards are another literate caste derived from the Rājputs, and it may be noticed that both the Banias and Chārans or Bhāts have hitherto been content with the knowledge of their own rude Mārwāri dialect and evinced no desire for classical learning or higher English education. Matters are now changing, but this attitude shows that they have hitherto not desired education for itself but

---

<sup>120</sup> That is Mārwar. But perhaps the term here is used in the wider sense of Rājputāna.

<sup>121</sup> *Rājasthān*, ii. p. 145.

<sup>122</sup> *Punjab Census Report* (1881), p. 293.

<sup>123</sup> *Supplemental Glossary*, p. 110.

merely as an indispensable adjunct to their business.

### **7. Banias employed as ministers in Rājput courts.**

Being literate, the Banias were not infrequently employed as ministers and treasurers in Rājput states. Forbes says, in an account of an Indian court: “Beside the king stand the warriors of Rājput race or, equally gallant in the field and wiser far in council, the Wānia (Banias) Muntreshwars, already in profession puritans of peace, and not yet drained enough of their fiery Kshatriya blood.... It is remarkable that so many of the officers possessing high rank and holding independent commands are represented to have been Wānias.”<sup>124</sup> Colonel Tod writes that Nunkurn, the Kachhwāha chief of the Shekhawat federation, had a minister named Devi Das of the Banias or mercantile caste, and, like thousands of that caste, energetic, shrewd and intelligent.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Muhāj, the Jādon Bhātti chief of Jaisalmer, by an unhappy choice of a Banias minister, completed the demoralisation of the Bhātti state. This minister was named Sarup Singh, a Banias of the Jain faith and Mehta family, whose descendants were destined to be the exterminators of the laws and fortunes of the sons of Jaisal.<sup>126</sup> Other instances of the employment of Banias ministers are to be found in Rājput history. Finally, it may be noted that the Banias are by no means the only instance of a mercantile class formed from the Rājputs.

---

<sup>124</sup> *Rāsmāla*, i. pp. 240, 243.

<sup>125</sup> *Rājasthān*, ii. p. 360.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* ii. p. 240.

The two important trading castes of Khatri and Bhātia are almost certainly of Rājput origin, as is shown in the articles on those castes.

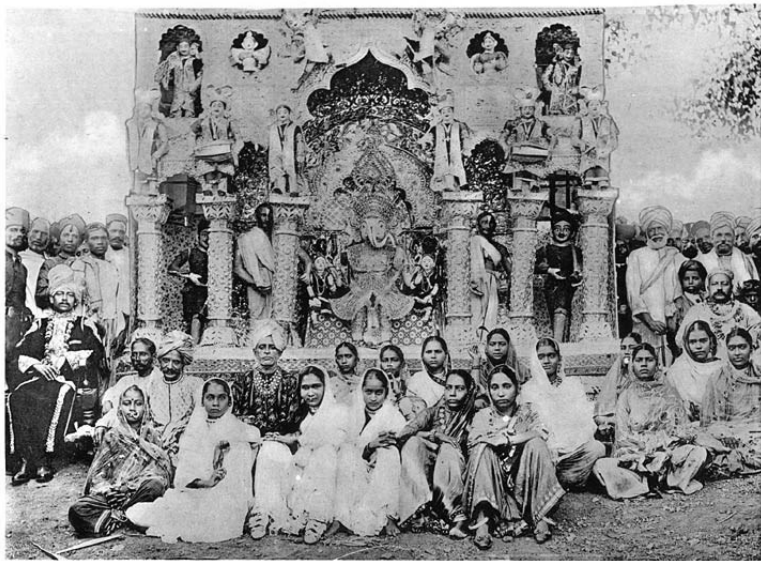
## 8. Subcastes.

The Banias are divided into a large number of endogamous groups or subcastes, of which the most important have been treated in the annexed subordinate articles. The minor subcastes, mainly formed by migration, vary greatly in different provinces. Colonel Tod gave a list of eighty-four in Rājputāna, of which eight or ten only can be identified in the Central Provinces, and of thirty mentioned by Bhattachārya as the most common groups in northern India, about a third are unknown in the Central Provinces. The origin of such subcastes has already been explained. The main subcastes may be classified roughly into groups coming from Rājputāna, Bundelkhand and the United Provinces. The leading Rājputāna groups are the Oswāl, Maheshri, Khandelwāl, Saitwāl, Srimāl and Jaiswāl. These groups are commonly known as Mārwāri Bania or simply Mārwāri. The Bundelkhand or Central India subcastes are the Gahoi, Golapūrab, Asāti, Umre and Parwār;<sup>127</sup> while the Agarwāl, Dhusar, Agrahari, Ajudhiabāsi and others come from the United Provinces. The Lād subcaste is from Gujarāt, while the Lingāyats originally belonged to the Telugu and Canarese country. Several of the subcastes coming from the same locality will take food cooked without water from each other, and

---

<sup>127</sup> The Parwārs probably belonged originally to Rājputāna; see subordinate article.

occasionally two subcastes, as the Oswāl and Khandelwāl, even food cooked with water or *katchi*. This practice is seldom found in other good castes. It is probably due to the fact that the rules about food are less strictly observed in Rājputāna.



The elephant-headed god Ganpati. His conveyance is a rat, which can be seen as a little blob between his feet.

### **9. Hindu and Jain subcastes: divisions among subcastes.**

Another classification may be made of the subcastes according as they are of the Hindu or Jain religion; the important Jain subcastes are the Oswāl, Parwār, Golapūrāb, Saitwāl and

Charnāgar, and one or two smaller ones, as the Baghelwāl and Samaiya. The other subcastes are principally Hindu, but many have a Jain minority, and similarly the Jain subcastes return a proportion of Hindus. The difference of religion counts for very little, as practically all the non-Jain Banias are strict Vaishnava Hindus, abstain entirely from any kind of flesh meat, and think it a sin to take animal life; while on their side the Jains employ Brāhmans for certain purposes, worship some of the local Hindu deities, and observe the principal Hindu festivals. The Jain and Hindu sections of a subcaste have consequently, as a rule, no objection to taking food together, and will sometimes intermarry. Several of the important subcastes are subdivided into Bīsa and Dasa, or twenty and ten groups. The Bīsa or twenty group is of pure descent, or twenty carat, as it were, while the Dasas are considered to have a certain amount of alloy in their family pedigree. They are the offspring of remarried widows, and perhaps occasionally of still more irregular unions. Intermarriage sometimes takes place between the two groups, and families in the Dasa group, by living a respectable life and marrying well, improve their status, and perhaps ultimately get back into the Bīsa group. As the Dasas become more respectable they will not admit to their communion newly remarried widows or couples who have married within the prohibited degrees, or otherwise made a *mésalliance*, and hence a third inferior group, called the Pacha or five, is brought into existence to make room for these.

## **10. Exogamy and rules regulating marriage.**

Most subcastes have an elaborate system of exogamy. They are either divided into a large number of sections, or into a few *gotras*, usually twelve, each of which is further split up into subsections. Marriage can then be regulated by forbidding a man to take a wife from the whole of his own section or from the subsection of his mother, grandmothers and even greatgrandmothers. By this means the union of persons within five or more degrees of relationship either through males or females is avoided, and most Baniyas prohibit intermarriage, at any rate nominally, up to five degrees. Such practices as exchanging girls between families or marrying two sisters are, as a rule, prohibited. The *gotras* or main sections appear to be frequently named after Brāhman Rīshis or saints, while the subsections have names of a territorial or titular character.

### **11. Marriage customs.**

There is generally no recognised custom of paying a bride- or bridegroom-price, but one or two instances of its being done are given in the subordinate articles. On the occasion of betrothal, among some subcastes, the boy's father proceeds to the girl's house and presents her with a *māla* or necklace of gold or silver coins or coral, and a *mundri* or silver ring for the finger. The contract of betrothal is made at the village temple and the caste-fellows sprinkle turmeric and water over the parties. Before the wedding the ceremony of Benaiki is performed; in this the bridegroom, riding on a horse, and the bride on a decorated chair or litter, go round their villages and say farewell to their friends

and relations. Sometimes they have a procession in this way round the marriage-shed. Among the Mārwāri Banias a *toran* or string of mango-leaves is stretched above the door of the house on the occasion of a wedding and left there for six months. And a wooden triangle with figures perched on it to represent sparrows is tied over the door. The binding portion of the wedding is the procession seven times round the marriage altar or post. In some Jain subcastes the bridegroom stands beside the post and the bride walks seven times round him, while he throws sugar over her head at each turn. After the wedding the couple are made to draw figures out of flour sprinkled on a brass plate in token of the bridegroom's occupation of keeping accounts. It is customary for the bride's family to give *sīdha* or uncooked food sufficient for a day's consumption to every outsider who accompanies the marriage party, while to each member of the caste provisions for two to five days are given. This is in addition to the evening feasts and involves great expense. Sometimes the wedding lasts for eight days, and feasts are given for four days by the bridegroom's party and four days by the bride's. It is said that in some places before a Bania has a wedding he goes before the caste *pañchāyat* and they ask him how many people he is going to invite. If he says five hundred, they prescribe the quantity of the different kinds of provisions which he must supply. Thus they may say forty maunds (3200 lbs.) of sugar and flour, with butter, spices, and other articles in proportion. He says, 'Gentlemen, I am a poor man; make it a little less'; or he says he will give

*gur* or cakes of raw cane sugar instead of refined sugar. Then they say, 'No, your social position is too high for *gur*; you must have sugar for all purposes.' The more guests the host invites the higher is his social consideration; and it is said that if he does not maintain this his life is not worth living. Sometimes the exact amount of entertainment to be given at a wedding is fixed, and if a man cannot afford it at the time he must give the balance of the feasts at any subsequent period when he has money; and if he fails to do this he is put out of caste. The bride's father is often called on to furnish a certain sum for the travelling expenses of the bridegroom's party, and if he does not send this money they do not come. The distinctive feature of a Bania wedding in the northern Districts is that women accompany the marriage procession, and the Banias are the only high caste in which they do this. Hence a high-caste wedding party in which women are present can be recognised to be a Bania's. In the Marātha Districts women also go, but here this custom obtains among other high castes. The bridegroom's party hire or borrow a house in the bride's village, and here they erect a marriage-shed and go through the preliminary ceremonies of the wedding on the bridegroom's side as if they were at home.

## **12. Polygamy and widow-marriage.**

Polygamy is very rare among the Banias, and it is generally the rule that a man must obtain the consent of his first wife before taking a second one. In the absence of this precaution for her happiness, parents will refuse to give him their daughter. The



remarriage of widows is nominally prohibited, but frequently occurs, and remarried widows are relegated to the inferior social groups in each subcaste as already described. Divorce is also said to be prohibited, but it is probable that women put away for adultery are allowed to take refuge in such groups instead of being finally expelled.

### **13. Disposal of the dead and mourning.**

The dead are cremated as a rule, and the ashes are thrown into a sacred river or any stream. The bodies of young children and of persons dying from epidemic disease are buried. The period of mourning must be for an odd number of days. On the third day a leaf plate with cooked food is placed on the ground where the body was burnt, and on some subsequent day a feast is given to the caste. Rich Banias will hire people to mourn. Widows and young girls are usually employed, and these come and sit before the house for an hour in the morning and sometimes also in the evening, and covering their heads with their cloths, beat their breasts and make lamentations. Rich men may hire as many as ten mourners for a period of one, two or three months. The Mārwaris, when a girl is born, break an earthen pot to show that they have had a misfortune; but when a boy is born they beat a brass plate in token of their joy.

### **14. Religion: the god Ganpati or Ganesh.**

Nearly all the Banias are Jains or Vaishnava Hindus. An account of the Jain religion has been given in a separate article, and some notice of the retention of Hindu practices by the Jains

is contained in the subordinate article on Parwār Bania. The Vaishnava Banias no less than the Jains are strongly averse to the destruction of animal life, and will not kill any living thing. Their principal deity is the god Ganesh or Ganpati, the son of Mahādeo and Pārvati, who is the god of good-luck, wealth and prosperity. Ganesh is represented in sculpture with the head of an elephant and riding on a rat, though the rat is now covered by the body of the god and is scarcely visible. He has a small body like a child's with a fat belly and round plump arms. Perhaps his body signifies that he is figured as a boy, the son of Pārvati or Gauri. In former times grain was the main source of wealth, and from the appearance of Ganesh it can be understood why he is the god of overflowing granaries, and hence of wealth and good fortune. The elephant is a sacred animal among Hindus, and that on which the king rides. To have an elephant was a mark of wealth and distinction among Banias, and the Jains harness the cars of their gods to elephants at their great *rath* or chariot festival. Gajpati or 'lord of elephants' is a title given to a king; Gajānand or 'elephant-faced' is an epithet of the god Ganesh and a favourite Hindu name. Gajvīthi or the track of the elephant is a name of the Milky Way, and indicates that there is believed to be a divine elephant who takes this course through the heavens. The elephant eats so much grain that only a comparatively rich man can afford to keep one; and hence it is easy to understand how the attribute of plenty or of wealth was associated with the divine elephant as his special characteristic. Similarly the rat

is connected with overflowing granaries, because when there is much corn in a Hindu house or store-shed there will be many rats; thus a multitude of rats implied a rich household, and so this animal too came to be a symbol of wealth. The Hindus do not now consider the rat sacred, but they have a tenderness for it, especially in the Marātha country. The more bigoted of them objected to rats being poisoned as a means of checking plague, though observation has fully convinced them that rats spread the plague; and in the Bania hospitals, formerly maintained for preserving the lives of animals, a number of rats were usually to be found. The rat, in fact, may now be said to stand to Ganpati in the position of a disreputable poor relation. No attempt is made to deny his existence, but he is kept in the background as far as possible. The god Ganpati is also associated with wealth of grain through his parentage. He is the offspring of Siva or Mahādeo and his wife Devi or Gauri. Mahādeo is in this case probably taken in his beneficent character of the deified bull; Devi in her most important aspect as the great mother-goddess is the earth, but as mother of Ganesh she is probably imagined in her special form of Gauri, the yellow one, that is, the yellow corn. Gauri is closely associated with Ganesh, and every Hindu bridal couple worship Gauri Ganesh together as an important rite of the wedding. Their conjunction in this manner lends colour to the idea that they are held to be mother and son. In Rājputāna Gauri is worshipped as the corn goddess at the Gangore festival about the time of the vernal equinox, especially by women. The

meaning of Gauri, Colonel Tod states, is yellow, emblematic of the ripened harvest, when the votaries of the goddess adore her effigies, in the shape of a matron painted the colour of ripe corn. Here she is seen as Ana-pūrṇa (the corn-goddess), the benefactress of mankind. "The rites commence when the sun enters Aries (the opening of the Hindu year), by a deputation to a spot beyond the city to bring earth for the image of Gauri. A small trench is then excavated in which barley is sown; the ground is irrigated and artificial heat supplied till the grain germinates, when the females join hands and dance round it, invoking the blessings of Gauri on their husbands. The young corn is then taken up, distributed and presented by the females to the men, who wear it in their turbans."<sup>128</sup> Thus if Ganesh is the son of Gauri he is the offspring of the bull and the growing corn; and his genesis from the elephant and the rat show him equally as the god of full granaries, and hence of wealth and good fortune. We can understand therefore how he is the special god of the Banias, who formerly must have dealt almost entirely in grain, as coined money had not come into general use.

### **15. Diwāli festival.**

At the Diwāli festival the Banias worship Ganpati or Ganesh, in conjunction with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Lakshmi is considered to be the deified cow, and, as such, the other main source of wealth, both as mother of the bull, the tiller of the soil, and the giver of milk from which *ghī* (clarified butter) is made;

---

<sup>128</sup> *Rājasthān*, i. p. 491.

this is another staple of the Bania's trade, as well as a luxurious food, of which he is especially fond. At Diwāli all Banias make up their accounts for the year, and obtain the signatures of clients to their balances. They open fresh account-books, which they first worship and adorn with an image of Ganesh, and perhaps an invocation to the god on the front page. A silver rupee is also worshipped as an emblem of Lakshmi, but in some cases an English sovereign, as a more precious coin, has been substituted, and this is placed on the seat of the goddess and reverence paid to it. The Banias and Hindus generally think it requisite to gamble at Diwāli in order to bring good luck during the coming year; all classes indulge in a little speculation at this season.



Mud images made and worshipped at the Holi festival.

## **16. Holi festival.**

In the month of Phāgun (February), about the time of the Holi, the Mārwaris make an image of mud naked, calling it Nāthu Rām, who was supposed to be a great Mārwari. They mock at this and throw mud at it, and beat it with shoes, and have various jests and sports. The men and women are divided into two parties, and throw dirty water and red powder over each other, and the women make whips of cloth and beat the men. After two or three days, they break up the image and throw it away. The Banias, both Jain and Hindu, like to begin the day by going and looking at the god in his temple. This is considered an auspicious omen in the same manner as it is commonly held to be a good omen to see some particular person or class of person the first thing in the morning. Others begin the day by worshipping the sacred *tulsi* or basil.

## **17. Social customs: rules about food.**

The Banias are very strict about food. The majority of them abstain from all kinds of flesh food and alcoholic liquor. The Kasarwānis are reported to eat the flesh of clean animals, and perhaps others of the lower subcastes may also do so, but the Banias are probably stricter than any other caste in their adherence to a vegetable diet. Many of them eschew also onions and garlic as impure food. Banias take the lead in the objection to foreign sugar on account of the stories told of the impure

ingredients which it contains, and many of them, until recently, at any rate, still adhered to Indian sugar. Drugs are not forbidden, but they are not usually addicted to them. Tobacco is forbidden to the Jains, but both they and the Hindus smoke, and their women sometimes chew tobacco. The Bania while he is poor is very abstemious, and it is said that on a day when he has made no money he goes supperless to bed. But when he has accumulated wealth, he develops a fondness for *ghī* or preserved butter, which often causes him to become portly. Otherwise his food remains simple, and as a rule he confined himself until recently to two daily meals, at midday and in the evening; but Banias, like most other classes who can afford it, have now begun to drink tea in the morning. In dress the Bania is also simple, adhering to the orthodox Hindu garb of a long white coat and a loin-cloth. He has not yet adopted the cotton trousers copied from the English fashion. Some Banias in their shops wear only a cloth over their shoulders and another round their waist. The *kardora* or silver waist-belt is a favourite Bania ornament, and though plainly dressed in ordinary life, rich Mārwaāris will on special festival occasions wear costly jewels. On his head the Mārwāri wears a small tightly folded turban, often coloured crimson, pink or yellow; a green turban is a sign of mourning and also black, though the latter is seldom seen. The Banias object to taking the life of any animal. They will not castrate cattle even through their servants, but sell the young bulls and buy oxen. In Saugor, a Bania is put out of caste if he keeps buffaloes. It is supposed



that good Hindus should not keep buffaloes nor use them for carting or ploughing, because the buffalo is impure, and is the animal on which Yama, the god of death, rides. Thus in his social observances generally the Bania is one of the strictest castes, and this is a reason why his social status is high. Sometimes he is even held superior to the Rājput, as the local Rājputs are often of impure descent and lax in their observance of religious and social restrictions. Though he soon learns the vernacular language of the country where he settles, the Mārwarī usually retains his own native dialect in his account-books, and this makes it more difficult for his customers to understand them.



Bania's shop.

## 18. Character of the Bania.

The Bania has a very distinctive caste character. From early boyhood he is trained to the keeping of accounts and to the view that it is his business in life to make money, and that no transaction should be considered successful or creditable which does not show a profit. As an apprentice, he goes through a severe training in mental arithmetic, so as to enable him to make the most intricate calculations in his head. With this object a boy commits to memory a number of very elaborate tables. For whole numbers he learns by heart the units from one to ten multiplied as high as forty times, and the numbers from eleven to twenty multiplied to twenty times. There are also fractional tables, giving the results of multiplying  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $2\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  into units from one to one hundred; interest-tables showing the interest due on any sum from one to one thousand rupees for one month, and for a quarter of a month at twelve per cent; tables of the squares of all numbers from one to one hundred, and a set of technical rules for finding the price of a part from the price of the whole.<sup>129</sup> The self-denial and tenacity which enable the Bania without capital to lay the foundations of a business are also remarkable. On first settling in a new locality, a Mār-wāri Bania takes service with some shopkeeper, and by dint of the strictest economy puts together a little money. Then

---

<sup>129</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Hindus of Gujarāt*, p. 80.

the new trader establishes himself in some village and begins to make grain advances to the cultivators on high rates of interest, though occasionally on bad security. He opens a shop and retails grain, pulses, condiments, spices, sugar and flour. From grain he gradually passes to selling cloth and lending money, and being keen and exacting, and having to deal with ignorant and illiterate clients, he acquires wealth; this he invests in purchasing villages, and after a time blossoms out into a big Seth or banker. The Bania can also start a retail business without capital. The way in which he does it is to buy a rupee's worth of stock in a town, and take it out early in the morning to a village, where he sits on the steps of the temple until he has sold it. Up till then he neither eats nor washes his face. He comes back in the evening after having eaten two or three pice worth of grain, and buys a fresh stock, which he takes out to another village in the morning. Thus he turns over his capital with a profit two or three times a week according to the saying, "If a Bania gets a rupee he will have an income of eight rupees a month," or as another proverb pithily sums up the immigrant Mār wāri's career, 'He comes with a *lota*<sup>130</sup> and goes back with a lakh.' The Bania never writes off debts, even though his debtor may be a pauper, but goes on entering them up year by year in his account-books and taking the debtor's acknowledgment. For he says, '*Purus Pārus*', or man is like the philosopher's stone, and his fortune may change any day.

### **19. Dislike of the cultivators towards him.**

---

<sup>130</sup> The common brass drinking-vessel.

The cultivators rarely get fair treatment from the Banias, as the odds are too much against them. They must have money to sow their land, and live while the crops are growing, and the majority who have no capital are at the moneylender's mercy. He is of a different caste, and often of a different country, and has no fellow-feeling towards them, and therefore considers the transaction merely from the business point of view of getting as much profit as possible. The debtors are illiterate, often not even understanding the meaning of figures, or the result of paying compound interest at twenty-five or fifty per cent; they can neither keep accounts themselves nor check their creditor's. Hence they are entirely in his hands, and in the end their villages or land, if saleable, pass to him, and they decline from landlord to tenant, or from tenant to labourer. They have found vent for their feelings in some of the bitterest sayings ever current: 'A man who has a Bania for a friend has no need of an enemy.' 'Borrow from a Bania and you are as good as ruined.' 'The rogue cheats strangers and the Bania cheats his friends.' 'Kick a Bania even if he is dead.' "His heart, we are told, is no bigger than a coriander seed; he goes in like a needle and comes out like a sword; as a neighbour he is as bad as a boil in the armpit. If a Bania is on the other side of a river you should leave your bundle on this side for fear he should steal it. If a Bania is drowning you should not give him your hand; he is sure to have some pecuniary motive for drifting down-stream. A Bania will start an auction in a desert. If a Bania's son tumbles down he is sure to pick up something. He

uses light weights and swears that the scales tip up of themselves; he keeps his accounts in a character that no one but God can read; if you borrow from him your debt mounts up like a refuse-heap or gallops like a horse; if he talks to a customer he debits the conversation in his accounts; and when his own credit is shaky he writes up his transactions on the wall so that they can easily be rubbed out.”<sup>131</sup>

## **20. His virtues.**

Nevertheless there is a good deal to be said on the other side, and the Bania's faults are probably to a large extent produced by his environment, like other people's. One of the Bania's virtues is that he will lend on security which neither the Government nor the banks would look at, or on none at all. Then he will always wait a long time for his money, especially if the interest is paid. No doubt this is no loss to him, as he keeps his money out at good interest; but it is a great convenience to a client that his debt can be postponed in a bad year, and that he can pay as much as he likes in a good one. The village moneylender is indispensable to its economy when the tenants are like school-boys in that money burns a hole in their pocket; and Sir Denzil Ibbetson states that it is surprising how much reasonableness and honesty there is in his dealings with the people, so long as he can keep his transactions out of a court of justice.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, Sir Reginald Craddock writes: “The village Bania is a much-

---

<sup>131</sup> Sir H. H. Risley's *Peoples of India*, p. 127, and Appendix I. p. 8.

<sup>132</sup> *Punjab Census Report* (1881), p. 291.

abused individual, but he is as a rule a quiet, peaceable man, a necessary factor in the village economy. He is generally most forbearing with his clients and customers, and is not the person most responsible for the indebtedness of the ryot. It is the casual moneylender with little or no capital who lives by his wits, or the large firms with shops and agents scattered over the face of the country who work the serious mischief. These latter encourage the people to take loans and discourage repayment until the debt has increased by accumulation of interest to a sum from which the borrower cannot easily free himself.”<sup>133</sup>

### **21. The moneylender changed for the worse.**

The progress of administration, bringing with it easy and safe transit all over the country; the institution of a complete system of civil justice and the stringent enforcement of contracts through the courts; the introduction of cash coinage as the basis of all transactions; and the grant of proprietary and transferable rights in land, appear to have at the same time enhanced the Bania's prosperity and increased the harshness and rapacity of his dealings. When the moneylender lived in the village he had an interest in the solvency of the tenants who constituted his clientèle and was also amenable to public opinion, even though not of his own caste. For it would clearly be an impossibly unpleasant position for him to meet no one but bitter enemies whenever he set foot outside his house, and to go to bed in nightly fear of being dacoited and murdered by a combination of his

---

<sup>133</sup> *Nāgpur Settlement Report* (1900), para. 54.

next-door neighbours. He therefore probably adopted the motto of live and let live, and conducted his transactions on a basis of custom, like the other traders and artisans who lived among the village community. But with the rise of the large banking-houses whose dealings are conducted through agents over considerable tracts of country, public opinion can no longer act. The agent looks mainly to his principal, and the latter has no interest in or regard for the cultivators of distant villages. He cares only for his profit, and his business is conducted with a single view to that end. He himself has no public opinion to face, as he lives in a town among a community of his caste-fellows, and here absolutely no discredit is attached to grinding the faces of the poor, but on the contrary the honour and consideration accruing to him are in direct proportion to his wealth. The agent may have some compunction, but his first aim is to please his principal, and as he is often a sojourner liable to early transfer he cares little what may be said or thought about him locally.

## **22. The enforcement of contracts.**

Again the introduction of the English law of contract and transfer of property, and the increase in the habit of litigation have greatly altered the character of the money-lending business for the worse. The debtor signs a bond sometimes not even knowing the conditions, more often having heard them but without any clear idea of their effect or of the consequences to himself, and as readily allows it to be registered. When it comes into court the witnesses, who are the moneylender's creatures,

easily prove that it was a genuine and *bona fide* transaction, and the debtor is too ignorant and stupid to be able to show that he did not understand the bargain or that it was unconscionable. In any case the court has little or no power to go behind a properly executed contract without any actual evidence of fraud, and has no option but to decree it in terms of the deed. This evil is likely to be remedied very shortly, as the Government of India have announced a proposal to introduce the recent English Act and allow the courts the discretion to go behind contracts, and to refuse to decree exorbitant interest or other hard bargains. This urgently needed reform will, it may be hoped, greatly improve the character of the civil administration by encouraging the courts to realise that it is their business to do justice between litigants, and not merely to administer the letter of the law; and at the same time it should have the result, as in England, of quickening the public conscience and that of the moneylenders themselves, which has indeed already been to some extent awakened by other Government measures, including the example set by the Government itself as a creditor.

### **23. Cash coinage and the rate of interest.**

Again the free circulation of metal currency and its adoption as a medium for all transactions has hitherto been to the disadvantage of the debtors. Interest on money was probably little in vogue among pastoral peoples, and was looked upon with disfavour, being prohibited by both the Mosaic and Muhammadan codes. The reason was perhaps that in a pastoral



community there existed no means of making a profit on a loan by which interest could be paid, and hence the result of usury was that the debtor ultimately became enslaved to his creditor; and the enslavement of freemen on any considerable scale was against the public interest. With the introduction of agriculture a system of loans on interest became a necessary and useful part of the public economy, as a cultivator could borrow grain to sow land and support himself and his family until the crop ripened, out of which the loan, principal and interest, could be repaid. If, as seems likely, this was the first occasion for the introduction of the system of loan-giving on a large scale, it would follow that the rate of interest would be based largely on the return yielded by the earth to the seed. Support is afforded to this conjecture by the fact that in the case of grain loans in the Central Provinces the interest on loans of grain of the crops which yield a comparatively small return, such as wheat, is twenty-five to fifty per cent, while in the case of those which yield a large return, such as juāri and kodon, it is one hundred per cent. These high rates of interest were not of much importance so long as the transaction was in grain. The grain was much less valuable at harvest than at seed time, and in addition the lender had the expense of storing and protecting his stock of grain through the year. It is probable that a rate of twenty-five per cent on grain loans does not yield more than a reasonable profit to the lender. But when in recent times cash came to be substituted for grain it would appear that there was no proportionate reduction in the interest. The borrower

would lose by having to sell his grain for the payment of his debt at the most unfavourable rate after harvest, and since the transaction was by a regular deed the lender no longer took any share of the risk of a bad harvest, as it is probable that he was formerly accustomed to do. The rates of interest for cash loans afforded a disproportionate profit to the lender, who was put to no substantial expense in keeping money as he had formerly been in the case of grain. It is thus probable that rates for cash loans were for a considerable period unduly severe in proportion to the risk, and involved unmerited loss to the borrower. This is now being remedied by competition, by Government loans given on a large scale in time of scarcity, and by the introduction of co-operative credit. But it has probably contributed to expedite the transfer of land from the cultivating to the moneylending classes.

#### **24. Proprietary and transferable rights in land.**

Lastly the grant of proprietary and transferable right to land has afforded a new incentive and reward to the successful moneylender. Prior to this measure it is probable that no considerable transfers of land occurred for ordinary debt. The village headman might be ousted for non-payment of revenue, or simply through the greed of some Government official under native rule, and of course the villages were continually pillaged and plundered by their own and hostile armies such as the Pindāris, while the population was periodically decimated by famine. But apart from their losses by famine, war and the badness of the central government, it is probable that the

cultivators were held to have a hereditary right to their land, and were not liable to ejectment on the suit of any private person. It is doubtful whether they had any conception of ownership of the land, and it seems likely that they may have thought of it as a god or the property of the god; but the cultivating castes perhaps had a hereditary right to cultivate it, just as the Chamār had a prescriptive right to the hides of the village cattle, the Kalār to the mahua-flowers for making his liquor, the Kumbhār to clay for his pots, and the Teli to press the oil-seeds grown in his village. The inferior castes were not allowed to hold land, and it was probably never imagined that the village moneylender should by means of a piece of stamped paper be able to oust the cultivators indebted to him and take their land himself. With the grant of proprietary right to land such as existed in England, and the application of the English law of contract and transfer of property, a new and easy road to wealth was opened to the moneylender, of which he was not slow to take advantage. The Banias have thus ousted numbers of improvident proprietors of the cultivating castes, and many of them have become large landlords. A considerable degree of protection has now been afforded to landowners and cultivators, and the process has been checked, but that it should have proceeded so far is regrettable; and the operation of the law has been responsible for a large amount of unintentional injustice to the cultivating castes and especially to proprietors of aboriginal descent, who on account of their extreme ignorance and improvidence most readily fall a prey to the moneylender.

## **25. The Bania as a landlord.**

As landlords the Banias were not at first a success. They did not care to spend money in improving their property, and ground their tenants to the utmost. Sir R. Craddock remarks of them:<sup>134</sup> “Great or small they are absolutely unfitted by their natural instincts to be landlords. Shrewdest of traders, most business-like in the matter of bargains, they are unable to take a broad view of the duties of landlord or to see that rack-renting will not pay in the long run.”

Still, under the influence of education, and the growth of moral feeling, as well as the desire to stand well with Government officers and to obtain recognition in the shape of some honour, many of the Mārwāri proprietors are developing into just and progressive landlords. But from the cultivator’s point of view, residence on their estates, which are managed by agents in charge of a number of villages for an absent owner, cannot compare with the system of the small cultivating proprietor resident among tenants of his own caste, and bound to them by ties of sympathy and caste feeling, which produces, as described by Sir R. Craddock, the ideal village.

## **26. Commercial honesty.**

As a trader the Bania formerly had a high standard of commercial probity. Even though he might show little kindness or honesty in dealing with the poorer class of borrowers, he was respected and absolutely reliable in regard to money. It was

---

<sup>134</sup> *Nāgpur Settlement Report* (1900), para. 54.

not unusual for people to place their money in a rich Bania's hands without interest, even paying him a small sum for safe-keeping. Bankruptcy was considered disgraceful, and was visited with social penalties little less severe than those enforced for breaches of caste rules. There was a firm belief that a merchant's condition in the next world depended on the discharge of all claims against him. And the duty of paying ancestral debts was evaded only in the case of helpless or hopeless poverty. Of late, partly owing to the waning power of caste and religious feeling in the matter, and partly to the knowledge of the bankruptcy laws, the standard of commercial honour has greatly fallen. Since the case of bankruptcy is governed and arranged for by law, the trader thinks that so long as he can keep within the law he has done nothing wrong. A banker, when heavily involved, seldom scruples to become a bankrupt and to keep back money enough to enable him to start afresh, even if he does nothing worse. This, however, is probably a transitory phase, and the same thing has happened in England and America at one stage of commercial development. In time it may be expected that the loss of the old religious and caste feeling will be made good by a new standard of commercial honour enforced by public opinion among merchants generally. The Banias are very good to their own caste, and when a man is ruined will have a general subscription and provide funds to enable him to start afresh in a small way. Beggars are very rare in the caste. Rich Mārwarīs are extremely generous in their subscriptions to objects of public

utility, but it is said that the small Bania is not very charitably inclined, though he doles out handfuls of grain to beggars with fair liberality. But he has a system by which he exacts from those who deal with him a slight percentage on the price received by them for religious purposes. This is called Deodān or a gift to God, and is supposed to go into some public fund for the construction or maintenance of a temple or similar object. In the absence of proper supervision or audit it is to be feared that the Bania inclines to make use of it for his private charity, thus saving himself expense on that score. The system has been investigated by Mr. Napier, Commissioner of Jubbulpore, with a view to the application of these funds to public improvements.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.