

# ROBERT VANE RUSSELL

THE TRIBES AND CASTES  
OF THE CENTRAL  
PROVINCES OF INDIA,  
VOLUME 4

Robert Vane Russell

**The Tribes and Castes of the Central  
Provinces of India, Volume 4**

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# R. V. Russell

## The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, Volume 4

### 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**  
**Kumhār—Yemkala**

**Vol. IV**

**Kumhār**

**1. Traditions of origin**

**Kumhār, Kumbhār.**—The caste of potters, the name being derived from the Sanskrit *kumbh*, a water-pot. The Kumhārs numbered nearly 120,000 persons in the Central Provinces in 1911 and were most numerous in the northern and eastern or Hindustāni-speaking Districts, where earthen vessels have a greater vogue than in the south. The caste is of course an ancient one, vessels of earthenware having probably been in use at a very early period, and the old Hindu scriptures consequently give various accounts of its origin from mixed marriages between the four classical castes. “Concerning the traditional parentage of the caste,” Sir H. Risley writes,<sup>1</sup> “there seems to be a wide difference of opinion among the recognised authorities on the subject. Thus the Brahma Vaivārtta Purāna says that the Kumbhakār or maker of water-jars (*kumbka*), is born of a Vaishya woman by a Brāhman father; the Parāsara Samhita makes the father a Mālākār (gardener) and the mother a Chamār; while the Parāsara Padhati holds that the ancestor of the caste was begotten of a Tili woman by a Pattikār or weaver of silk cloth.” Sir Monier Williams again, in his Sanskrit Dictionary, describes them as the offspring of a Kshatriya woman by a Brāhman. No importance can of course be attached to such statements as the above from the point of view of actual fact, but they are interesting as showing the view taken of the formation of castes by the old Brāhman writers, and also the position given to the Kumhār at the time when they wrote. This varies from a moderately respectable to a very humble one according to the different accounts of his lineage. The caste themselves have a legend of the usual Brāhmanical type: “In the Kritayuga, when Maheshwar (Siva) intended to marry the daughter of Hemvanta, the Devas and Asuras<sup>2</sup> assembled at Kailās (Heaven). Then a question arose as to who should furnish the vessels required for the ceremony, and one Kulālaka, a Brāhman, was ordered to make them. Then Kulālaka stood before the assembly with folded hands, and prayed that materials might be given to him for making the pots. So Vishnu gave his Sudarsana (discus) to be used as a wheel, and the mountain of Mandāra was fixed as a pivot beneath it to hold it up. The scraper was Adi Kūrma the tortoise, and a rain-cloud was used for the water-tub. So Kulālaka made the pots and gave them to Maheshwar for his marriage, and ever since his descendants have been known as Kumbhakār or maker of water-jars.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Kumhār.

<sup>2</sup> Gods and demons.



Potter and his wheel

## 2. Caste sub-divisions

The Kumhārs have a number of subcastes, many of which, as might be expected, are of the territorial type and indicate the different localities from which they migrated to the Central Provinces. Such are the Mālwi from Mālwa, the Telenga from the Telugu country in Hyderābād, the Pardeshi from northern India and the Marātha from the Marātha Districts. Other divisions are the Lingāyats who belong to the sect of this name, the Gadhwāl or Gadhere who make tiles and carry them about on donkeys (*gadha*), the Bardia who use bullocks for transport and the Sungaria who keep pigs (*suar*). Certain endogamous groups have arisen simply from differences in the method of working. Thus the Hāthgarhia<sup>3</sup> mould vessels with their hands only without using the wheel; the Goria<sup>4</sup> make white or red pots only and not black ones; the Kurere mould their vessels on a stone slab revolving on a stick and not on a wheel; while the Chakere are Kumhārs who use the wheel (*chāk*) in localities where other Kumhārs do not use it. The Chhutakia and Rakhotia are illegitimate sections, being the offspring of kept women.

## 3. Social Customs

Girls are married at an early age when their parents can afford it, the matches being usually arranged at caste feasts. In Chānda parents who allow a daughter to become adolescent while still unwed are put out of caste, but elsewhere the rule is by no means so strict. The ceremony is of the normal type and a Brāhman usually officiates, but in Betūl it is performed by the Sawāsa or husband of the bride's paternal aunt. After the wedding the couple are given kneaded flour to hold in their hands and snatch from each other as an emblem of their trade. In Mandla a bride price of Rs. 50 is paid.

The Kumhārs recognise divorce and the remarriage of widows. If an unmarried girl is detected in criminal intimacy with a member of the caste, she has to give a feast to the caste-fellows and pay a fine of Rs. 1–4 and five locks of her hair are also cut off by way of purification. The caste

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<sup>3</sup> *Hāth*, hand and *garhna* to make or mould.

<sup>4</sup> *Gora*, white or red, applied to Europeans.

usually burn the dead, but the Lingāyat Kumhārs always bury them in accordance with the practice of their sect. They worship the ordinary Hindu deities and make an offering to the implements of their trade on the festival of Deothān Igāras. The village Brāhman serves as their priest. In Bālāghāt a Kumhār is put out of caste if a dead cat is found in his house. At the census of 1901 the Kumhār was ranked with the impure castes, but his status is not really so low. Sir D. Ibbetson said of him: "He is a true village menial; his social standing is very low, far below that of the Lohār and not much above the Chamār. His association with that impure beast, the donkey, the animal sacred to Sitala, the smallpox goddess, pollutes him and also his readiness to carry manure and sweepings." As already seen there are in the Central Provinces Sungaria and Gadheria subcastes which keep donkeys and pigs, and these are regarded as impure. But in most Districts the Kumhār ranks not much below the Barhai and Lohār, that is in what I have designated the grade of village menials above the impure and below the cultivating castes. In Bengal the Kumhārs have a much higher status and Brāhmans will take water from their hands. But the gradation of caste in Bengal differs very greatly from that of other parts of India.

#### 4. The Kumhār as a village menial

The Kumhār is not now paid regularly by dues from the cultivators like other village menials, as the ordinary system of sale has no doubt been found more convenient in his case. But he sometimes takes the soiled grass from the stalls of the cattle and gives pots free to the cultivator in exchange. On Akti day, at the beginning of the agricultural year, the village Kumhār of Saugor presents five pots with covers on them to each cultivator and receives 2½ lbs. of grain in exchange. One of these the tenant fills with water and presents to a Brāhman and the rest he reserves for his own purposes. On the occasion of a wedding also the bridegroom's party take the bride to the Kumhār's house as part of the *sohāg* ceremony for making the marriage propitious. The Kumhār seats the bride on his wheel and turns it round with her seven times. The Kumhār presents her with seven new pots, which are taken back to the house and used at the wedding. They are filled with water and are supposed to represent the seven seas. If any two of these pots accidentally clash together it is supposed that the bride and bridegroom will quarrel during their married life. In return for this the Kumhār receives a present of clothes. At a funeral also the Kumhār must supply thirteen vessels which are known as *ghāts*, and must also replace the broken earthenware. Like the other village menials at the harvest he takes a new vessel to the cultivator in his field and receives a present of grain. These customs appear to indicate his old position as one of the menials or general servants of the village ranking below the cultivators. Grant-Duff also includes the potter in his list of village menials in the Marātha villages.<sup>5</sup>

#### 5. Occupation

The potter is not particular as to the clay he uses and does not go far afield for the finer qualities, but digs it from the nearest place in the neighbourhood where he can get it free of cost. Red and black clay are employed, the former being obtained near the base of hills or on high-lying land, probably of the laterite formation, and the latter in the beds of tanks or streams. When the clay is thoroughly kneaded and ready for use a lump of it is placed on the centre of the wheel. The potter seats himself in front of the wheel and fixes his stick or *chakrai* into the slanting hole in its upper surface. With this stick the wheel is made to revolve very rapidly, and sufficient impetus is given to it to keep it in motion for several minutes. The potter then lays aside the stick and with his hands moulds the lump of clay into the shape required, stopping every now and then to give the wheel a fresh spin as it loses its momentum. When satisfied with the shape of his vessel he separates it from the lump with a piece of string, and places it on a bed of ashes to prevent it sticking to the ground. The wheel is either a

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<sup>5</sup> *History of the Marāthas*, edition 1878, vol. i. p. 26.

circular disc cut out of a single piece of stone about a yard in diameter, or an ordinary wooden wheel with spokes forming two diameters at right angles. The rim is then thickened with the addition of a coating of mud strengthened with fibre.<sup>6</sup> The articles made by the potter are ordinary circular vessels or *gharas* used for storing and collecting water, larger ones for keeping grain, flour and vegetables, and *surāhis* or amphoras for drinking-water. In the manufacture of these last salt and saltpetre are mixed with the clay to make them more porous and so increase their cooling capacity. A very useful thing is the small saucer which serves as a lamp, being filled with oil on which a lighted wick is floated. These saucers resemble those found in the excavations of Roman remains. Earthen vessels are more commonly used, both for cooking and eating purposes among the people of northern India, and especially by Muhammadans, than among the Marāthas, and, as already noticed, the Kumhār caste musters strong in the north of the Province. An earthen vessel is polluted if any one of another caste takes food or drink from it and is at once discarded. On the occasion of a death all the vessels in the house are thrown away and a new set obtained, and the same measure is adopted at the Holi festival and on the occasion of an eclipse, and at various other ceremonial purifications, such as that entailed if a member of the household has had maggots in a wound. On this account cheapness is an indispensable quality in pottery, and there is no opening for the Kumhār to improve his art. Another product of the Kumhār's industry is the *chilam* or pipe-bowl. This has the usual opening for inhaling the smoke but no stem, an impromptu stem being made by the hands and the smoke inhaled through it. As the *chilam* is not touched by the mouth, Hindus of all except the impure castes can smoke it together, passing it round, and Hindus can also smoke it with Muhammadans.

It is a local belief that, if an earthen pot is filled with salt and plastered over, the rains will stop until it is opened. This device is adopted when the fall is excessive, but, on the other hand, if there is drought, the people sometimes think that the potter has used it to keep off the rain, because he cannot pursue his calling when the clay is very wet. And on occasions of a long break in the rains, they have been known to attack his shop and break all his vessels under the influence of this belief. The potter is sometimes known as Prājapati or the 'The Creator,' in accordance with the favourite comparison made by ancient writers of the moulding of his pots with the creation of human beings, the justice of which will be recognised by any one who watches the masses of mud on a whirling wheel growing into shapely vessels in the potter's creating hands.

## 6. Breeding pigs for sacrifices

Certain Kumhārs as well as the Dhīmars make the breeding of pigs a means of subsistence, and they sell these pigs for sacrifices at prices varying from eight annas (8d.) to a rupee. The pigs are sacrificed by the Gonds to their god Bura Deo and by Hindus to the deity Bhainsāsūr, or the buffalo demon, for the protection of the crops. Bhainsāsūr is represented by a stone in the fields, and when crops are beaten down at night by the wind it is supposed that Bhainsāsūr has passed over them and trampled them down. Hindus, usually of the lower castes, offer pigs to Bhainsāsūr to propitiate him and preserve their crops from his ravages, but they cannot touch the impure pig themselves. What they have to do, therefore, is to pay the Kumhār the price of the pig and get him to offer it to Bhainsāsūr on their behalf. The Kumhār goes to the god and sacrifices the pig and then takes the body home and eats it, so that his trade is a profitable one, while conversely to sacrifice a pig without partaking of its flesh must necessarily be bitter to the frugal Hindu mind, and this indicates the importance of the deity who is to be propitiated by the offering. The first question which arises in connection with this curious custom is why pigs should be sacrificed for the preservation of the crops; and the reason appears to be that the wild pig is the animal which, at present, mainly damages the crops.

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<sup>6</sup> The above description is taken from the Central Provinces *Monograph on Pottery and Glassware* by Mr. Jowers, p. 4.

## 7. The goddess Demeter

In ancient Greece pigs were offered to Demeter, the corn-goddess, for the protection of the crops, and there is good reason to suppose that the conceptions of Demeter herself and the lovely Proserpine grew out of the worship of the pig, and that both goddesses were in the beginning merely the deified pig. The highly instructive passage in which Sir J. G. Frazer advances this theory is reproduced almost in full<sup>7</sup>: “Passing next to the corn-goddess Demeter, and remembering that in European folklore the pig is a common embodiment of the corn-spirit, we may now ask whether the pig, which was so closely associated with Demeter, may not originally have been the goddess herself in animal form? The pig was sacred to her; in art she was portrayed carrying or accompanied by a pig; and the pig was regularly sacrificed in her mysteries, the reason assigned being that the pig injures the corn and is therefore an enemy of the goddess. But after an animal has been conceived as a god, or a god as an animal, it sometimes happens, as we have seen, that the god sloughs off his animal form and becomes purely anthropomorphic; and that then the animal which at first had been slain in the character of the god, comes to be viewed as a victim offered to the god on the ground of its hostility to the deity; in short, that the god is sacrificed to himself on the ground that he is his own enemy. This happened to Dionysus and it may have happened to Demeter also. And in fact the rites of one of her festivals, the Thesmophoria, bear out the view that originally the pig was an embodiment of the corn-goddess herself, either Demeter or her daughter and double Proserpine. The Thesmophoria was an autumn festival celebrated by women alone in October, and appears to have represented with mourning rites the descent of Proserpine (or Demeter) into the lower world, and with joy her return from the dead. Hence the name Descent or Ascent variously applied to the first, and the name *Kalligeneia* (fair-born) applied to the third day of the festival. Now from an old scholium on Lucian we learn some details about the mode of celebrating the Thesmophoria, which shed important light on the part of the festival called the Descent or the Ascent. The scholiast tells us that it was customary at the Thesmophoria to throw pigs, cakes of dough, and branches of pine-trees into ‘the chasms of Demeter and Proserpine,’ which appear to have been sacred caverns or vaults.

“In these caverns or vaults there were said to be serpents, which guarded the caverns and consumed most of the flesh of the pigs and dough-cakes which were thrown in. Afterwards—apparently at the next annual festival—the decayed remains of the pigs, the cakes, and the pine-branches were fetched by women called ‘drawers,’ who, after observing, rules of ceremonial purity for three days, descended into the caverns, and, frightening away the serpents by clapping their hands, brought up the remains and placed them on the altar. Whoever got a piece of the decayed flesh and cakes, and sowed it with the seed-corn in his field, was believed to be sure of a good crop.

“To explain this rude and ancient rite the following legend was told. At the moment when Pluto carried off Proserpine, a swineherd called Eubuleus chanced to be herding his swine on the spot, and his herd was engulfed in the chasm down which Pluto vanished with Proserpine. Accordingly, at the Thesmophoria pigs were annually thrown into caverns to commemorate the disappearance of the swine of Eubuleus. It follows from this that the casting of the pigs into the vaults at the Thesmophoria formed part of the dramatic representation of Proserpine’s descent into the lower world; and as no image of Proserpine appears to have been thrown in, we may infer that the descent of the pigs was not so much an accompaniment of her descent as the descent itself, in short, that the pigs were Proserpine. Afterwards, when Proserpine or Demeter (for the two are equivalent) became anthropomorphic, a reason had to be found for the custom of throwing pigs into caverns at her festival; and this was done by saying that when Pluto carried off Proserpine, there happened to be some swine browsing near, which were swallowed up along with her. The story is obviously a forced and awkward attempt to

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<sup>7</sup> *Golden Bough*, ii. pp. 299, 301.

bridge over the gulf between the old conception of the corn-spirit as a pig and the new conception of her as an anthropomorphic goddess. A trace of the older conception survived in the legend that when the sad mother was searching for traces of the vanished Proserpine, the footprints of the lost one were obliterated by the footprints of a pig; originally, we may conjecture, the footprints of the pig were the footprints of Proserpine and of Demeter herself. A consciousness of the intimate connection of the pig with the corn lurks in the legend that the swineherd Eubuleus was a brother of Triptolemus, to whom Demeter first imparted the secret of the corn. Indeed, according to one version of the story, Eubuleus himself received, jointly with his brother Triptolemus, the gift of the corn from Demeter as a reward for revealing to her the fate of Proserpine. Further, it is to be noted that at the Thesmophoria the women appear to have eaten swine's flesh. The meal, if I am right, must have been a solemn sacrament or communion, the worshippers partaking of the body of the god."

## 8. Estimation of the pig in India

We thus see how the pig in ancient Greece was worshipped as a corn-deity because it damaged the crops and subsequently became an anthropomorphic goddess. It is suggested that pigs are offered to Bhainsāsūr by the Hindus for the same reason. But there is no Hindu deity representing the pig, this animal on the contrary being regarded as impure. It seems doubtful, however, whether this was always so. In Rājputāna on the stone which the Regent of Kotah set up to commemorate the abolition of forced taxes were carved the effigies of the sun, the moon, the cow and the hog, with an imprecation on whoever should revoke the edict.<sup>8</sup> Colonel Tod says that the pig was included as being execrated by all classes, but this seems very doubtful. It would scarcely occur to any Hindu nowadays to associate the image of the impure pig with those of the sun, moon and cow, the representations of three of his greatest deities. Rather it gives some reason for supposing that the pig was once worshipped, and the Rājputās still do not hold the wild boar impure, as they hunt it and eat its flesh. Moreover, Vishnu in his fourth incarnation was a boar. The Gonds regularly offer pigs to their great god Bura Deo, and though they now offer goats as well, this seems to be a later innovation. The principal sacrifice of the early Romans was the Suovetaurilia or the sacrifice of a pig, a ram and a bull. The order of the words, M. Reinach remarks,<sup>9</sup> is significant as showing the importance formerly attached to the pig or boar. Since the pig was the principal sacrificial animal of the primitive tribes, the Gonds and Baigas, its connection with the ritual of an alien and at one time hostile religion may have strengthened the feeling of aversion for it among the Hindus, which would naturally be engendered by its own dirty habits.

## 9. The buffalo as a corn-god

It seems possible then that the Hindus revered the wild boar in the past as one of the strongest and fiercest animals of the forest and also as a destroyer of the crops. And they still make sacrifices of the pig to guard their fields from his ravages. These sacrifices, however, are not offered to any deity who can represent a deified pig but to Bhainsāsūr, the deified buffalo. The explanation seems to be that in former times, when forests extended over most of the country, the cultivator had in the wild buffalo a direr foe than the wild pig. And one can well understand how the peasant, winning a scanty subsistence from his poor fields near the forest, and seeing his harvest destroyed in a night by the trampling of a herd of these great brutes against whom his puny weapons were powerless, looked on them as terrible and malignant deities. The sacrifice of a buffalo would be beyond the means of a single man, and the animal is now more or less sacred as one of the cow tribe. But the annual joint sacrifice of one or more buffaloes is a regular feature of the Dasahra festival and extends over a great

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<sup>8</sup> *Rājasthān*, ii. p. 524.

<sup>9</sup> *Orphèus*, p. 152.

part of India. In Betūl and other districts the procedure is that on the Dasahra day, or a day before, the Māng and Kotwār, two of the lowest village menials, take a buffalo bull and bring it to the village proprietor, who makes a cut on its nose and draws blood. Then it is taken all round the village and to the shrines of the gods, and in the evening it is killed and the Māng and Kotwār eat the flesh. It is now believed that if the blood of a buffalo does not fall at Dasahra some epidemic will attack the village, but as there are no longer any wild buffaloes except in the denser forests of one or two Districts, the original meaning of the rite might naturally have been forgotten.<sup>10</sup>

## 10. The Dasahra festival

The Dasahra festival probably marks the autumnal equinox and also the time when the sowing of wheat and other spring crops begins. Many Hindus still postpone sowing the wheat until after Dasahra, even though it might be convenient to begin before, especially as the festival goes by the lunar month and its date varies in different years by more than a fortnight. The name signifies the tenth day, and prior to the festival a fast of nine days is observed, when the pots of wheat corresponding to the gardens of Adonis are sown and quickly sprout up. This is an imitation of the sowing and growth of the real crop and is meant to ensure its success. During these nine days it is said that the goddess Devi was engaged in mortal combat with the buffalo demon Mahisāsaur or Bhainsāsaur, and on the tenth day or the Dasahra she slew him. The fast is explained as being observed in order to help her to victory, but it is really perhaps a fast in connection with the growing of the crops. A similar nine daysfast for the crops was observed by the Greeks.<sup>11</sup>

## 11. The goddess Devi

Devi signifies 'the goddess' *par excellence*. She is often the tutelary goddess of the village and of the family, and is held to have been originally Mother Earth, which may be supposed to be correct. In tracts where the people of northern and southern India meet she is identified with Anna Pūrna, the corn-goddess of the Telugu country; and in her form of Gauri or 'the Yellow One' she is perhaps herself the yellow corn. As Gauri she is worshipped at weddings in conjunction with Ganesh or Ganpati, the god of Good Fortune; and it is probably in honour of the harvest colour that Hindus of the upper castes wear yellow at their weddings and consider it lucky. A Brahman also prefers to wear yellow when eating his food. It has been seen<sup>12</sup> that red is the lucky colour of the lower castes of Hindus, and the reason probably is that the shrines of their gods are stained red with the blood of the animals sacrificed. High-caste Hindus no longer make animal sacrifices, and their offerings to Siva, Vishnu and Devi consist of food, flowers and blades of corn. Thus yellow would be similarly associated with the shrines of the gods. All Hindu brides have their bodies rubbed with yellow turmeric, and the principal religious flower, the marigold, is orange-yellow. Yellow is, however, also lucky as being the colour of Vishnu or the Sun, and a yellow flag is waved above his great temple at Rāmtek on the occasion of the fair. Thus Devi as the corn-goddess perhaps corresponds to Demeter, but she is not in this form an animal goddess. The Hindus worshipping Mother Earth, as all races do in the early stage of religion, may by a natural and proper analogy have ascribed the gift of the corn to her from whom it really comes, and have identified her with the corn-goddess. This is by no means a full explanation of the goddess Devi, who has many forms. As Pārvasī, the hill-maiden, and Durga, the inaccessible one, she is the consort of Siva in his character of the mountain-god of the Himalayas; as Kālī, the devourer of human flesh, she is perhaps the deified tiger; and she may have assimilated yet more objects of worship into her wide divinity. But there seems no special

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<sup>10</sup> The sacrifice is now falling into abeyance, as landowners refuse to supply the buffalo.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 368.

<sup>12</sup> *Vide* article on Lakhera.

reason to hold that she is anywhere believed to be the deified buffalo; and the probable explanation of the Dasahra rite would therefore seem to be that the buffalo was at first venerated as the corn-god because, like the pig in Greece, he was most destructive to the crops, and a buffalo was originally slaughtered and eaten sacramentally as an act of worship. At a later period the divinity attaching to the corn was transferred to Devi, an anthropomorphic deity of a higher class, and in order to explain the customary slaughter of the buffalo, which had to be retained, the story became current that the beneficent goddess fought and slew the buffalo-demon which injured the crops, for the benefit of her worshippers, and the fast was observed and the buffalo sacrificed in commemoration of this event. It is possible that the sacrifice of the buffalo may have been a non-Aryan rite, as the Mundas still offer a buffalo to Deswāli, their forest god, in the sacred grove; and the Korwas of Sargūja have periodical sacrifices to Kāli in which many buffaloes are slaughtered. In the pictures of her fight with Bhainsāsūr, Devi is shown as riding on a tiger, and the uneducated might imagine the struggle to have resembled that between a tiger and a buffalo. As the destroyer of buffaloes and deer which graze on the crops the tiger may even be considered the cultivator's friend. But in the rural tracts Bhainsāsūr himself is still venerated in the guise of a corn-deity, and pig are perhaps offered to him as the animals which nowadays do most harm to the crops.

## Kunbi

[This article is based on the information collected for the District Gazetteers of the Central Provinces, manuscript notes furnished by Mr. A.K. Smith, C.S., and from papers by Pandit Pyāre Lāl Misra and Munshi Kanhya Lāl. The Kunbis are treated in the *Poona* and *Khāndesh* volumes of the *Bombay Gazetteer*. The caste has been taken as typical of the Marāthi-speaking Districts, and a fairly full description of the marriage and other ceremonies has therefore been given, some information on houses, dress and food being also reproduced from the *Wardha* and *Yeotmal District Gazetteers*.]

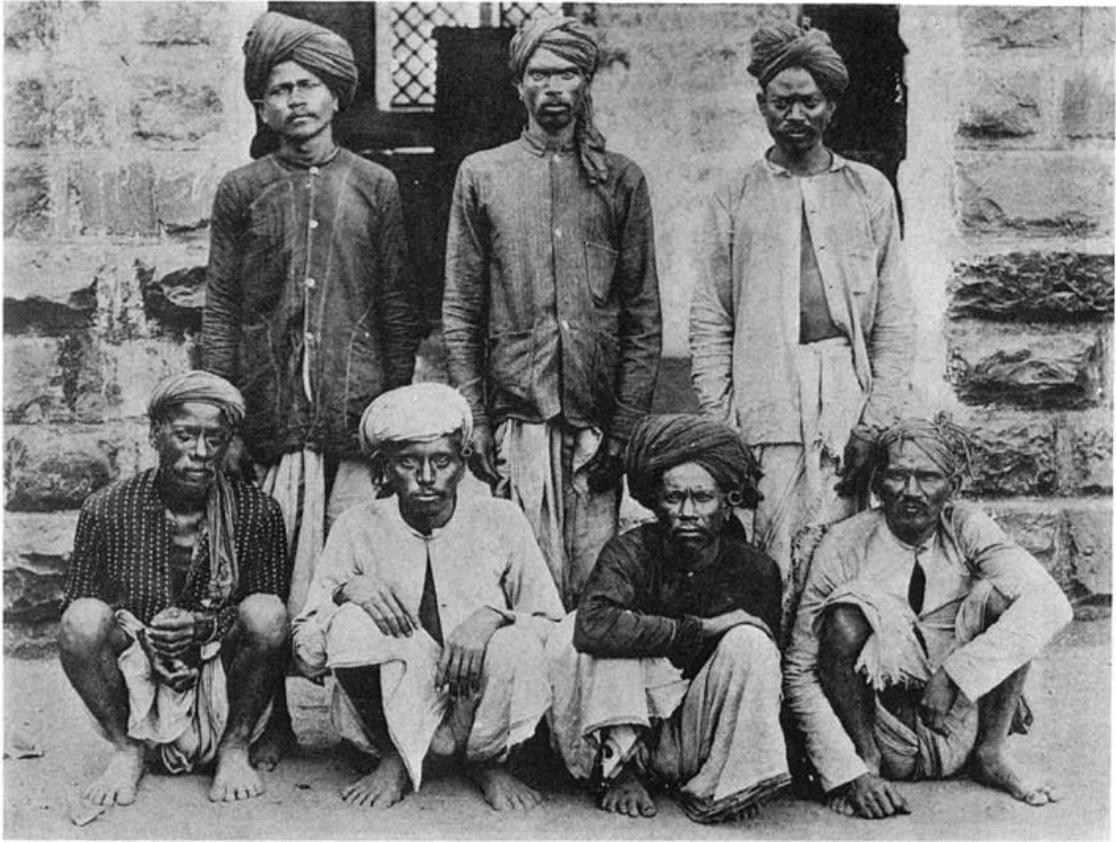
### 1. Distribution of the caste and origin of name

**Kunbi**—The great agricultural caste of the Marātha country. In the Central Provinces and Berār the Kunbis numbered nearly 1,400,000 persons in 1911; they belong to the Nāgpur, Chānda, Bhandāra, Wardha, Nimār and Betūl Districts of the Central Provinces. In Berār their strength was 800,000, or nearly a third of the total population. Here they form the principal cultivating class over the whole area except in the jungles of the north and south, but muster most strongly in the Buldāna District to the west, where in some tāluks nearly half the population belongs to the Kunbi caste. In the combined Province they are the most numerous caste except the Gonds. The name has various forms in Bombay, being Kunbi or Kulambi in the Deccan, Kulwādi in the south Konkan, Kanbi in Gujarāt, and Kulbi in Belgaum. In Sanskrit inscriptions it is given as Kutumbika (householder), and hence it has been derived from *kutumba*, a family. A chronicle of the eleventh century quoted by Forbes speaks of the Kutumbiks or cultivators of the *grāms*, or small villages.<sup>13</sup> Another writer describing the early Rājput dynasties says:<sup>14</sup> “The villagers were Koutombiks (householders) or husbandmen (Karshuks); the village headmen were Putkeels (patels).” Another suggested derivation is from a Dravidian root *kul* a husbandman or labourer; while that favoured by the caste and their neighbours is from *kun*, a root, or *kan* grain, and *bi*, seed; but this is too ingenious to be probable.

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<sup>13</sup> *Rāsmāla*, i. p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 241.



Group of Kunbis

## 2. Settlement in the Central Provinces

It is stated that the Kunbis entered Khāndesh from Gujarāt in the eleventh century, being forced to leave Gujarāt by the encroachments of Rājput tribes, driven south before the early Muhammadan invaders of northern India.<sup>15</sup> From Khāndesh they probably spread into Berār and the adjoining Nāgpur and Wardha Districts. It seems probable that their first settlement in Nāgpur and Wardha took place not later than the fourteenth century, because during the subsequent period of Gond rule we find the offices of Deshmukh and Deshpāndia in existence in this area. The Deshmukh was the manager or headman of a circle of villages and was responsible for apportioning and collecting the land revenue, while the Deshpāndia was a head *patwari* or accountant. The Deshmukhs were usually the leading Kunbis, and the titles are still borne by many families in Wardha and Nāgpur. These offices<sup>16</sup> belong to the Marātha country, and it seems necessary to suppose that their introduction into Wardha and Berār dates from a period at least as early as the fourteenth century, when these territories were included in the dominions of the Bahmani kings of Bījapur. A subsequent large influx of Kunbis into Wardha and Nāgpur took place in the eighteenth century with the conquest of Raghūji Bhonsla and the establishment of the Marātha kingdom of Nāgpur. Traces of these separate immigrations survive in the subdivisions of the caste, which will now be mentioned.

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<sup>15</sup> *Khāndesh Gazetteer*, p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. i. part ii. p. 34.

### 3. Subcastes

The internal structure of the Kunbi caste in the Central Provinces shows that it is a mixed occupational body recruited from different classes of the population. The Jhāre or jungly<sup>17</sup> Kunbis are the oldest immigrants and have no doubt an admixture of Gond blood. They do not break their earthen vessels after a death in the house. With them may be classed the Mānwa Kunbis of the Nāgpur District; these appear to be a group recruited from the Mānas, a primitive tribe who were dominant in Chānda perhaps even before the advent of the Gonds. The Mānwa Kunbi women wear their cloths drawn up so as to expose the thigh like the Gonds, and have some other primitive practices. They do not employ Brāhmans at their marriages, but consult a Mahār Mohtūria or soothsayer to fix the date of the ceremony. Other Kunbis will not eat with the Mānwas, and the latter retaliate in the usual manner by refusing to accept food from them; and say that they are superior to other Kunbis because they always use brass vessels for cooking and not earthen ones. Among the other subcastes in the Central Provinces are the Khaire, who take their name from the *khaīr*<sup>18</sup> or catechu tree, presumably because they formerly prepared catechu; this is a regular occupation of the forest tribes, with whom it may be supposed that the Khaire have some affinity. The Dhanoje are those who took to the occupation of tending *dhan*<sup>19</sup> or small stock, and they are probably an offshoot of the Dhangar or shepherd caste whose name is similarly derived. Like the Dhangar women they wear cocoanut-shell bangles, and the Mānwa Kunbis also do this; these bangles are not broken when a child is born, and hence the Dhanojes and Mānwas are looked down on by the other subcastes, who refuse to remove their leaf-plates after a feast. The name of the Khedule subcaste may be derived from *kheda* a village, while another version given by Mr. Kitts<sup>20</sup> is that it signifies 'A beardless youth.' The highest subcaste in the Central Provinces are the Tirole or Tilole, who now claim to be Rājput̄s. They say that their ancestors came from Therol in Rājputāna, and, taking to agriculture, gradually became merged with the Kunbis. Another more probable derivation of the name is from the *til* or sesamum plant. The families who held the hereditary office of Deshmukh, which conferred a considerable local position, were usually members of the Tirole subcaste, and they have now developed into a sort of aristocratic branch of the caste, and marry among themselves when matches can be arranged. They do not allow the remarriage of widows nor permit their women to accompany the wedding procession. The Wāndhekars are another group which also includes some Deshmukh families, and ranks next to the Tiroles in position. Mr. Kitts records a large number of subcastes in Berār.<sup>21</sup> Among them are some groups from northern India, as the Hindustāni, Pardesi, Dholewār, Jaiswār and Singrore; these are probably Kurmis who have settled in Berār and become amalgamated with the Kunbis. Similarly the Tailanges and Munurwārs appear to be an offshoot of the great Kāpu caste of cultivators in the Telugu country. The Wanjāri subcaste is a fairly large one and almost certainly represents a branch of the Banjāra caste of carriers, who have taken to agriculture and been promoted into the Kunbi community. The Lonhāre take their name from Lonār Mehkar, the well-known bitter lake of the Buldāna District, whose salt they may formerly have refined. The Ghātole are those who dwelt above the *ghāts* or passes of the Saihadri range to the south of the Berār plain. The Baone are an important subcaste both in Berār and the Central Provinces, and take their name from the phrase Bāwan Berār,<sup>22</sup> a term applied to the province by the Mughals because it paid fifty-two lakhs of revenue, as against only eight lakhs realised from the adjoining Jhādi or hill country in the Central

<sup>17</sup> From *jihār*, a tree or shrub.

<sup>18</sup> *Acacia catechu*.

<sup>19</sup> *Dhan* properly means wealth, *cf.* the two meanings of the word stock in English.

<sup>20</sup> *Berār Census Report* (1881), para. 180.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Bāwan* = fifty-two.

Provinces. In Chhindwāra is found a small local subcaste called Gādhao because they formerly kept donkeys, though they no longer do so; they are looked down on by the others who will not even take water from their hands. In Nimār is a group of Gujarāti Kunbis who are considered to have been originally Gūjars.<sup>23</sup> Their local subdivisions are Leve and Karwa and many of them are also known as Dālia, because they made the *dāl* or pulse of Burhānpur, which had a great reputation under native rule. It is said that it was formerly despatched daily to Sindhia's kitchen.

#### 4. The cultivating status

It appears then that a Kunbi has in the past been synonymous with a cultivator, and that large groups from other castes have taken to agriculture, have been admitted into the community and usually obtained a rise in rank. In many villages Kunbis are the only ryots, while below them are the village menials and artisans, several of whom perform functions at weddings or on other occasions denoting their recognition of the Kunbi as their master or employer; and beneath these again are the impure Mahārs or labourers. Thus at a Kunbi betrothal the services of the barber and washerman must be requisitioned; the barber washes the feet of the boy and girl and places vermilion on the foreheads of the guests. The washerman spreads a sheet on the ground on which the boy and girl sit. At the end of the ceremony the barber and washerman take the bride and bridegroom on their shoulders and dance to music in the marriage-shed; for this they receive small presents. After a death has occurred at a Kunbi's house the impurity is not removed until the barber and washerman have eaten in it. At a Kunbi's wedding the Gurao or village priest brings the leafy branches of five trees, the mango, *jāmun*<sup>24</sup> *umar*<sup>25</sup> and two others and deposits them at Māroti's temple, whence they are removed by the parents of the bride. Before a wedding again a Kunbi bride must go to the potter's house and be seated on his wheel while it is turned round seven times for good luck. At seed-time and harvest all the village menials go to the cultivator's field and present him with a specimen of their wares or make obeisance to him, receiving in return a small present of grain. This state of things seems to represent the primitive form of Hindu society from which the present widely ramified system, of castes may have expanded, and even now the outlines of the original structure may be discernible under all subsequent accretions.

#### 5. Exogamous septs

Each subcaste has a number of exogamous septs or clans which serve as a table of affinities in regulating marriage. The vernacular term for these is *kul*. Some of the septs are named after natural objects or animals, others from titles or nicknames borne by the reputed founder of the group, or from some other caste to which he may have belonged, while others again are derived from the names of villages which maybe taken to have been the original home of the sept or clan. The following are some septs of the Tirole subcaste: Kole, jackal; Wānkhede, a village; Kadu, bitter; Jagthāp, famous; Kadam, a tree; Meghe, a cloud; Lohekari, a worker in iron; Ughde, a child who has been exposed at birth; Shinde, a palm-tree; Hagre, one who suffers from diarrhoea; Aglāwe, an incendiary; Kalamkār, a writer; Wāni (Bania), a caste; Sutār, a carpenter, and so on. A few of the groups of the Bāone subcaste are:—Kāntode, one with a torn ear; Dokarmāre, a killer of pigs; Lūte, a plunderer; Titarmāre, a pigeon-killer; and of the Khedule: Patre, a leaf-plate; Ghoremāre, one who killed a horse; Bāgmāre, a tiger-slayer; Gadhe, a donkey; Burāde, one of the Burud or Basor caste; Nāktode, one with a broken nose, and so on. Each subcaste has a number of septs, a total of 66 being recorded for the Tiroles alone. The names of the septs confirm the hypothesis arrived at from a scrutiny of the subcastes

<sup>23</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Hindus of Gujarāt* p. 490, App. B, Gūjar.

<sup>24</sup> *Eugenia jambolana*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ficus glomerata*.

that the Kunbis are largely recruited from the pre-Aryan or aboriginal tribes. Conclusions as to the origin of the caste can better be made in its home in Bombay, but it may be noted that in Canara, according to the accomplished author of *A Naturalist on the Prowl*<sup>26</sup> the Kunbi is quite a primitive forest-dweller, who only a few years back lived by scattering his seed on patches of land burnt clear of vegetation, collecting myrobalans and other fruits, and snaring and trapping animals exactly like the Gonds and Baigas of the Central Provinces. Similarly in Nāsik it is stated that a large proportion of the Kunbi caste are probably derived from the primitive tribes<sup>27</sup>. Yet in the cultivated plains which he has so largely occupied, he is reckoned the equal in rank of the Kurmi and other cultivating castes of Hindustān, who in theory at any rate are of Aryan origin and of so high a grade of social purity that Brāhmans will take water from them. The only reasonable explanation of this rise in status appears to be that the Kunbi has taken possession of the land and has obtained the rank which from time immemorial belongs to the hereditary cultivator as a member and citizen of the village community. It is interesting to note that the Wanjāri Kunbis of Berār, who, being as already seen Banjāras, are of Rājput descent at any rate, now strenuously disclaim all connection with the Banjāra caste and regard their reception into the Kunbi community as a gain in status. At the same time the refusal of the Marātha Brāhmans to take water to drink from Kunbis may perhaps have been due to the recognition of their non-Aryan origin. Most of the Kunbis also eat fowls, which the cultivating castes of northern India would not usually do.

## 6. Restrictions on marriage of relatives

A man is forbidden to marry within his own sept or *kul*, or in that of his mother or either of his grandmothers. He may marry his wife's younger sister but not her elder sister. Alliances between first and second cousins are also prohibited except that a sister's son may be married to a brother's daughter. Such marriages are also favoured by the Marātha Brāhmans and other castes, and the suitability of the match is expressed in the saying *Ato ghari bhāsi sūn*, or 'At a sister's house her brother's daughter is a daughter-in-law.' The sister claims it as a right and not unfrequently there are quarrels if the brother decides to give his daughter to somebody else, while the general feeling is so strongly in favour of these marriages that the caste committee sometimes imposes a fine on fathers who wish to break through the rule. The fact that in this single case the marriage of near relatives is not only permitted but considered almost as an obligation, while in all other instances it is strictly prohibited, probably points to the conclusion that the custom is a survival of the matriarchate, when a brother's property would pass to his sister's son. Under such a law of inheritance he would naturally desire that his heir should be united to his own daughter, and this union might gradually become customary and at length almost obligatory. The custom in this case may survive when the reasons which justified it have entirely vanished. And while formerly it was the brother who would have had reason to desire the match for his daughter, it is now the sister who insists on it for her son, the explanation being that among the Kunbis as with other agricultural castes, to whom a wife's labour is a valuable asset, girls are expensive and a considerable price has to be paid for a bride.

## 7. Betrothal and marriage

Girls are usually married between the ages of five and eleven and boys between ten and twenty. The Kunbis still think it a mark of social distinction to have their daughters married as young as possible. The recognised bride-price is about twenty rupees, but much larger sums are often paid. The boy's father goes in search of a girl to be married to his son, and when the bride-price has been settled and the match arranged the ceremony of Māngni or betrothal takes place. In the first place

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<sup>26</sup> See the article entitled 'An Anthropoid.'

<sup>27</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer; Nāsik* p. 26.

the boy's father proceeds to his future daughter-in-law's house, where he washes her feet, smears her forehead with red powder and gives her a present of a rupee and some sweetmeats. All the party then eat together. This is followed by a visit of the girl's father to the boy's house where a similar ceremony is enacted and the boy is presented with a cocoanut, a *pagri* and cloth, and a silver or gold ring. Again the boy's relatives go to the girl's house and give her more valuable presents of jewellery and clothing. A Brāhman is afterwards consulted to fix the date of the marriage, but the poorer Kunbis dispense with his services as he charges two or three rupees. Prior to the ceremony the bodies of the bride and bridegroom are well massaged with vegetable oil and turmeric in their respective houses, partly with a view to enhance their beauty and also perhaps to protect them during the trying period of the ceremony when maleficent spirits are particularly on the alert. The marriage-shed is made of eleven poles festooned with leaves, and inside it are placed two posts of the *sāleh* (*Boswellia serrata*) or *umar* (*Ficus glomerata*) tree, one longer than the other, to represent the bride and bridegroom. Two jars filled with water are set near the posts, and a small earthen platform called *baola* is made. The bridegroom wears a yellow or white dress, and has a triangular frame of bamboo covered with tinsel over his forehead, which is known as *bāsing* and is a substitute for the *maur* or marriage-crown of the Hindustāni castes. Over his shoulder he carries a pickaxe as the representative implement of husbandry with one or two wheaten cakes tied to it. This is placed on the top of the marriage-shed and at the end of the five days' ceremonies the members of the families eat the dried cakes with milk, no outsider being allowed to participate. The *barāt* or wedding procession sets out for the bride's village, the women of the bridegroom's family accompanying it except among the Tirole Kunbis, who forbid the practice in order to demonstrate their higher social position. It is received on the border of the girl's village by her father and his friends and relatives, and conducted to the *janwāsa* or temporary lodging prepared for it, with the exception of the bridegroom, who is left alone before the shrine of Māroti or Hanumān. The bridegroom's father goes to the marriage-shed where he washes the bride's feet and gives her another present of clothes, and her relatives then proceed to Māroti's temple where they worship and make offerings, and return bringing the bridegroom with them. As he arrives at the marriage pavilion he touches it with a stick, on which the bride's brother who is seated above the shed pours down some water and is given a present of money by the bridegroom. The bridegroom's feet are then washed by his father-in-law and he is given a yellow cloth which he wears. The couple are made to stand on two wooden planks opposite each other with a curtain between them, the bridegroom facing east and the bride west, holding some Akshata or rice covered with saffron in their hands. As the sun sets the officiating Brāhman gets on to the roof of the house and repeats the marriage texts from there. At his signal the couple throw the rice over each other, the curtain between them is withdrawn, and they change their seats. The assembled party applaud and the marriage proper is over. The Brāhman marks their foreheads with rice and turmeric and presses them together. He then seats them on the earthen platform or *baola*, and ties their clothes together, this being known as the Brahma Gānthi or Brāhman's knot. The wedding usually takes place on the day after the arrival of the marriage procession and another two days are consumed in feasting and worshipping the deities. When the bride and bridegroom return home after the wedding one of the party waves a pot of water round their heads and throws it away at a little distance on the ground, and after this some grain in the same manner. This is a provision of food and drink to any evil spirits who may be hovering round the couple, so that they may stop to consume it and refrain from entering the house. The expenses of the bride's family may vary from Rs. 60 to Rs. 100 and those of the bridegroom's from Rs. 160 to Rs. 600. A wedding carried out on a lavish scale by a well-to-do man is known as Lāl Biāh or a red marriage, but when the parties are poor the expenses are curtailed and it is then called Safed Biāh or a white marriage. In this case the bridegroom's mother does not accompany the wedding procession and the proceedings last only two days. The bride goes back with the wedding procession for a few days to her husband's house and then returns home. When she arrives at maturity her parents give a feast to the caste and send her to her husband's house, this occasion being known as Bolvan (the

calling). The Karwa Kunbis of Nimār have a peculiar rule for the celebration of marriages. They have a *guru* or priest in Gujarāt who sends them a notice once in every ten or twelve years, and in this year only marriages can be performed. It is called *Singhast ki sāl* and is the year in which the planet Guru (Jupiter) comes into conjunction with the constellation Sinh (Leo). But the Karwas themselves think that there is a large temple in Gujarāt with a locked door to which there is no key. But once in ten or twelve years the door unlocks of itself, and in that year their marriages are celebrated. A certain day is fixed and all the weddings are held on it together. On this occasion children from infants in arms to ten or twelve years are married, and if a match cannot be arranged for them they will have to wait another ten or twelve years. A girl child who is born on the day fixed for weddings may, however, be married twelve days afterwards, the twelfth night being called Māndo Rāt, and on this occasion any other weddings which may have been unavoidably postponed owing to a death or illness in the families may also be completed. The rule affords a loophole of escape for the victims of any such *contretemps* and also insures that every girl shall be married before she is fully twelve years old. Rather than not marry their daughter in the *Singhast ki sāl* before she is twelve the parents will accept any bridegroom, even though he be very poor or younger than the bride. This is the same year in which the celebration of marriages is forbidden among the Hindus generally. The other Kunbis have the general Hindu rule that weddings are forbidden during the four months from the 11th Asārḥ Sudi (June) to the 11th Kārtik Sudi (October). This is the period of the rains, when the crops are growing and the gods are said to go to sleep, and it is observed more or less as a time of abstinence and fasting. The Hindus should properly abstain from eating sugarcane, brinjals, onions, garlic and other vegetables for the whole four months. On the 12th of Kārtik the marriage of Tulsi or the basil plant with the Sāligrām or ammonite representing Vishnu is performed and all these vegetables are offered to her and afterwards generally consumed. Two days afterwards, beginning from the 14th of Kārtik, comes the Diwāli festival. In Betūl the bridal couple are seated in the centre of a square made of four plough yokes, while a leaf of the pīpal tree and a piece of turmeric are tied by a string round both their wrists. The untying of the string by the local Brāhman constitutes the essential and binding portion of the marriage. Among the Lonhāre subcaste a curious ceremony is performed after the wedding. A swing is made, and a round pestle, which is supposed to represent a child, is placed on it and swung to and fro. It is then taken off and placed in the lap of the bride, and the effect of performing this symbolical ceremony is supposed to be that she will soon become a mother.

## 8. Polygamy and divorce

Polygamy is permitted but rarely practised, a second wife being only taken if the first be childless or of bad character, or destitute of attractions. Divorce is allowed, but in some localities at any rate a divorced woman cannot marry again unless she is permitted to do so in writing by her first husband. If a girl be seduced before marriage a fine is imposed on both parties and they are readmitted to social intercourse, but are not married to each other. Curiously enough, in the Tirole and Wāndhekar, the highest subcastes, the keeping of a woman is not an offence entailing temporary exclusion from caste, whereas among the lower subcastes it is.<sup>28</sup>

## 9. Widow-marriage

The Kunbis permit the remarriage of widows, with the exception of the Deshmukh families of the Tirole subcaste who have forbidden it. If a woman's husband dies she returns to her father's house and he arranges her second marriage, which is called *choli-pātal*, or giving her new clothes. He takes a price for her which may vary from twenty-five to five hundred rupees according to the age and attractions of the woman. A widow may marry any one outside the family of her deceased husband,

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<sup>28</sup> This is the rule in the Nāgpur District.

but she may not marry his younger brother. This union, which among the Hindustāni castes is looked upon as most suitable if not obligatory, is strictly forbidden among the Marātha castes, the reason assigned being that a wife stands in the position of a mother to her husband's younger brothers. The contrast is curious. The ceremony of widow-marriage is largely governed by the idea of escaping or placating the wrath of the first husband's ghost, and also of its being something to be ashamed of and contrary to orthodox Hinduism. It always takes place in the dark fortnight of the month and always at night. Sometimes no women are present, and if any do attend they must be widows, as it would be the worst of omens for a married woman or unmarried girl to witness the ceremony. This, it is thought, would lead to her shortly becoming a widow herself. The bridegroom goes to the widow's house with his male friends and two wooden seats are set side by side. On one of these a betel-nut is placed which represents the deceased husband of the widow. The new bridegroom advances with a small wooden sword, touches the nut with its tip, and then kicks it off the seat with his right toe. The barber picks up the nut and burns it. This is supposed to lay the deceased husband's spirit and prevent his interference with the new union. The bridegroom then takes the seat from which the nut has been displaced and the woman sits on the other side to his left. He puts a necklace of beads round her neck and the couple leave the house in a stealthy fashion and go to the husband's village. It is considered unlucky to see them as they go away because the second husband is regarded in the light of a robber. Sometimes they stop by a stream on the way home, and, taking off the woman's clothes and bangles, bury them by the side of the stream. An exorcist may also be called in, who will confine the late husband's spirit in a horn by putting in some grains of wheat, and after sealing up the horn deposit it with the clothes. When a widower or widow marries a second time and is afterwards attacked by illness, it is ascribed to the illwill of their former partner's spirit. The metal image of the first husband or wife is then made and worn as an amulet on the arm or round the neck. A bachelor who wishes to marry a widow must first go through a mock ceremony with an *ākra* or swallow-wort plant, as the widow-marriage is not considered a real one, and it is inauspicious for any one to die without having been properly married once. A similar ceremony must be gone through when a man is married for the third time, as it is held that if he marries a woman for the third time he will quickly die. The *ākra* or swallow-wort (*Calotropis gigantea*) is a very common plant growing on waste land with mauve or purple flowers. When cut or broken a copious milky juice exudes from the stem, and in some places parents are said to poison children whom they do not desire to keep alive by rubbing this on their lips.

## 10. Customs at birth

During her monthly impurity a woman stays apart and may not cook for herself nor touch anybody nor sleep on a bed made of cotton thread. As soon as she is in this condition she will untie the cotton threads confining her hair and throw them away, letting her hair hang down. This is because they have become impure. But if there is no other woman in the house and she must continue to do the household work herself, she does not throw them away until the last day.<sup>29</sup> Similarly she must not sleep on a cotton sheet or mattress during this time because she would defile it, but she may sleep on a woollen blanket as wool is a holy material and is not defiled. At the end of the period she proceeds to a stream and purifies herself by bathing and washing her head with earth. When a woman is with child for the first time her women friends come and give her new green clothes and bangles in the seventh month; they then put her into a swing and sing songs. While she is pregnant she is made to work in the house so as not to be inactive. After the birth of a child the mother remains impure for twelve days. A woman of the Māng or Mahār caste acts as midwife, and always breaks her bangles and puts on new ones after she has assisted at a birth. If delivery is prolonged the woman is given hot water and sugar or camphor wrapped in a betel-leaf, or they put a few grains of gram into her hand

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<sup>29</sup> From a note by Mr. A. K. Smith, C.S.

and then someone takes and feeds them to a mare, as it is thought that the woman's pregnancy has been prolonged by her having walked behind the tethering-ropes of a mare, which is twelve months in foal. Or she is given water to drink in which a Sulaimāni onyx or a rupee of Akbar's time has been washed; in the former case the idea is perhaps that a passage will be made for the child like the hole through the bead, while the virtue of the rupee probably consists in its being a silver coin and having the image or device of a powerful king like Akbar. Or it may be thought that as the coin has passed from hand to hand for so long, it will facilitate the passage of the child from the womb. A pregnant woman must not look on a dead body or her child may be still-born, and she must not see an eclipse or the child may be born maimed. Some believe that if a child is born during an eclipse it will suffer from lung-disease; so they make a silver model of the moon while the eclipse lasts and hang it round the child's neck as a charm. Sometimes when delivery is delayed they take a folded flower and place it in a pot of water and believe that as its petals unfold so the womb will be opened and the child born; or they seat the woman on a wooden bench and pour oil on her head, her forehead being afterwards rubbed with it in the belief that as the oil falls so the child will be born. If a child is a long time before learning to speak they give it leaves of the pīpal tree to eat, because the leaves of this tree make a noise by rustling in the wind; or a root which is very light in weight, because they think that the tongue is heavy and the quality of lightness will thus be communicated to it. Or the mother, when she has kneaded dough and washed her hands afterwards, will pour a drop or two of the water down the child's throat. And the water which made her hands clean and smooth will similarly clear the child's throat of the obstruction which prevented it from speaking. If a child's neck is weak and its head rolls about they make it look at a crow perching on the house and think this will make its neck strong like the crow's. If he cannot walk they make a little triangle on wheels with a pole called *ghurghuri*, and make him walk holding on to the pole. The first teeth of the child are thrown on to the roof of the house, because the rats, who have especially good and sharp teeth, live there, and it is hoped that the child's second teeth may grow like theirs. A few grains of rice are also thrown so that the teeth may be hard and pointed like the rice; the same word, *kani*, being used for the end of a grain of rice and the tip of a tooth. Or the teeth are placed under a water-pot in the hope that the child's second teeth may grow as fast as the grass does under water-pots. If a child is lean some people take it to a place where asses have lain down and rolled in ashes; they roll the child in the ashes similarly and believe that it will get fat like the asses are. Or they may lay the child in a pigsty with the same idea. People who want to injure a child get hold of its coat and lay it out in the sun to dry, in the belief that the child's body will dry up in a similar manner. In order to avert the evil eye they burn some turmeric and juāri flour and hold the newly-born child in the smoke. It is also branded on the stomach with a burning piece of turmeric, perhaps to keep off cold. For the first day or two after birth a child is given cow's milk mixed with water or honey and a little castor oil, and after this it is suckled by the mother. But if she is unable to nourish it a wet-nurse is called in, who may be a woman of low caste or even a Muhammadan. The mother is given no regular food for the first two days, but only some sugar and spices. Until the child is six months old its head and body are oiled every second or third day and the body is well hand-rubbed and bathed. The rubbing is meant to make the limbs supple and the oil to render the child less susceptible to cold. If a child when sitting soon after birth looks down through its legs they think it is looking for its companions whom it has left behind and that more children will be born. It is considered a bad sign if a child bites its upper teeth on its underlip; this is thought to prognosticate illness and the child is prevented from doing so as far as possible.

## 11. Sixth and twelfth day ceremonies

On the sixth day after birth they believe that Chhathi or Satwai Devi, the Sixth-day Goddess, comes at midnight and writes on the child's forehead its fate in life, which writing, it is said, may be seen on a man's skull when the flesh has come off it after death. On this night the women of the

family stay awake all night singing songs and eating sweetmeats. A picture of the goddess is drawn with turmeric and vermilion over the mother's bed. The door of the birth-room is left open, and at midnight she comes. Sometimes a Sunār is employed to make a small image of Chhathi Devi, for which he is paid Rs. 1–4, and it is hung round the child's neck. On this day the mother is given to eat all kinds of grain, and among flesh-eating castes the soup of fish and meat, because it is thought that every kind of food which the mother eats this day will be easily digested by the child throughout its life. On this day the mother is given a second bath, the first being on the day of the birth, and she must not bathe in between. Sometimes after childbirth a woman buys several bottles of liquor and has a bath in it; the stimulating effect of the spirit is supposed to remedy the distension of the body caused by the birth. If the child is a boy it is named on the twelfth and if a girl on the thirteenth day. On the twelfth day the mother's bangles are thrown away and new ones put on. The Kunbis are very kind to their children, and never harsh or quick-tempered, but this may perhaps be partly due to their constitutional lethargy. They seldom refuse a child anything, but taking advantage of its innocence will by dissimulation make it forget what it wanted. The time arrives when this course of conduct is useless, and then the child learns to mistrust the word of its parents. Minute quantities of opium are generally administered to children as a narcotic.

## 12. Devices for procuring children

If a woman is barren and has no children one of the remedies prescribed by the Sarodis or wandering soothsayers is that she should set fire to somebody's house, going alone and at night to perform the deed. So long as some small part of the house is burnt it does not matter if the fire be extinguished, but the woman should not give the alarm herself. It is supposed that the spirit of some insect which is burnt will enter her womb and be born as a child. Perhaps she sets fire to someone else's house so as to obtain the spirit of one of the family's dead children, which may be supposed to have entered the insects dwelling on the house. Some years ago at Bhāndak in Chānda complaints were made of houses being set on fire. The police officer<sup>30</sup> sent to investigate found that other small fires continued to occur. He searched the roofs of the houses, and on two or three found little smouldering balls of rolled-up cloth. Knowing of the superstition he called all the childless married women of the place together and admonished them severely, and the fires stopped. On another occasion the same officer's wife was ill, and his little son, having fever, was sent daily to the dispensary for medicine in charge of a maid. One morning he noticed on one of the soles of the boy's feet a stain of the juice of the *bhilawa*<sup>31</sup> or marking-nut tree, which raises blisters on the skin. On looking at the other foot he found six similar marks, and on inquiry he learned that these were made by a childless woman in the expectation that the boy would soon die and be born again as her child. The boy suffered no harm, but his mother, being in bad health, nearly died of shock on learning of the magic practised against her son.

Another device is to make a *pradakshana* or pilgrimage round a pīpal tree, going naked at midnight after worshipping Māroti or Hanumān, and holding a necklace of *tulsi* beads in the hand. The pīpal is of course a sacred tree, and is the abode of Brahma, the original creator of the world. Brahma has no consort, and it is believed that while all other trees are both male and female the pīpal is only male, and is capable of impregnating a woman and rendering her fertile. A variation of this belief is that pīpal trees are inhabited by the spirits of unmarried Brāhman boys, and hence a woman sometimes takes a piece of new thread and winds it round the tree, perhaps with the idea of investing the spirit of the boy with the sacred thread. She will then walk round the tree as a symbol of the wedding ceremony of walking round the sacred post, and hopes that the boy, being thus brought to

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<sup>30</sup> Circle Inspector Ganesh Prasād.

<sup>31</sup> *Semicarpus anacardium*.

man's estate and married, will cause her to bear a son. But modest women do not go naked round the tree. The Amawas or New Moon day, if it falls on a Monday, is specially observed by married women. On this day they will walk 108 times round a pīpal tree, and then give 108 mangoes or other fruits to a Brahman, choosing a different fruit every time. The number 108 means a hundred and a little more to show there is no stint, 'Full measure and flowing over,' like the customary present of Rs. 1–4 instead of a rupee. This is also no doubt a birth-charm, fruit being given so that the woman may become fruitful. Or a childless woman will pray to Hanumān or Mahābir. Every morning she will go to his shrine with an offering of fruit or flowers, and every evening will set a lamp burning there; and morning and evening, prostrating herself, she makes her continuous prayer to the god: '*Oh, Mahābir, Mahārāj! hamko ek batcha do, sirf ek batcha do.*'<sup>32</sup> Then, after many days, Mahābir, as might be anticipated, appears to her in a dream and promises her a child. It does not seem that they believe that Mahābir himself directly renders the woman fertile, because similar prayers are made to the River Nerbudda, a goddess. But perhaps he, being the god of strength, lends virile power to her husband. Another prescription is to go to the burying-ground, and, after worshipping it, to take some of the bone-ash of a burnt corpse and wear this wrapped up in an amulet on the body. Occasionally, if a woman can get no children she will go to the father of a large family and let him beget a child upon her, with or without the connivance of her husband. But only the more immodest women do this. Or she cuts a piece off the breast-cloth of a woman who has children, and, after burning incense on it, wears it as an amulet. For a stronger charm she will take a piece of such a woman's cloth and a lock of her hair and some earth which her feet have pressed and bury these in a pot before Devi's shrine, sometimes fashioning an image of the woman out of them. Then, as they rot away, the child-bearing power of the fertile woman will be transferred to her. If a woman's first children have died and she wishes to preserve a later one, she sometimes weighs the child against sugar or copper and distributes the amount in charity. Or she gives the child a bad name, such as Dagharia (a stone), Kachria (sweepings), Ukandia (a dunghill).

### 13. Love charms

If a woman's husband is not in love with her, a prescription of a *Mohani* or love-charm given by the wise women is that she should kill an owl and serve some of its flesh to her husband as a charm. "It has not occurred," Mr. Kipling writes, "to the oriental jester to speak of a boiled owl in connection with intoxication, but when a husband is abjectly submissive to his wife her friends say that she has given him boiled owl's flesh to eat."<sup>33</sup> If a man is in love with some woman and wishes to kindle a similar sentiment in her the following method is given: On a Saturday night he should go to a graveyard and call out, 'I am giving a dinner tomorrow night, and I invite you all to attend.' Then on the Sunday night he takes cocoanuts, sweetmeats, liquor and flowers to the cemetery and sets them all out, and all the spirits or Shaitans come and partake. The host chooses a particularly big Shaitan and calls to him to come near and says to him, 'Will you go with me and do what I ask you.' If the spirit assents he follows the man home. Next night the man again offers cocoanuts and incense to the Shaitan, whom he can see by night but not by day, and tells him to go to the woman's house and call her. Then the spirit goes and troubles her heart, so that she falls in love with the man and has no rest till she goes to him. If the man afterwards gets tired of her he will again secretly worship and call up the Shaitan and order him to turn the woman's inclination away. Another method is to fetch a skull from a graveyard and go to a banyan tree at midnight. There, divesting himself of his clothes, the operator partially cooks some rice in the skull, and then throws it against the tree; he gathers all the grains that stick to the trunk in one box and those that fall to the ground in another box, and the

<sup>32</sup> 'Oh, Lord Mahābir, give me a child, only one child.'

<sup>33</sup> *Beast and Man in India*, p. 44. But, according to the same writer, the Hindus do say, 'Drunk as an owl' and also 'Stupid as an owl.'

first rice given to the woman to eat will turn her inclination towards him, while the second will turn it away from him. This is a sympathetic charm, the rice which sticks to the tree having the property of attracting the woman.

## 14. Disposal of the dead

The Kunbis either bury or burn the dead. In Berār sepulture is the more common method of disposal, perhaps in imitation of the Muhammadans. Here the village has usually a field set apart for the disposal of corpses, which is known as Smashān. Hindus fill up the earth practically level with the ground after burial and erect no monument, so that after a few years another corpse can be buried in the same place. When a Kunbi dies the body is washed in warm water and placed on a bier made of bamboos, with a network of *san*-hemp.<sup>34</sup> Ordinary rope must not be used. The mourners then take it to the grave, scattering almonds, sandalwood, dates, betel-leaf and small coins as they go. These are picked up by the menial Mahārs or labourers. Halfway to the grave the corpse is set down and the bearers change their positions, those behind going in front. Here a little wheat and pulse which have been tied in the cloth covering the corpse are left by the way. On the journey to the grave the body is covered with a new unwashed cloth. The grave is dug three or four feet deep, and the corpse is buried naked, lying on its back with the head to the south. After the burial one of the mourners is sent to get an earthen pot from the Kurnhār; this is filled with water at a river or stream, and a small piece is broken out of it with a stone; one of the mourners then takes the pot and walks round the corpse with it, dropping a stream of water all the way. Having done this, he throws the pot behind him over his shoulder without looking round, and then all the mourners go home without looking behind them. The stone with which the hole has been made in the earthen pot is held to represent the spirit of the deceased. It is placed under a tree or on the bank of a stream, and for ten days the mourners come and offer it *pindās* or balls of rice, one ball being offered on the first day, two on the second, and so on, up to ten on the tenth. On this last day a little mound of earth is made, which is considered to represent Mahādeo. Four miniature flags are planted round, and three cakes of rice are laid on it; and all the mourners sit round the mound until a crow comes and eats some of the cake. Then they say that the dead man's spirit has been freed from troubling about his household and mundane affairs and has departed to the other world. But if no real crow comes to eat the cake, they make a representation of one out of the sacred *kusha* grass, and touch the cake with it and consider that a crow has eaten it. After this the mourners go to a stream and put a little cow's urine on their bodies, and dip ten times in the water or throw it over them. The officiating Brāhman sprinkles them with holy water in which he has dipped the toe of his right foot, and they present to the Brāhman the vessels in which the funeral cakes have been cooked and the clothes which the chief mourner has worn for ten days. On coming home they also give him a stick, umbrella, shoes, a bed and anything else which they think the dead man will want in the next world. On the thirteenth day they feed the caste-fellows and the head of the caste ties a new *pagri* on the chief mourner's head backside foremost; and the chief mourner breaking an areca-nut on the threshold places it in his mouth and spits it out of the door, signifying the final ejection of the deceased's spirit from the house. Finally, the chief mourner goes to worship at Maroti's shrine, and the household resumes its ordinary life. The different relatives of the deceased man usually invite the bereaved family to their house for a day and give them a feast, and if they have many relations this may go on for a considerable time. The complete procedure as detailed above is observed only in the case of the head of the household, and for less important members is considerably abbreviated. The position of chief mourner is occupied by a man's eldest son, or in the absence of sons by his younger brother, or failing him by the eldest son of an elder brother, or failing male relations by the widow. The chief mourner is considered to

<sup>34</sup> *Crotalaria juncea*.

have a special claim to the property. He has the whole of his head and face shaved, and the hair is tied up in a corner of the grave-cloth. If the widow is chief mourner a small lock of her hair is cut off and tied up in the cloth. When the corpse is being carried out for burial the widow breaks her *mangalsūtram* or marriage necklace, and wipes off the *kunku* or vermilion from her forehead. This necklace consists of a string of black glass beads with a piece of gold, and is always placed on the bride's neck at the wedding. The widow does not break her glass bangles at all, but on the eleventh day changes them for new ones.

## 15. Mourning

The period of mourning for adults of the family is ten days, and for children three, while in the case of distant relatives it is sufficient to take a bath as a mark of respect for them. The male mourners shave their heads, the walls of the house are whitewashed and the floor spread with cowdung. The chief mourner avoids social intercourse and abstains from ordinary work and from all kinds of amusements. He debars himself from such luxuries as betel-leaf and from visiting his wife. Oblations are offered to the dead on the third day of the light fortnight of Baisākh (June) and on the last day of Bhādrapad (September). The Kunbi is a firm believer in the action of ghosts and spirits, and never omits the attentions due to his ancestors. On the appointed day he diligently calls on the crows, who represent the spirits of ancestors, to come and eat the food which he places ready for them; and if no crow turns up, he is disturbed at having incurred the displeasure of the dead. He changes the food and goes on calling until a crow comes, and then concludes that their previous failure to appear was due to the fact that his ancestors were not pleased with the kind of food he first offered. In future years, therefore, he changes it, and puts out that which was eaten, until a similar *contretemps* of the non-appearance of crows again occurs. The belief that the spirits of the dead pass into crows is no doubt connected with that of the crow's longevity. Many Hindus think that a crow lives a thousand years, and others that it never dies of disease, but only when killed by violence. Tennyson's 'many-wintered crow' may indicate some similar idea in Europe. Similarly if the Gonds find a crow's nest they give the nestlings to young children to eat, and think that this will make them long-lived. If a crow perches in the house when a woman's husband or other relative is away, she says, 'Fly away, crow; fly away and I will feed you'; and if the crow then flies away she thinks that the absent one will return. Here the idea is no doubt that if he had been killed his spirit might have come home in the shape of the crow perching on the house. If a married woman sees two crows breeding it is considered a very bad omen, the effect being that her husband will soon die. It is probably supposed that his spirit will pass into the young crow which is born as a result of the meeting which she has seen.

Mr. A. K. Smith states that the omen applies to men also, and relates a story of a young advocate who saw two crows thus engaged on alighting from the train at some station. In order to avert the consequences he ran to the telegraph office and sent messages to all his relatives and friends announcing his own death, the idea being that this fictitious death would fulfil the omen, and the real death would thus become unnecessary. In this case the belief would be that the man's own spirit would pass into the young crow.

## 16. Religion

The principal deities of the caste are Māroti or Hanumān, Mahādeo or Siva, Devi, Satwai and Khandoba. Māroti is worshipped principally on Saturdays, so that he may counteract the evil influences exercised by the planet Saturn on that day. When a new village is founded Māroti must first be brought and placed in the village and worshipped, and after this houses are built. The name Māroti is derived from Marut, the Vedic god of the wind, and he is considered to be the son of Vāyu, the wind, and Anjini. Khandoba is an incarnation of Siva as a warrior, and is the favourite deity of the Marāthas. Devi is usually venerated in her Incarnation of Marhai Māta, the goddess of smallpox

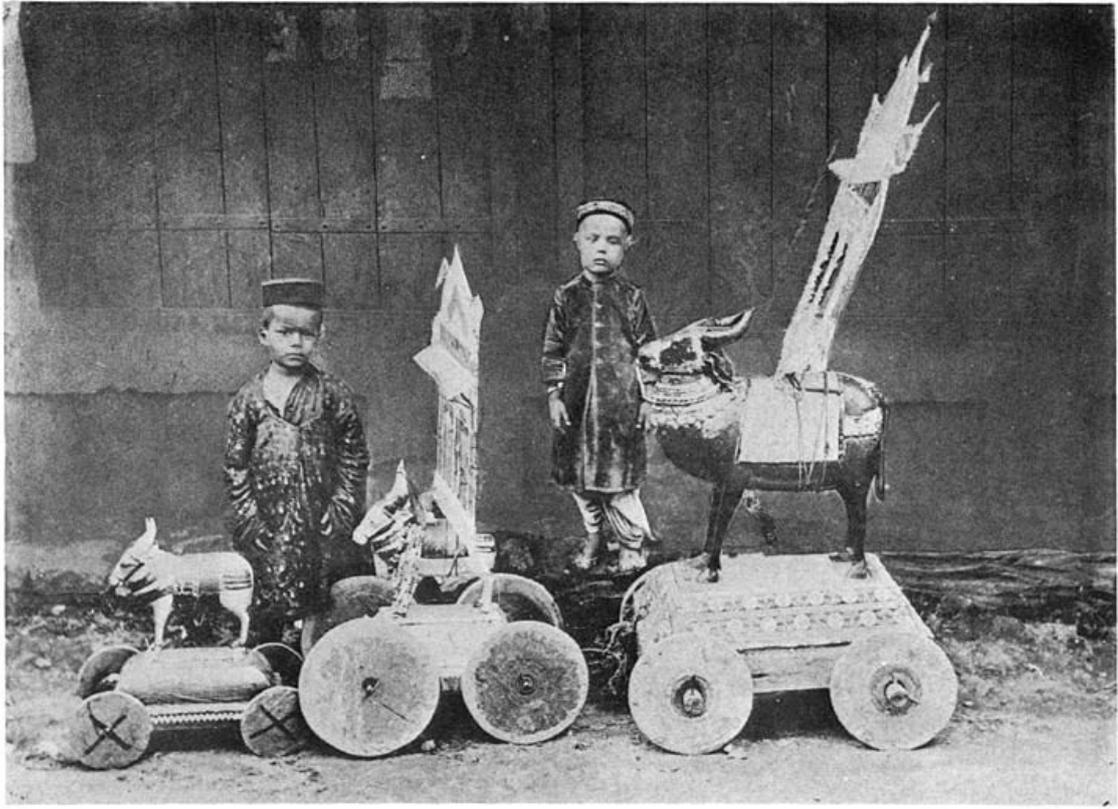
and cholera—the most dreaded scourges of the Hindu villager. They offer goats and fowls to Marhai Devi, cutting the throat of the animal and letting its blood drop over the stone, which represents the goddess; after this they cut off a leg and hang it to the tree above her shrine, and eat the remainder. Sometimes also they offer wooden images of human beings, which are buried before the shrine of the goddess and are obviously substitutes for a human sacrifice; and the lower castes offer pigs. If a man dies of snake-bite they make a little silver image of a snake, and then kill a real snake, and make a platform outside the village and place the image on it, which is afterwards regularly worshipped as Nāgoba Deo. They may perhaps think that the spirit of the snake which is killed passes into the silver image. Somebody afterwards steals the image, but this does not matter. Similarly if a man is killed by a tiger he is deified and worshipped as Bāghoba Deo, though they cannot kill a tiger as a preliminary. The Kunbis make images of their ancestors in silver or brass, and keep them in a basket with their other household deities. But when these get too numerous they take them on a pilgrimage to some sacred river and deposit them in it. A man who has lost both parents will invite some man and woman on Akshaya Tritiya,<sup>35</sup> and call them by the names of his parents, and give them a feast. Among the mythological stories known to the caste is one of some interest, explaining how the dark spots came on the face of the moon. They say that once all the gods were going to a dinner-party, each riding on his favourite animal or *vāhan* (conveyance). But the *vāhan* of Ganpati, the fat god with the head of an elephant, was a rat, and the rat naturally could not go as fast as the other animals, and as it was very far from being up to Ganpati's weight, it tripped and fell, and Ganpati came off. The moon was looking on, and laughed so much that Ganpati was enraged, and cursed it, saying, 'Thy face shall be black for laughing at me.' Accordingly the moon turned quite black; but the other gods interfered, and said that the curse was too hard, so Ganpati agreed that only a part of the moon's face should be blackened in revenge for the insult. This happened on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Bhādon (September), and on that day it is said that nobody should look at the moon, as if he does, his reputation will probably be lowered by some false charge or libel being promulgated against him. As already stated, the Kunbi firmly believes in the influence exercised by spirits, and a proverb has it, 'Brāhmans die of indigestion, Sunārs from bile, and Kunbis from ghosts'; because the Brāhman is always feasted as an act of charity and given the best food, so that he over-eats himself, while the Sunār gets bilious from sitting all day before a furnace. When somebody falls ill his family get a Brāhman's cast-off sacred thread, and folding it to hold a little lamp, will wave this to and fro. If it moves in a straight line they say that the patient is possessed by a spirit, but if in a circle that his illness is due to natural causes. In the former case they promise an offering to the spirit to induce it to depart from the patient. The Brāhmans, it is said, try to prevent the Kunbis from getting hold of their sacred threads, because they think that by waving the lamp in them, all the virtue which they have obtained by their repetitions of the Gāyatri or sacred prayer is transferred to the sick Kunbi. They therefore tear up their cast-off threads or sew them into clothes.

## 17. The Pola festival

The principal festival of the Kunbis is the Pola, falling at about the middle of the rainy season, when they have a procession of plough-bullocks. An old bullock goes first, and on his horns is tied the *makhar*, a wooden frame with pegs to which torches are affixed. They make a rope of mango-leaves stretched between two posts, and the *makhar* bullock is made to break this and stampede back to the village, followed by all the other cattle. It is said that the *makhar* bullock will die within three years. Behind him come the bullocks of the proprietors and then those of the tenants in the order, not so much of their wealth, but of their standing in the village and of the traditional position held by their families. A Kunbi feels it very bitterly if he is not given what he considers to be his proper

<sup>35</sup> The 3rd Baisākh (May) Sudi, the commencement of the agricultural year. The name means, 'The day of immortality.'

rank in this procession. It has often been remarked that the feudal feeling of reverence for hereditary rights and position is as strong among the Marātha people as anywhere in the world.



Figures of animals made for Pola festival

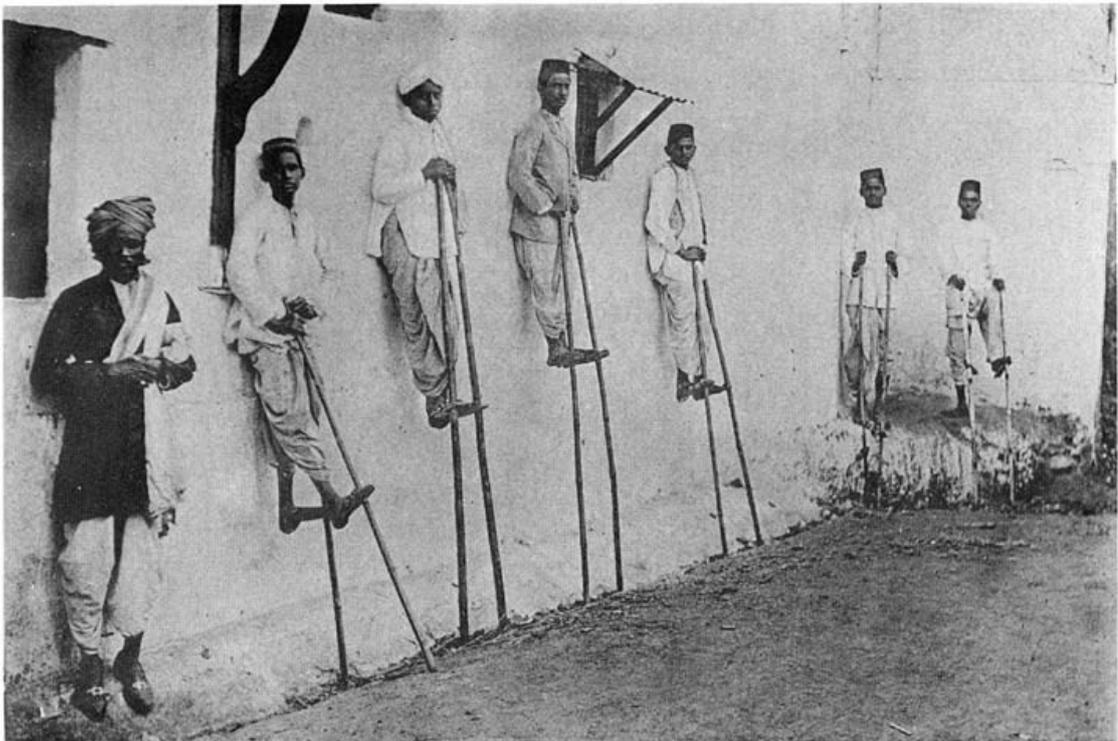
## 18. Muhammadan tendencies of Berār Kunbis

In Wardha and Berār the customs of the Kunbis show in several respects the influence of Islām, due no doubt to the long period of Muhammadan dominance in the country. To this may perhaps be attributed the prevalence of burial of the dead instead of cremation, the more respectable method according to Hindu ideas. The Dhanoje Kunbis commonly revere Dāwal Mālik, a Muhammadan saint, whose tomb is at Uprai in Amraoti District. An *urus* or fair is held here on Thursdays, the day commonly sacred to Muhammadan saints, and on this account the Kunbis will not be shaved on Thursdays. They also make vows of mendicancy at the Muharram festival, and go round begging for rice and pulse; they give a little of what they obtain to Muhammadan beggars and eat the rest. At the Muharram they tie a red thread on their necks and dance round the *alāwa*, a small hole in which fire is kindled in front of the *tāsias* or tombs of Hussain. At the Muharram<sup>36</sup> they also carry horseshoes of silver or gilt tinsel on the top of a stick decorated with peacock's feathers. The horseshoe is a model of that of the horse of Hussain. The men who carry these horseshoes are supposed to be possessed by the spirit of the saint, and people make prayers to them for anything they want. If one of the horseshoes is dropped the finder will keep it in his house, and next year if he feels that the spirit moves him will carry it himself. In Wardha the Kunbis worship Khwāja Sheikh Farīd of Girar, and occasionally Sheikh Farīd appears to a Kunbi in a dream and places him under a vow. Then he and all his household make little imitation beggars' wallets of cloth and dye them with red ochre, and

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<sup>36</sup> Furnished by Inspector Ganesh Prasād.

little hoes on the model of those which saises use to drag out horses' dung, this hoe being the badge of Sheikh Farīd. Then they go round begging to all the houses in the village, saying, 'Dam,<sup>37</sup> Sāhib, dam.' With the alms given them they make cakes of *malīda*, wheat, sugar and butter, and give them to the priest of the shrine. Sometimes Sheikh Farīd tells the Kunbi in the dream that he must buy a goat of a certain Dhangar (shepherd), naming the price, while the Dhangar is similarly warned to sell it at the same price, and the goat is then purchased and sacrificed without any haggling: At the end of the sacrifice the priest releases the Kunbi from his vow, and he must then shave the whole of his head and distribute liquor to the caste-fellows in order to be received back into the community. The water of the well at Sheikh Farīd's shrine at Girar is considered to preserve the crops against insects, and for this purpose it is carried to considerable distances to be sprinkled on them.



Hindu boys on stilts

## 19. Villages and houses

An ordinary Kunbi village<sup>38</sup> contains between 70 and 80 houses or some 400 souls. The village generally lies on a slight eminence near a *nullah* or stream, and is often nicely planted with tamarind or pīpal trees. The houses are now generally tiled for fear of fire, and their red roofs may be seen from a distance forming a little cluster on high lying ground, an elevated site being selected so as to keep the roads fairly dry, as the surface tracks in black-soil country become almost impassable sloughs of mud as soon as the rains have broken. The better houses stand round an old mud fort, a relic of the Pindāri raids, when, on the first alarm of the approach of these marauding bands, the whole population hurried within its walls. The village proprietor's house is now often built inside the fort. It is an oblong building surrounded by a compound wall of unbaked bricks, and with a gateway through which a cart can drive. Adjoining the entrance on each side are rooms for the reception of

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<sup>37</sup> *Dam*: breath or life.

<sup>38</sup> These paragraphs are largely based on a description of a Wardha village by Mr. A.K. Smith, C.S.

guests, in which constables, chuprāssies and others are lodged when they stay at night in the village. *Kothas* or sheds for keeping cattle and grain stand against the walls, and the dwelling-house is at the back. Substantial tenants have a house like the proprietor's, of well-laid mud, whitewashed and with tiled roof; but the ordinary cultivator's house is one-roomed, with an *angan* or small yard in front and a little space for a garden behind, in which vegetables are grown during the rains. The walls are of bamboo matting plastered over with mud. The married couples sleep inside, the room being partitioned off if there are two or more in the family, and the older persons sleep in the verandahs. In the middle of the village by the biggest temple will be an old pīpal tree, the trunk encircled by an earthen or stone platform, which answers to the village club. The respectable inhabitants will meet here while the lower classes go to the liquor-shop nearly every night to smoke and chat. The blacksmith's and carpenter's shops are also places of common resort for the cultivators. Hither they wend in the morning and evening, often taking with them some implement which has to be mended, and stay to talk. The blacksmith in particular is said to be a great gossip, and will often waste much of his customer's time, plying him for news and retailing it, before he repairs and hands back the tool brought to him. The village is sure to contain two or three little temples of Māroti or Mahādeo. The stones which do duty for the images are daily oiled with butter or *ghī*, and a miscellaneous store of offerings will accumulate round the buildings. Outside the village will be a temple of Devi or Māta Mai (Smallpox Goddess) with a heap of little earthen horses and a string of hens' feet and feathers hung up on the wall. The little platforms which are the shrines of the other village gods will be found in the fields or near groves. In the evening the elders often meet at Māroti's temple and pay their respects to the deity, bowing or prostrating themselves before him. A lamp before the temple is fed by contributions of oil from the women, and is kept burning usually up to midnight. Once a year in the month, of Shrāwan (July) the villagers subscribe and have a feast, the Kunbis eating first and the menial and labouring castes after them. In this month also all the village deities are worshipped by the Joshi or priest and the villagers. In summer the cultivators usually live in their fields, where they erect temporary sheds of bamboo matting roofed with juāri stalks. In these most of the household furniture is stored, while at a little distance in another funnel-shaped erection of bamboo matting is kept the owner's grain. This system of camping out is mainly adopted for fear of fire in the village, when the cultivator's whole stock of grain and his household goods might be destroyed in a few minutes without possibility of saving them. The women stay in the village, and the men and boys go there for their midday and evening meals.

## 20. Furniture

Ordinary cultivators have earthen pots for cooking purposes and brass ones for eating from, while the well-to-do have all their vessels of brass. The furniture consists of a few stools and cots. No Kunbi will lie on the ground, probably because a dying man is always laid on the ground to breathe his last; and so every one has a cot consisting of a wooden frame with a bed made of hempen string or of the root-fibres of the *palās* tree (*Butea frondosa*). These cots are always too short for a man to lie on them at full length, and are in consequence supremely uncomfortable. The reason may perhaps be found in the belief that a man should always lie on a bed a little shorter than himself so that his feet project over the end. Because if the bed is longer than he is, it resembles a bier, and if he lies on a bier once he may soon die and lie on it a second time. For bathing they make a little enclosure in the compound with mats, and place two or three flat stones in it. Hot water is generally used and they rub the perspiration off their bodies with a flat stone called Jhāwar. Most Kunbis bathe daily. On days when they are shaved they plaster the head with soft black earth, and then wash it off and rub their bodies with a little linseed or sesamum oil, or, if they can afford it, with cocoanut oil.

## 21. Food

The Kunbis eat three times a day, at about eight in the morning, at midday and after dark. The morning meal is commonly eaten in the field and the two others at home. At midday the cultivator comes home from work, bathes and takes his meal, having a rest for about two hours in all. After finishing work he again comes home and has his evening meal, and then, after a rest, at about ten o'clock he goes again to the fields, if the crops are on the ground, and sleeps on the *mara* or small elevated platform erected in the field to protect the grain from birds and wild animals; occasionally waking and emitting long-drawn howls or pulling the strings which connect with clappers in various parts of the field. Thus for nearly eight months of the year the Kunbi sleeps in his fields, and only during the remaining period at home. Juāri is the staple food of the caste, and is eaten both raw and cooked. The raw pods of juāri were the provision carried with them on their saddles by the marauding Marātha horsemen, and the description of Sivaji getting his sustenance from gnawing at one of these as he rode along is said to have struck fear into the heart of the Nizām. It is a common custom among well-to-do tenants and proprietors to invite their friends to a picnic in the fields when the crop is ripe to eat *hurda* or the pods of juāri roasted in hot ashes. For cooking purposes juāri is ground in an ordinary handmill and then passed through a sieve, which separates the finer from the coarser particles. The finer flour is made into dough with hot water and baked into thick flat *chapātis* or cakes, weighing more than half a pound each; while the coarse flour is boiled in water like rice. The boiled pulse of *arhar* (*Cajanus indicus*) is commonly eaten with juāri, and the *chapātis* are either dipped into cold linseed oil or consumed dry. The sameness of this diet is varied by a number of green vegetables, generally with very little savour to a European palate. These are usually boiled and then mixed into a salad with linseed or sesamum oil and flavoured with salt or powdered chillies, these last being the Kunbi's indispensable condiment. He is also very fond of onions and garlic, which are either chopped and boiled, or eaten raw. Butter-milk when available is mixed with the boiled juāri after it is cooked, while wheat and rice, butter and sugar are delicacies reserved for festivals. As a rule only water is drunk, but the caste indulge in country liquor on festive occasions. Tobacco is commonly chewed after each meal or smoked in leaf cigarettes, or in *chilams* or clay pipe-bowls without a stem. Men also take snuff, and a few women chew tobacco and take snuff, though they do not smoke. It is noticeable that different subdivisions of the caste will commonly take food from each other in Berār, whereas in the Central Provinces they refuse to do so. The more liberal usage in Berār is possibly another case of Muhammadan influence. Small children eat with their father and brothers, but the women always wait on the men, and take their own food afterwards. Among the Dālia Kunbis of Nimār, however, women eat before men at caste feasts in opposition to the usual practice. It is stated in explanation that on one occasion when the men had finished their meal first and gone home, the women on returning were waylaid in the dark and robbed of their ornaments. And hence it was decided that they should always eat first and go home before nightfall. The Kunbi is fairly liberal in the matter of food. He will eat the flesh of goats, sheep and deer, all kinds of fish and fowls, and will drink liquor. In Hoshangābād and Nimār the higher subcastes abstain from flesh and wine. The caste will take food cooked without water from Brāhmans, Banias and Sunārs, and that mixed with water only from Marātha Brāhmans. All castes except Marātha Brāhmans will take water from the hands of a Kunbi.



Throwing stilts into the water at the Pola festival

## 22. Clothes and ornaments

The dress of the ordinary cultivator is most common-place and consists only of a loin-cloth, another cloth thrown over the shoulders and upper part of the body, which except for this is often bare, and a third rough cloth wound loosely round the head. All these, originally white, soon assume a very dingy hue. There is thus no colour in a man's everyday attire, but the gala dress for holidays consists of a red *pagri* or turban, a black, coloured or white coat, and a white loin-cloth with red silk borders if he can afford it. The Kunbi is seldom or never seen with his head bare; this being considered a bad omen because every one bares his head when a death occurs. Women wear *lugras*, or a single long cloth of red, blue or black cotton, and under this the *choli*, or small breast-cloth. They have one silk-bordered cloth for special occasions. A woman having a husband alive must not wear a white cloth with no colour in it, as this is the dress of widows. A white cloth with a coloured border may be worn. The men generally wear shoes which are open at the back of the heel, and clatter as they move along. Women do not, as a rule, wear shoes unless these are necessary for field work, or if they go out just after their confinement. But they have now begun to do so in towns. Women have the usual collection of ornaments on all parts of the person. The head ornaments should be of gold when this metal can be afforded. On the finger they have a miniature mirror set in a ring; as a rule not more than one ring is worn, so that the hands may be free for work. For a similar reason glass bangles, being fragile, are worn only on the left wrist and metal ones on the right. But the Dhanoje Kunbis, as already stated, have coconut shell bangles on both wrists. They smear a mark of red powder on the forehead or have a spangle there. Girls are generally tattooed in childhood when the skin is tender, and the operation is consequently less painful. They usually have a small crescent and circle between the brows, small circles or dots on each temple and on the nose, cheeks and chin, and five small marks on the back of the hands to represent flies. Some of the Deshmukh families have now adopted the sacred thread; they also put caste marks on the forehead, and wear the shape of *pagri* or turban formerly distinctive of Marātha Brāhmans.

### 23. The Kunbi as cultivator

The Kunbi has the stolidity, conservative instincts, dulness and patience of the typical agriculturist. Sir R. Craddock describes him as follows<sup>39</sup>: “Of the purely agricultural classes the Kunbis claim first notice. They are divided into several sections or classes, and are of Marātha origin, the Jhāri Kunbis (the Kunbis of the wild country) being the oldest settlers, and the Deshkar (the Kunbis from the Deccan) the most recent. The Kunbi is certainly a most plodding, patient mortal, with a cat-like affection for his land, and the proprietary and cultivating communities, of both of which Kunbis are the most numerous members, are unlikely to fail so long as he keeps these characteristics. Some of the more intelligent and affluent of the caste, who have risen to be among the most prosperous members of the community, are as shrewd men of business in their way as any section of the people, though lacking in education. I remember one of these, a member of the Local Board, who believed that the land revenue of the country was remitted to England annually to form part of the private purse of the Queen Empress. But of the general body of the Kunbi caste it is true to say that in the matter of enterprise, capacity to hold their own with the moneylender, determination to improve their standard of comfort, or their style of agriculture, they lag far behind such cultivating classes as the Kirār, the Rāghvi and the Lodhi. While, however, the Kunbi yields to these classes in some of the more showy attributes which lead to success in life, he is much their superior in endurance under adversity, he is more law-abiding, and he commands, both by reason of his character and his caste, greater social respect among the people at large. The wealthy Kunbi proprietor is occasionally rather spoilt by good fortune, or, if he continues a keen cultivator, is apt to be too fond of land-grabbing. But these are the exceptional cases, and there is generally no such pleasing spectacle as that afforded by a village in which the cultivators and the proprietors are all Kunbis living in harmony together.” The feeling<sup>40</sup> of the Kunbi towards agricultural improvements has hitherto probably been something the same as that of the Sussex farmer who said, ‘Our old land, it likes our old ploughs’ to the agent who was vainly trying to demonstrate to him the advantages of the modern two-horse iron plough over the great wooden local tool; and the emblem ascribed to old Sussex—a pig couchant with the motto ‘I wun’t be druv’—would suit the Kunbi equally well. But the Kunbi, too, though he could not express it, knows something of the pleasure of the simple outdoor life, the fresh smell of the soil after rain, the joy of the yearly miracle when the earth is again carpeted with green from the bursting into life of the seed which he has sown, and the pleasure of watching the harvest of his labours come to fruition. He, too, as has been seen, feels something corresponding to “That inarticulate love of the English farmer for his land, his mute enjoyment of the furrow crumbling from the ploughshare or the elastic tread of his best pastures under his heel, his ever-fresh satisfaction at the sight of the bullocks stretching themselves as they rise from the soft grass.”

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<sup>39</sup> *Nāgpur Settlement Report*, para. 45.

<sup>40</sup> The references to English farming in this paragraph are taken from an article in the *Saturday Review* of 22nd August 1908.



Carrying out the dead

## 24. Social and moral characteristics

Some characteristics of the Marātha people are noticed by Sir R. Jenkins as follows<sup>41</sup>: “The most remarkable feature perhaps in the character of the Marāthas of all descriptions is the little regard they pay to show or ceremony in the common intercourse of life. A peasant or mechanic of the lowest order, appearing before his superiors, will sit down of his own accord, tell his story without ceremony, and converse more like an equal than an inferior; and if he has a petition he talks in a loud and boisterous tone and fearlessly sets forth his claims. Both the peasantry and the better classes are often coarse and indelicate in their language, and many of the proverbs, which they are fond of introducing into conversation, are extremely gross. In general the Marāthas, and particularly the cultivators, are not possessed of much activity or energy of character, but they have quick perception of their own interest, though their ignorance of writing and accounts often renders them the dupes of the artful Brāhmans.” “The Kunbi,” Mr. Forbes remarks,<sup>42</sup> “though frequently all submission and prostration when he makes his appearance in a revenue office, is sturdy and bold enough among his own people. He is fond of asserting his independence and the helplessness of others without his aid, on which subject he has several proverbs, as: ‘Wherever it thunders there the Kunbi is a landholder,’ and ‘Tens of millions are dependent on the Kunbi, but the Kunbi depends on no man.’” This sense of his own importance, which has also been noticed among the Jāts, may perhaps be ascribed to the Kunbi’s ancient status as a free and full member of the village community. “The Kunbi and his bullocks are inseparable, and in speaking of the one it is difficult to dissociate the other. His pride in these animals is excusable, for they are most admirably suited to the circumstances in which nature has placed them,

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<sup>41</sup> *Report on the Territories of the Rāja of Nāgpur.*

<sup>42</sup> *Rāsmālā*, ii. 242.

and possess a very wide-extended fame. But the Kunbi frequently exhibits his fondness for them in the somewhat peculiar form of unmeasured abuse. ‘May the Kāthis<sup>43</sup> seize you!’ is his objurcation if in the peninsula of Surat; if in the Idar district or among the mountains it is there ‘May the tiger kill you!’ and all over Gujarāt, ‘May your master die!’ However, he means by this the animal’s former owner, not himself; and when more than usually cautious he will word his chiding thus—‘May the fellow that sold you to me perish.’” But now the Kāthis raid no more and the tiger, though still taking good toll of cattle in the Central Provinces, is not the ever-present terror that once he was. But the bullock himself is no longer so sacrosanct in the Kunbi’s eyes, and cannot look forward with the same certainty to an old age of idleness, threatened only by starvation in the hot weather or death by surfeit of the new moist grass in the rains; and when therefore the Kunbi’s patience is exhausted by these aggravating animals, his favourite threat at present is, ‘I will sell you to the Kasais’ (butchers); and not so very infrequently he ends by doing so. It may be noted that with the development of the cotton industry the Kunbi of Wardha is becoming much sharper and more capable of protecting his own interests, while with the assistance and teaching which he now receives from the Agricultural Department, a rapid and decided improvement is taking place in his skill as a cultivator.

## Kunjra

**Kunjra.**<sup>44</sup>—A caste of greengrocers, who sell country vegetables and fruit and are classed as Muhammadans. Mr. Crooke derives the name from the Sanskrit *kunj*, ‘a bower or arbour.’ They numbered about 1600 persons in the Central Provinces in 1911, principally in the Jubbulpore Division. The customs of the Kunjras appear to combine Hindu and Muhammadan rites in an indiscriminate medley. It is reported that marriage is barred only between real brothers and sisters and foster brothers and sisters, the latter rule being known as *Dudh bachāna*, or ‘Observing the tie of the milk.’ At their betrothal presents are given to the parties, and after this a powder of henna leaves is sent to the boy, who rubs it on his fingers and returns it to the girl that she may do the same. As among the Hindus, the bodies of the bridal couple are anointed with oil and turmeric at their respective houses before the wedding. A marriage-shed is made and the bridegroom goes to the bride’s house wearing a cotton quilt and riding on a bullock. The barber holds the umbrella over his head and must be given a present before he will fold it, but the wedding is performed by the Kāzi according to the Nikāh ceremony by the repetition of verses from the Korān. The wedding is held at four o’clock in the morning, and as a preliminary to it the bride is presented with some money by the boy’s father, which is known as the Meher or dowry. On its conclusion a cup of sherbet is given to the bridegroom, of which he drinks half and hands the remainder to the bride. The gift of the Meher is considered to seal the marriage contract. When a widow is married the Kāzi is also employed, and he simply recites the Kalama or Muhammadan profession of belief, and the ceremony is completed by the distribution of dates to the elders of the caste. Divorce is permitted and is known as *talāq*. The caste observe the Muhammadan festivals, and have some favourite saints of their own to whom they make offerings of *gulgula* a kind of pudding, with sacrifices of goats and fowls. Participation in these rites is confined to members of the family. Children are named on the day of their birth, the Muhammadan Kāzi or a Hindu Brāhman being employed indifferently to select the name. If the parents lose one or more children, in order to preserve the lives of those subsequently born, they will allow the *choti* or scalp-lock to grow on their heads in the Hindu fashion, dedicating it to one of their Muhammadan saints. Others will put a *hasli* or silver circlet round the neck of the child and add a ring to this every year; a strip of leather is sometimes also tied round the neck. When the child reaches the age of twelve years

<sup>43</sup> A freebooting tribe who gave their name to Kāthiawār.

<sup>44</sup> This article is partly based on papers by Nanhe Khān, Sub-Inspector of Police, Khurai, Saugor, and Kesho Rao, Headmaster, Middle School, Seoni-Chhapāra.

the scalp-lock is shaved, the leather band thrown into a river and the silver necklet sold. Offerings are made to the saints and a feast is given to the friends of the family. The dead are buried, camphor and attar of roses being applied to the corpse. On the *Tīja* and *Chālisa*, or third and fortieth days after a death, a feast is given to the caste-fellows, but no mourning is observed, neither do the mourners bathe nor perform ceremonies of purification. On the *Tīja* the Korān is also read and fried grain is distributed to children. For the death of a child the ordinary feasts need not be given, but prayers are offered for their souls with those of the other dead once a year on the night of Shab-i-Barāt or the fifteenth day of the month Shabān,<sup>45</sup> which is observed as a vigil with prayer, feasts and illuminations and offerings to the ancestors. Kunjra men are usually clean-shaven with the exception of the beard, which is allowed to grow long below the chin. Their women are not tattooed. In the cities, Mr. Crooke remarks,<sup>46</sup> their women have an equivocal reputation, as the better-looking girls who sit in the shops are said to use considerable freedom of manners to attract customers. They are also very quarrelsome and abusive when bargaining for the sale of their wares or arguing with each other. This is so much the case that men who become very abusive are said to be behaving like Kunjras; while in Dacca Sir H. Risley states<sup>47</sup> that the word Kunjra has become a term of abuse, so that the caste are ashamed to be known by it, and call themselves Mewa-farosh, Sabzi-farosh or Bepāri. When two women are having an altercation, their husbands and other male relatives are forbidden to interfere on pain of social degradation. The women never sit on the ground, but on small wooden stools or *pīrhīs*. The Kunjras belong chiefly to the north of the Province, and in the south their place is taken by the Marārs and Mālis who carry their own produce for sale to the markets. The Kunjras sell sugarcane, potatoes, onions and all kinds of vegetables, and others deal in the dried fruits imported by Kābuli merchants.

## Kuramwār

**Kuramwār.**<sup>48</sup>—The shepherd caste of southern India, who are identical with the Tamil Kurumba and the Telugu Kuruba. The caste is an important one in Madras, but in the Central Provinces is confined to the Chānda District where it numbered some 4000 persons in 1911. The Kuramwārs are considered to be the modern representatives of the ancient Pallava tribe whose kings were powerful in southern India in the seventh century.<sup>49</sup>

The marriage rules of the Kuramwārs are interesting. If a girl reaches adolescence while still single, she is finally expelled from the caste, her parents being also subjected to a penalty for readmission. Formerly it is said that such a girl was sacrificed to the river-goddess by being placed in a small hut on the river-bank till a flood came and swept her away. Now she is taken to the river and kept in a hut, while offerings are made to the river-goddess, and she may then return and live in the village though she is out of caste. In Madras, as a preliminary to the marriage, the bridegroom's father observes certain marks or 'curls' on the head or hair of the bride proposed. Some of these are believed to forecast prosperity and others misery to the family into which she enters. They are therefore very cautious in selecting only such girls as possess curls (*sūli*) of good fortune. The writer of the *North Arcot Manual*<sup>50</sup> after recording the above particulars, remarks: "This curious custom obtaining among this primitive tribe is observed by others only in the case of the purchase of cows, bulls and horses." In

<sup>45</sup> Literally 'The Month of Separatica.' It is the eighth month of the Muhammadan year and is said to be so called because in this month the Arabs broke up their encampments and scattered in search of water. On the night of Shab-i-Barāt God registers all the actions of men which they are to perform during the year; and all the children of men who are to be born and die in the year are recorded. Though properly a fast, it is generally observed with rejoicings and a display of fireworks. Hughes' *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 570.

<sup>46</sup> *Tribes and Castes of the N.W.P.*, art. Kunjra.

<sup>47</sup> *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, *ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> This article is compiled from notes taken by Mr. Hīra Lāl and by Pyāre Lāl Misra, Ethnographic clerk.

<sup>49</sup> *North Arcot Manual*, vol. i. p. 220.

<sup>50</sup> Vol. i. p. 224.

the Central Provinces, however, at least one parallel instance can be given from the northern Districts where any mark resembling the V on the head of a cobra is considered to be very inauspicious. And it is told that a girl who married into one well-known family bore it, and to this fact the remarkable succession of misfortunes which has attended the family is locally attributed. Among the Kuramwārs marriages can be celebrated only on four days in the year, the fifth day of both fortnights of Phāgun (February), the tenth day of the second fortnight of the same month and the third day of Baisākh (April). At the marriage the bride and bridegroom are seated together under the canopy, with the shuttle which is used for weaving blankets between them, and they throw coloured rice at each other. After this a miniature swing is put up and a doll is placed in it in imitation of a child and swung to and fro. The bride then takes the doll out and gives it to the bridegroom, saying: 'Here, take care of it, I am now going to cook food'; while after a time the boy returns the doll to the girl, saying, 'I must now weave the blanket and go to tend the flock.' The proceeding seems a symbolic enactment of the cares of married life and the joint tending of the baby, this sort of symbolism being particularly noticeable in the marriage ceremonies of the people of Madras. Divorce is not permitted even though the wife be guilty of adultery, and if she runs away to her father's house her husband cannot use force to bring her back if she refuses to return to him. The Kuramwārs worship the implements of their calling at the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi, and if any family fails to do this it is put out of caste. They also revere annually Mallana Deva and Mallani Devi who guard their flocks respectively from attacks of tigers and epidemics of murrain. The shrines of these deities are generally built under a banyan tree and open to the east. The caste are shepherds and graziers and also make blankets. They are poor and ignorant, and the Abbé Dubois<sup>51</sup> says of them: "Being confined to the society of their woolly charge, they seem to have contracted the stupid nature of the animal, and from the rudeness of their nature they are as much beneath the other castes of Hindus as the sheep by their simplicity and imperfect instruction are beneath the other quadrupeds." Hence the proverbial comparison 'As stupid as a Kuramwār.' When out of doors the Kuramwār retains the most primitive method of eating and drinking; he takes his food in a leaf and licks it up with his tongue, and sucks up water from a tank or river with his mouth. They justify this custom by saying that on one occasion their god had taken his food out of the house on a leaf-plate and was proceeding to eat it with his hands when his sheep ran away and he had to go and fetch them back. In the meantime a crow came and pecked at the food and so spoilt it. It was therefore ordained that all the caste should eat their food straight off the leaf, in order to do which they would have to take it from the cooking-pot in small quantities and there would be no chance of leaving any for the crows to spoil. The story is interesting as showing how very completely the deity of the Kuramwārs is imagined on the principle that god made man in his own image. Or, as a Frenchman has expressed the idea, '*Dieu a fait l'homme à son image, mais l'homme le lui a bein rendu.*' The caste are dark in colour and may be distinguished by their caps made from pieces of blankets, and by their wearing a woollen cord round the waist over the loin-cloth. They speak a dialect of Canarese.

## Kurmi

### 1. Numbers and derivation of name

**Kurmi.**<sup>52</sup>—The representative cultivating caste of Hindustān or the country comprised roughly in the United Provinces, Bihār and the Central Provinces north of the Nerbudda. In 1911 the Kurmis numbered about 300,000 persons in the Central Provinces, of whom half belonged to the Chhattīsgarh

<sup>51</sup> *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies.*

<sup>52</sup> In this article some account of the houses, clothes and food of the Hindus generally of the northern Districts has been inserted, being mainly reproduced from the District Gazetteers.

Division and a third to the Jubbulpore Division; the Districts in which they were most numerous being Saugor, Damoh, Jubbulpore, Hoshangābād, Raipur, Bilāspur and Drūg. The name is considered to be derived from the Sanskrit *krishi*, cultivation, or from *kurma*, the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu, whether because it is the totem of the caste or because, as suggested by one writer, the Kurmi supports the population of India as the tortoise supports the earth. It is true that many Kurmis say they belong to the Kashyap *gotra*, Kashyap being the name of a Rishi, which seems to have been derived from *kachhap*, the tortoise; but many other castes also say they belong to the Kashyap *gotra* or worship the tortoise, and if this has any connection with the name of the caste it is probable that the caste-name suggested the *gotra*-name and not the reverse. It is highly improbable that a large occupational caste should be named after an animal, and the metaphorical similitude can safely be rejected. The name seems therefore either to come from *krishi*, cultivation, or from some other unknown source.

## 2. Functional character of the caste

There seems little reason to doubt that the Kurmis, like the Kunbis, are a functional caste. In Bihār they show traces of Aryan blood, and are a fine-looking race. But in Chota Nāgpur Sir H. Risley states: “Short, sturdy and of very dark complexion, the Kurmis closely resemble in feature the Dravidian tribes around them. It is difficult to distinguish a Kurmi from a Bhumij or Santāl, and the Santāls will take cooked food from them.”<sup>53</sup> In the Central Provinces they are fairly dark in complexion and of moderate height, and no doubt of very mixed blood. Where the Kurmis and Kunbis meet the castes sometimes amalgamate, and there is little doubt that various groups of Kurmis settling in the Marātha country have become Kunbis, and Kunbis migrating to northern India have become Kurmis. Each caste has certain subdivisions whose names belong to the other. It has been seen in the article on Kunbi that this caste is of very diverse origin, having assimilated large bodies of persons from several other castes, and is probably to a considerable extent recruited from the local non-Aryan tribes; if then the Kurmis mix so readily with the Kunbis, the presumption is that they are of a similar mixed origin, as otherwise they should consider themselves superior. Mr. Crooke gives several names of subcastes showing the diverse constitution of the Kurmis. Thus three, Gaharwār, Jādon and Chandel are the names of Rājput clans; the Kori subcaste must be a branch of the low weaver caste of that name; and in the Central Provinces the names of such subcastes as the Agaria or iron-workers, the Lonhāre or salt-refiners, and the Khaira or catechu-collectors indicate that these Kurmis are derived from low Hindu castes or the aboriginal tribes.

## 3. Subcastes

The caste has a large number of subdivisions. The Usrete belonged to Bundelkhand, where this name is found in several castes; they are also known as Havelia, because they live in the rich level tract of the Jubbulpore Haveli, covered like a chessboard with large embanked wheat-fields. The name Haveli seems to have signified a palace or headquarters of a ruler, and hence was applied to the tract surrounding it, which was usually of special fertility, and provided for the maintenance of the chief's establishment and household troops. Thus in Jubbulpore, Mandia and Betūl we find the forts of the old Gond rulers dominating an expanse of rich plain-country. The Usrete Kurmis abstain from meat and liquor, and may be considered as one of the highest subcastes. Their name may be derived from *a-sreshtha*, or not the best, and its significance would be that formerly they were considered to be of mixed origin, like most castes in Bundelkhand. The group of Sreshtha or best-born Kurmis has now, however, died out if it ever existed, and the Usretes have succeeded in establishing themselves in its place. The Chandnāhes of Jubbulpore or Chandnāhus of Chhattīsgarh are another large subdivision. The name may be derived from the village Chandnoha in Bundelkhand,

<sup>53</sup> *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Kurmi.

but the Chandnāhus of Chhattīsgarh say that three or four centuries ago a Rājput general of the Rāja of Ratanpur had been so successful in war that the king allowed him to appear in Durbār in his uniform with his forehead marked with sandalwood, as a special honour. When he died his son continued to do the same, and on the king's attention being drawn to it he forbade him. But the son did not obey, and hence the king ordered the sandalwood to be rubbed from his forehead in open Durbār. But when this was done the mark miraculously reappeared through the agency of the goddess Devi, whose favourite he was. Three times the king had the mark rubbed out and three times it came again. So he was allowed to wear it thereafter, and was called Chandan Singh from *chandan*, sandalwood; and his descendants are the Chandnāhu Kurmis. Another derivation is from Chandra, the moon. In Jubbulpore these Chandnāhes sometimes kill a pig under the palanquin of a newly married bride. In Bilāspur they are prosperous and capable cultivators, but are generally reputed to be stingy, and therefore are not very popular. Here they are divided into the Ekbahinyas and Dobahinyas, or those who wear glass bangles on one or both arms respectively. The Chandrāha Kurmis of Raipur are probably a branch of the Chandnāhus. They sprinkle with water the wood with which they are about to cook their food in order to purify it, and will eat food only in the *chauka* or sanctified place in the house. At harvest when they must take meals in the fields, one of them prepares a patch of ground, cleaning and watering it, and there cooks food for them all.

The Singrore Kurmis derive their name from Singror, a place near Allahābād. Singror is said to have once been a very important town, and the Lodhis and other castes have subdivisions of this name. The Desha Kurmis are a group of the Mungeli tahsīl of Bilāspur. Desh means one's native country, but in this case the name probably refers to Bundelkhand. Mr. Gordon states<sup>54</sup> that they do not rear poultry and avoid residing in villages in which their neighbours keep poultry. The Santore Kurmis are a group found in several Districts, who grow *san*-hemp,<sup>55</sup> and are hence looked down upon by the remainder of the caste. In Raipur the Mānwa Kurmis will also do this; Māna is a word sometimes applied to a loom, and the Mānwa Kurmis may be so called because they grow hemp and weave sacking from the fibres. The Pataria are an inferior group in Bilāspur, who are similarly despised because they grow hemp and will take their food in the fields in *patris* or leaf-plates. The Gohbaiyān are considered to be an illegitimate group; the name is said to signify 'holding the arm.' The Bāhargaiyan, or 'those who live outside the town,' are another subcaste to which children born out of wedlock are relegated. The Palkiha subcaste of Jubbulpore are said to be so named because their ancestors were in the service of a certain Rāja and spread his bedding for him; hence they are somewhat looked down on by the others. The name may really be derived from *palal*, a kind of vegetable, and they may originally have been despised for growing this vegetable, and thus placing themselves on a level with the gardening castes. The Masūria take their name from the *masūr* or lentil, a common cold-weather crop in the northern Districts, which is, however, grown by all Kurmis and other cultivators; and the Agaria or iron-workers, the Kharia or catechu-makers, and the Lonhāre or salt-makers, have already been mentioned. There are also numerous local or territorial subcastes, as the Chaurasia or those living in a Chaurāsi<sup>56</sup> estate of eighty-four villages, the Pardeshi or foreigners, the Bundelkhandi or those who came from Bundelkhand, the Kanaujias from Oudh, the Gaur from northern India, and the Marāthe and Telenge or Marāthas and Telugus; these are probably Kunbis who have been taken into the caste. The Gabel are a small subcaste in Sakti State, who now prefer to drop the name Kurmi and call themselves simply Gabel. The reason apparently is that the other Kurmis about them sow *san*-hemp, and as they have ceased doing this they try to separate themselves and rank above the rest. But they call the bastard group of their community Rakhaut Kurmis, and other people speak of all of them as Gabel Kurmis, so that there is no doubt that they belong to the

<sup>54</sup> *Indian Folk Tales*, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Crotalaria juncea*. See article on Lorha for a discussion of the Hindus' prejudice against this crop.

<sup>56</sup> There are several Chaurāsīs, a grant of an estate of this special size being common under native rule.

caste. It is said that formerly they were pack-carriers, but have now abandoned this calling in favour of cultivation.

#### 4. Exogamous groups

Each subcaste has a number of exogamous divisions and these present a large variety of all types. Some groups have the names of Brāhman saints as Sāndil, Bhāradwaj, Kausil and Kashyap; others are called after Rājput septs, as Chauhān, Rāthor, Panwār and Solanki; other names are of villages, as Khairagarhi from Khairagarh, Pandariha from Pandaria, Bhadaria, and Harkotia from Harkoti; others are titular, as Sondeha, gold-bodied, Sonkharchi, spender of gold, Bimba Lohir, stick-carrier, Banhpagar, one wearing a thread on the arm, Bhandāri, a store-keeper, Kumaria, a potter, and Shikaria, a hunter; and a large number are totemistic, named after plants, animals or natural objects, as Sadāphal, a fruit; Kathail from *kath* or catechu; Dhorha, from *dhor*, cattle; Kānsia, the *kāns* grass; Karaiya, a frying-pan; Sarang, a peacock; Samundha, the ocean; Sindia, the date-palm tree; Dudhua from *dudh*, milk, and so on. Some sections are subdivided; thus the Tidha section, supposed to be named after a village, is divided into three subsections named Ghurepake, a mound of cowdung, Dwarparke, door-jamb, and Jangi, a warrior, which are themselves exogamous. Similarly the Chaudhri section, named after the title of the caste headman, is divided into four subsections, two, Majhgawān Bamuria, named after villages, and two, Purwa Thok and Pascham Thok, signifying the eastern and western groups. Presumably when sections get so large as to bar the marriage of persons not really related to each other at all, relief is obtained by subdividing them in this manner. A list of the sections of certain subcastes so far as they have been obtained is given at the end of the article.



Pounding rice

## 5. Marriage rules. Betrothal

Marriage is prohibited between members of the same section and between first and second cousins on the mother's side. But the Chandnāhe Kurmis permit the wedding of a brother's daughter to a sister's son. Most Kurmis forbid a man to marry his wife's sister during her lifetime. The Chhattīsgarh Kurmis have the practice of exchanging girls between two families. There is usually no objection to marriage on account of religious differences within the pale of Hinduism, but the difficulty of a union between a member of a Vaishnava sect who abstains from flesh and liquor, and a partner who does not, is felt and expressed in the following saying:

Vaishnava purush avaiṣṇava nāri  
Unt beil ki jot bichāri,

or 'A Vaishnava husband with a non-Vaishnava wife is like a camel yoked with a bullock.' Muhammadans and Christians are not retained in the caste. Girls are usually wedded between nine and eleven, but well-to-do Kurmis like other agriculturists, sometimes marry their daughters when only a few months old. The people say that when a Kurmi gets rich he will do three things: marry his daughters very young and with great display, build a fine house, and buy the best bullocks he can afford. The second and third methods of spending his money are very sensible, whatever may be thought of the first. No penalty is imposed for allowing a girl to exceed the age of puberty before marriage. Boys are married between nine and fifteen years, but the tendency is towards the postponement of the ceremony. The boy's father goes and asks for a bride and says to the girl's father, 'I have placed my son with you,' that is, given him in adoption; if the match be acceptable the girl's father replies, 'Yes, I will give my daughter to collect cowdung for you'; to which the boy's father responds, 'I will hold her as the apple of my eye.' Then the girl's father sends the barber and the Brāhman to the boy's house, carrying a rupee and a cocoanut. The boy's relatives return the visit and perform the '*God bharna*,' or 'Filling the lap of the girl.' They take some sweetmeats, a rupee and a cocoanut, and place them in the girl's lap, this being meant to induce fertility. The ceremony of betrothal succeeds, when the couple are seated together on a wooden plank and touch the feet of the guests and are blessed by them. The auspicious date of the wedding is fixed by the Brāhman and intimation is given to the boy's family through the *lagan* or formal invitation, which is sent on a paper coloured yellow with powdered rice and turmeric. A bride-price is paid, which in the case of well-to-do families may amount to as much as Rs. 100 to Rs. 400.

## 6. The marriage-shed or pavilion

Before the wedding the women of the family go out and fetch new earth for making the stoves on which the marriage feast will be cooked. When about to dig they worship the earth by sprinkling water over it and offering flowers and rice. The marriage-shed is made of the wood of the *sāleh* tree,<sup>57</sup> because this wood is considered to be alive. If a pole of *sāleh* is cut and planted in the ground it takes root and sprouts, though otherwise the wood is quite useless. The wood of the *kekar* tree has similar properties and may also be used. The shed is covered with leaves of the mango or *jāmun*<sup>58</sup> trees, because these trees are evergreen and hence typify perpetual life. The marriage-post in the centre of the shed is called Magrohan or Khām; the women go and worship it at the carpenter's house; two pice, a piece of turmeric and an areca-nut are buried below it in the earth and a new thread and a *toran* or string of mango-leaves is wound round it. Oil and turmeric are also rubbed on the marriage-

<sup>57</sup> *Boswellia serrata*.

<sup>58</sup> *Eugenia Jambolana*.

post at the same time as on the bride and bridegroom. In Saugor the marriage-post is often a four-sided wooden frame or a pillar with four pieces of wood suspended from it. The larger the marriage-shed is made the greater honour accrues to the host, even though the guests may be insufficient to fill it. In towns it has often to be made in the street and is an obstacle to traffic. There may be eight or ten posts besides the centre one.

## 7. The marriage-cakes

Another preliminary ceremony is the family sacrament of the Meher or marriage-cakes. Small balls of wheat-flour are kneaded and fried in an earthen pan with sesamum oil by the eldest woman of the family. No metal vessel may be used to hold the water, flour or oil required for these cakes, probably because earthen vessels were employed before metal ones and are therefore considered more sacred. In measuring the ingredients a quarter of a measure is always taken in excess, such as a seer<sup>59</sup> and a quarter for a seer of wheat, to foreshadow the perpetual increase of the family. When made the cakes are offered to the Kul Deo or household god. The god is worshipped and the bride and bridegroom then first partake of the cakes and after them all members of the family and relatives. Married daughters and daughters-in-law may eat of the cakes, but not widows, who are probably too impure to join in a sacred sacrament Every person admitted to partake of the marriage-cakes is held to belong to the family, so that all other members of it have to observe impurity for ten days after a birth or death has occurred in his house and shave their heads for a death. When the family is so large that this becomes irksome it is cut down by not inviting persons beyond seven degrees of relationship to the Meher sacrament This exclusion has sometimes led to bitter quarrels and actions for defamation. It seems likely that the Meher may be a kind of substitute for the sacrificial meal, at which all the members of the clan ate the body of the totem or divine animal, and some similar significance perhaps once attached to the wedding-cake in England, pieces of which are sent to relatives unable to be present at the wedding.

## 8. Customs at the wedding

Before the wedding the women of each party go and anoint the village gods with oil and turmeric, worshipping them, and then similarly anoint the bride and bridegroom at their respective houses for three days. The bridegroom's head is shaved except for his scalp-lock; he wears a silver necklet on his neck, puts lamp-black on his eyes, and is dressed in new yellow and white clothes. Thus attired he goes round and worships all the village gods and visits the houses of his relatives and friends, who mark his forehead with rice and turmeric and give him a silver piece. A list of the money thus received is made and similar presents are returned to the donors when they have weddings. The bridegroom goes to the wedding either in a litter or on a horse, and must not look behind him. After being received at the bride's village and conducted to his lodging, he proceeds to the bride's house and strikes a grass mat hung before the house seven times with a reed-stick. On entering the bride's house the bridegroom is taken to worship her family gods, the men of the party usually remaining outside. Then, as he goes through the room, one of the women who has tied a long thread round her toe gets behind him and measures his height with the thread without his seeing. She breaks off the thread at his height and doubling it once or twice sews it round the top of the bride's skirt, and they think that as long as the bride wears this thread she will be able to make her husband do as she likes. If the girls wish to have a joke they take one of the bridegroom's shoes which he has left outside the house, wrap it up in a piece of cloth, and place it on a shelf or in a cupboard, where the family god would be kept, with two lamps burning before it. Then they say to the bridegroom, 'Come and worship our household god'; and if he goes and does reverence to it they unwrap the cloth and show him his own

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<sup>59</sup> 2 lbs.

shoe and laugh at him. But if he has been to one or two weddings and knows the joke he just gives it a kick. The bride's younger brother steals the bridegroom's other shoe and hides it, and will not give it back without a present of a rupee or two. The bride and bridegroom are seated on wooden seats, and while the Brāhman recites texts, they make the following promises. The bridegroom covenants to live with his wife and her children, to support them and tell her all his concerns, consult her, make her a partner of his religious worship and almsgiving, and be with her on the night following the termination of her monthly impurity. The bride promises to remain faithful to her husband, to obey his wishes and orders, to perform her household duties as well as she can, and not to go anywhere without his permission. The last promise of the bridegroom has reference to the general rule among Hindus that a man should always sleep with his wife on the night following the termination of her menses because at this time she is most likely to conceive and the prospect of a child being born must not be lost. The Shāstras lay it down that a man should not visit his wife before going into battle, this being no doubt an instance of the common custom of abstinence from conjugal intercourse prior to some important business or undertaking; but it is stated that if on such an occasion she should have just completed a period of impurity and have bathed and should desire him to come in to her, he should do so, even with his armour on, because by refusing, in the event of his being killed in battle, the chance of a child being born would be finally lost. To Hindu ideas the neglect to produce life is a sin of the same character, though in a minor degree, as that of destroying life; and it is to be feared that it will be some time before this ingrained superstition gives way to any considerations of prudential restraint. Some people say that for a man not to visit his wife at this time is as great a sin as murder.

## 9. Walking round the sacred post

The binding ceremony of the marriage is the walking seven times round the marriage-post in the direction of the sun. The post probably represents the sun and the walk of the bridal couple round it may be an imitation of the movement of the planets round the sun. The reverence paid to the marriage-post has already been noticed. During the procession the bride leads and the bridegroom puts his left hand on her left shoulder. The household pounding-slab is near the post and on it are placed seven little heaps of rice, turmeric, areca-nut, and a small winnowing-fan. Each time the bride passes the slab the bridegroom catches her right foot and with it makes her brush one of the little heaps off the slab. These seven heaps represent the seven Rishis or saints who are the seven large stars of the constellation of the Great Bear.

## 10. Other ceremonies

After the wedding the bride and bridegroom resume their seats and the parents of the bride wash their feet in a brass tray, marking their foreheads with rice and turmeric. They put some silver in the tray, and other relations and friends do the same. The presents thus collected go to the bridegroom. The Chandnāhu Kurmis then have a ceremony known as *palkachār*. The bride's father provides a bed on which a mattress and quilt are laid and the bride and bridegroom are seated on it, while their brother and sister sprinkle parched rice round them. This is supposed to typify the consummation of the marriage, but the ceremony is purely formal as the bridal couple are children. The bridegroom is given two lamps and he has to mix their flames, probably to symbolise the mixing of the spirits of his wife and himself. He requires a present of a rupee or two before he consents to do so. During the wedding the bride is bathed in the same water as the bridegroom, the joint use of the sacred element being perhaps another symbolic mark of their union. At the feasts the bride eats rice and milk with her husband from one dish, once at her own house and once after she goes to her husband's house. Subsequently she never eats with her husband but always after him. She also sits and eats at the wedding-feasts with her husband's relations. This is perhaps meant to mark her admission into her husband's clan. After the wedding the Brāhmins on either side recite Sanskrit verses, praising

their respective families and displaying their own learning. The competition often becomes bitter and would end in a quarrel, but that the elders of the party interfere and stop it.

The expenses of an ordinary wedding on the bridegroom's side may be Rs. 100 in addition to the bride-price, and on the bride's Rs. 200. The bride goes home for a day or two with the bridegroom's party in Chhattīsgarh but not in the northern Districts, as women accompany the wedding procession in the former but not in the latter locality. If she is too small to go, her shoes and marriage-crown are sent to represent her. When she attains maturity the *chauk* or *gauna* ceremony is performed, her husband going to fetch her with a few friends. At this time her parents give her clothes, food and ornaments in a basket called *jhanpi* or *tipara* specially prepared for the occasion.

## 11. Polygamy widow-marriage and divorce

A girl who becomes pregnant by a man of the caste before marriage is wedded to him by the rite used for widows. If the man is an outsider she is expelled from the community. Women are much valued for the sake of their labour in the fields, and the transgressions of a wife are viewed with a lenient eye. In Damoh it is said that a man readily condones his wife's adultery with another Kurmi, and if it becomes known and she is put out of caste, he will give the penalty feasts himself for her admission. If she is detected in a *liaison* with an outsider she is usually discarded, but the offence may be condoned should the man be a Brāhman. And one instance is mentioned of a mālguzār's wife who had gone wrong with a Gond, and was forgiven and taken back by her husband and the caste. But the leniency was misplaced as she subsequently eloped with an Ahīr. Polygamy is usual with those who can afford to pay for several wives, as a wife's labour is more efficient and she is a more profitable investment than a hired servant. An instance is on record of a blind Kurmi in Jubbulpore, who had nine wives. A man who is faithful to one wife, and does not visit her on fast-days, is called a Brahmachari or saint and it is thought that he will go to heaven. The remarriage of widows is permitted and is usual. The widow goes to a well on some night in the dark fortnight, and leaving her old clothes there puts on new ones which are given to her by the barber's wife. She then fills a pitcher with water and takes it to her new husband's house. He meets her on the threshold and lifts it from her head, and she goes into the house and puts bangles on her wrists. The following saying shows that the second marriage of widows is looked upon as quite natural and normal by the cultivating castes:

“If the clouds are like partridge feathers it will rain, and if a widow puts lamp-black on her eyes she will marry again; these things are certain.”<sup>60</sup>

A bachelor marrying a widow must first go through the ceremony with a ring which he thereafter wears on his finger, and if it is lost he must perform a funeral ceremony as if a wife had died. If a widower marries a girl she must wear round her neck an image of his first wife. A girl who is twice married by going round the sacred post is called Chandelia and is most unlucky. She is considered as bad or worse than a widow, and the people sometimes make her live outside the village and forbid her to show them her face. Divorce is open to either party, to a wife on account of the impotency or ill-treatment of her husband, and to a husband for the bad character, ill-health or quarrelsome disposition of his wife. A deed of divorce is executed and delivered before the caste committee.

## 12. Impurity of women

During her periodical impurity, which lasts for four or five days, a woman should not sleep on a cot. She must not walk across the shadow of any man not her husband, because it is thought that if she does so her next child will be like that man. Formerly she did not see her husband's face for all these days, but this rule was too irksome and has been abandoned. She should eat the same kind of

<sup>60</sup> Elliot, *Hoshangābād Settlement Report*, p. 115.

food for the whole period, and therefore must take nothing special on one day which she cannot get on other days. At this time she will let her hair hang loose, taking out all the cotton strings by which it is tied up.<sup>61</sup> These strings, being cotton, have become impure, and must be thrown away. But if there is no other woman to do the household work and she has to do it herself, she will keep her hair tied up for convenience, and only throw away the strings on the last day when she bathes. All cotton things are rendered impure by her at this time, and any cloth or other article which she touches must be washed before it can be touched by anybody else; but woollen cloth, being sacred, is not rendered impure, and she can sleep on a woollen blanket without its thereby becoming a defilement to other persons. When bathing at the end of the period a woman should see no other face but her husband's; but as her husband is usually not present, she wears a ring with a tiny mirror and looks at her own face in this as a substitute.

If a woman desires to procure a miscarriage she eats a raw *papāya* fruit, and drinks a mixture of ginger, sugar, bamboo leaves and milk boiled together. She then has her abdomen well rubbed by a professional *masseuse*, who comes at a time when she can escape observation. After a prolonged course of this treatment it is said that a miscarriage is obtained. It would seem that the rubbing is the only treatment which is directly effective. The *papāya*, which is a very digestible fruit, can hardly be of assistance, but may be eaten from some magical idea of its resemblance to a foetus. The mixture drunk is perhaps designed to be a tonic to the stomach against the painful effects of the massage.

### 13. Pregnancy rites

As regards pregnancy Mr. Marten writes as follows:<sup>62</sup> “A woman in pregnancy is in a state of taboo and is peculiarly liable to the influence of magic and in some respects dangerous to others. She is exempt from the observance of fasts, is allowed any food she fancies, and is fed with sweets and all sorts of rich food, especially in the fifth month. She should not visit her neighbour's houses nor sleep in any open place. Her clothes are kept separate from others. She is subject to a large number of restrictions in her ordinary life with a view of avoiding everything that might prejudice or retard her delivery. She should eschew all red clothes or red things of any sort, such as suggest blood, till the third or fourth month, when conception is certain. She will be careful not to touch the dress of any woman who has had a miscarriage. She will not cross running water, as it might cause premature delivery, nor go near a she-buffalo or a mare lest delivery be retarded, since a mare is twelve months in foal. If she does by chance approach these animals she must propitiate them by offerings of grain. Nor in some cases will she light a lamp, for fear the flame in some way may hurt the child. She should not finish any sowing, previously begun, during pregnancy, nor should her husband thatch the house or repair his axe. An eclipse is particularly dangerous to the unborn child and she must not leave the house during its continuance, but must sit still with a stone pestle in her lap and anoint her womb with cowdung. Under no circumstances must she touch any cutting instrument as it might cause her child to be born mutilated.

“During the fifth month of pregnancy the family gods are worshipped to avoid generally any difficulties in her labour. Towards the end of that month and sometimes in the seventh month she rubs her body with a preparation of gram-flour, castor-oil and turmeric, bathes herself, and is clothed with new garments and seated on a wooden stool in a space freshly cleaned and spread with cowdung. Her lap is then filled with sweets called *pakwān* made of cocoanut. A similar ceremony called *Boha Jewan* is sometimes performed in the seventh or eighth month, when a new *sāri* is given to her and grain is thrown into her lap. Another special rite is the *Pansavan* ceremony, performed to remove

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<sup>61</sup> The custom is pointed out by Mr. A. K. Smith, C.S.

<sup>62</sup> *Central Provinces Census Report* (1911), p. 153.

all defects in the child, give it a male form, increase its size and beauty, give it wisdom and avert the influence of evil spirits.”

## 14. Earth-eating

Pregnant women sometimes have a craving for eating earth. They eat the earth which has been mixed with wheat on the threshing-floor, or the ashes of cowdung cakes which have been used for cooking. They consider it as a sort of medicine which will prevent them from vomiting. Children also sometimes get the taste for eating earth, licking it up from the floor, or taking pieces of lime-plaster from the walls. Possibly they may be attracted by the saltish taste, but the result is that they get ill and their stomachs are distended. The Panwar women of Bālāghāt eat red and white clay in order that their children may be born with red and white complexions.

## 15. Customs at birth

During the period of labour the barber's wife watches over the case, but as delivery approaches hands it over to a recognised midwife, usually the Basorin or Chamārin, who remains in the lying-in room till about the tenth day after delivery. “If delivery is retarded,” Mr. Marten continues,<sup>63</sup> “pressure and massage are used, but coffee and other herbal decoctions are given, and various means, mostly depending on sympathetic magic, are employed to avert the adverse spirits and hasten and ease the labour. She may be given water to drink in which the feet of her husband<sup>64</sup> or her mother-in-law or a young unmarried girl have been dipped, or she is shown the *swastik* or some other lucky sign, or the *chakra-vyuha*, a spiral figure showing the arrangement of the armies of the Pāndavas and Kauravas which resembles the intestines with the exit at the lower end.”

The menstrual blood of the mother during child-birth is efficacious as a charm for fertility. The Nāin or Basorin will sometimes try and dip her big toe into it and go to her house. There she will wash her toe and give the water to a barren woman, who by drinking it will transfer to herself the fertility of the woman whose blood it is. The women of the family are in the lying-in room and they watch her carefully, while some of the men stand about outside. If they see the midwife coming out they examine her, and if they find any blood exclaim, ‘You have eaten of our salt and will you play us this trick’; and they force her back into the room where the blood is washed off. All the stained clothes are washed in the birth-room, and the water as well as that in which the mother and child are bathed is poured into a hole dug inside the room, so that none of it may be used as a charm.

## 16. Treatment of mother and child

The great object of the treatment after birth is to prevent the mother and child from catching cold. They appear to confuse the symptoms of pneumonia and infantile lockjaw in a disease called *sanpāt*, to the prevention of which their efforts are directed. A *sigri* or stove is kept alight under the bed, and in this the seeds of *ajwāin* or coriander are burnt. The mother eats the seeds, and the child is waved over the stove in the smoke of the burning *ajwāin*. Raw asafoetida is put in the woman's ears wrapped in cotton-wool, and she eats a little half-cooked. A freshly-dried piece of cowdung is also picked up from the ground and half-burnt and put in water, and some of this water is given to her to drink, the process being repeated every day for a month. Other details of the treatment of the mother and child after birth are given in the articles on Mehtar and Kunbi. For the first five days after birth the child is given a little honey and calf's urine mixed. If the child coughs it is given *bans-lochan*, which is said to be some kind of silicate found in bamboos. The mother does not suckle the child for

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<sup>63</sup> *C.P. Census Report* (1911), p. 153.

<sup>64</sup> Or his big toe.

three days, and for that period she is not washed and nobody goes near her, at least in Mandla. On the third day after the birth of a girl, or the fourth after that of a boy, the mother is washed and the child is then suckled by her for the first time, at an auspicious moment pointed out by the astrologer. Generally speaking the whole treatment of child-birth is directed towards the avoidance of various imaginary magical dangers, while the real sanitary precautions and other assistance which should be given to the mother are not only totally neglected, but the treatment employed greatly aggravates the ordinary risks which a woman has to take, especially in the middle and higher castes.

## 17. Ceremonies after birth

When a boy is born the father's younger brother or one of his friends lets off a gun and beats a brass plate to proclaim the event. The women often announce the birth of a boy by saying that it is a one-eyed girl. This is in case any enemy should hear the mention of the boy's birth, and the envy felt by him should injure the child. On the sixth day after the birth the Chhathi ceremony is performed and the mother is given ordinary food to eat, as described in the article on Kunbi. The twelfth day is known as Barhon or Chauk. On this day the father is shaved for the first time after the child's birth. The mother bathes and cuts the nails of her hands and feet; if she is living by a river she throws them into it, otherwise on to the roof of the house. The father and mother sit in the *chauk* or space marked out for worship with cowdung and flour; the woman is on the man's left side, a woman being known as Bāmangi or the left limb, either because the left limb is weak or because woman is supposed to have been made from man's left side, as in Genesis. The household god is brought into the *chauk* and they worship it. The Bua or husband's sister brings presents to the mother known as *bharti*, for filling her lap: silver or gold bangles if she can afford them, a coat and cap for the boy; dates, rice and a breast-cloth for the mother; for the father a rupee and a cocoanut. These things are placed in the mother's lap as a charm to sustain her fertility. The father gives his sister back double the value of the presents if he can afford it. He gives her husband a head-cloth and shoulder-cloth; he waves two or three pice round his wife's head and gives them to the barber's wife. The latter and the midwife take the clothes worn by the mother at child-birth, and the father gives them each a new cloth if he can afford it. The part of the navel-string which falls off the child's body is believed to have the power of rendering a barren woman fertile, and is also intimately connected with the child's destiny. It is therefore carefully preserved and buried in some auspicious place, as by the bank of a river.

In the sixth month the Pasni ceremony is performed, when the child is given grain for the first time, consisting of rice and milk. Brāhmans or religious mendicants are invited and fed. The child's hair and nails are cut for the first time on the Shivrātri or Akti festival following the birth, and are wrapped up in a ball of dough and thrown into a sacred river. If a child is born during an eclipse they think that it will suffer from lung disease; so a silver model of the moon is made immediately during the eclipse, and hung round the child's neck, and this is supposed to preserve it from harm.

## 18. Suckling children

A Hindu woman will normally suckle her child for two to three years after its birth, and even beyond this up to six years if it sleeps with her. But they think that the child becomes short of breath if suckled for so long, and advise the mother to wean it. And if she becomes pregnant again, when she has been three or four months in this condition, she will wean the child by putting *nīm* leaves or some other bitter thing on her breasts. A Hindu should not visit his wife for the last six months of her pregnancy nor until the child has been fed with grain for the first time six months after its birth. During the former period such action is thought to be a sin, while during the latter it may have the effect of rendering the mother pregnant again too quickly, and hence may not allow her a sufficiently long period to suckle the first child.

## 19. Beliefs about twins

Twins, Mr. Marten states, are not usually considered to be inauspicious.<sup>65</sup> “It is held that if they are of the same sex they will survive, and if they are of a different sex one of them will die. Boy twins are called Rāma and Lachhman, a boy and a girl Mahādeo and Pārvati, and two girls Ganga and Jamuni or Sīta and Konda. They should always be kept separate so as to break the essential connection which exists between them and may cause any misfortune which happens to the one to extend to the other. Thus the mother always sleeps between them in bed and never carries both of them nor suckles both at the same time. Again, among some castes in Chhattīsgarh, when the twins are of different sex, they are considered to be *pāp* (sinful) and are called Pāpi and Pāpin, an allusion to the horror of a brother and sister sharing the same bed (the mother’s womb).” Hindus think that if two people comb their hair with the same comb they will lose their affection for each other. Hence the hair of twins is combed with the same comb to weaken the tie which exists between them, and may cause the illness or death of either to follow on that of the other.

## 20. Disposal of the dead

The dead are usually burnt with the head to the north. Children whose ears have not been bored and adults who die of smallpox or leprosy are buried, and members of poor families who cannot afford firewood. If a person has died by hanging or drowning or from the bite of a snake, his body is burnt without any rites, but in order that his soul may be saved, the *hom* sacrifice is performed subsequently to the cremation. Those who live near the Nerbudda and Mahānadi sometimes throw the bodies of the dead into these rivers and think that this will make them go to heaven. The following account of a funeral ceremony among the middle and higher castes in Saugor is mainly furnished by Major W. D. Sutherland, I.M.S., with some additions from Mandla, and from material furnished by the Rev. E. M. Gordon:<sup>66</sup> “When a man is near his end, gifts to Brāhmans are made by him, or by his son on his behalf. These, if he is a rich man, consist of five cows with their calves, marked on the forehead and hoofs with turmeric, and with garlands of flowers round their necks. Ordinary people give the price of one calf, which is fictitiously taken at Rs. 3–4, Rs. 1–4, ten annas or five annas according to their means. By holding on to the tail of this calf the dead man will be able to swim across the dreadful river Vaitarni, the Hindu Styx. This calf is called Bachra Sānkā or ‘the chain-calf,’ as it furnishes a chain across the river, and it may be given three times, once before the death and twice afterwards. When near his end the dying man is taken down from his cot and laid on a woollen blanket spread on the ground, perhaps with the idea that he should at death be in contact with the earth and not suspended in mid-air as a man on a cot is held to be. In his mouth are placed a piece of gold, some leaves of the *tulsi* or basil plant, or Ganges water, or rice cooked in Jagannāth’s temple. The dying man keeps on repeating ‘Rām, Rām, Sītārām.’”

## 21. Funeral rites

As soon as death occurs the corpse is bathed, clothed and smeared with a mixture of powdered sandalwood, camphor and spices. A bier is constructed of planks, or if this cannot be afforded the man’s cot is turned upside down and the body is carried out for burial on it in this fashion, with the legs of the cot pointing upwards. Straw is laid on the bier, and the corpse, covered with fine white cloth, is tied securely on to it, the hands being crossed on the breast, with the thumbs and great toes tied together. When a married woman dies she is covered with a red cloth which reaches only to the

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<sup>65</sup> *C.P. Census Report* (1911), p. 158.

<sup>66</sup> In *Indian Folk Tales*.

neck, and her face is left open to the view of everybody, whether she went abroad unveiled in her life or not. It is considered a highly auspicious thing for a woman to die in the lifetime of her husband and children, and the corpse is sometimes dressed like a bride and ornaments put on it. The corpse of a widow or girl is wrapped in a white cloth with the head covered. At the head of the funeral procession walks the son of the deceased, or other chief mourner, and in his hand he takes smouldering cowdung cakes in an earthen pot, from which the pyre will be kindled. This fire is brought from the hearth of the house by the barber, and he sometimes also carries it to the pyre. On the way the mourners change places so that each may assist in bearing the bier, and once they set the bier on the ground and leave two pice and some grain where it lay, before taking it up again. After the funeral each person who has helped to carry it takes up a clod of earth and with it touches successively the place on his shoulder where the bier rested, his waist and his knee, afterwards dropping the clod on the ground. It is believed that by so doing he removes from his shoulder the weight of the corpse, which would otherwise press on it for some time.

## 22. Burning the dead

At the cremation-ground the corpse is taken from the bier and placed on the pyre. The cloth which covered it and that on which it lay are given to a sweeper, who is always present to receive this perquisite. To the corpse's mouth, eyes, ears, nostrils and throat is applied a mixture of barley-flour, butter, sesamum seeds and powdered sandalwood. Logs of wood and cowdung cakes are then piled on the body and the pyre is fired by the son, who first holds a burning stick to the mouth of the corpse as if to inform it that he is about to apply the fire. The pyre of a man is fired at the head and of a woman at the foot. Rich people burn the corpse with sandalwood, and others have a little of this, and incense and sweet-smelling gum. Nowadays if the rain comes on and the pyre will not burn they use kerosine oil. When the body is half-consumed the son takes up a piece of wood and with it strikes the skull seven times, to break it and give exit to the soul. This, however, is not always done. The son then takes up on his right shoulder an earthen pot full of water, at the bottom of which is a small hole. He walks round the pyre three times in the direction of the sun's course and stands facing to the south, and dashes the pot on the ground, crying out in his grief, 'Oh, my father.' While this is going on *mantras* or sacred verses are recited by the officiating Brāhman. When the corpse is partly consumed each member of the assembly throws the *Pāñch lakariya* (five pieces of wood or sprigs of basil) on to the pyre, making obeisance to the deceased and saying, '*Swarg ko jao,*' or 'Ascend to heaven.' Or they may say, 'Go, become incarnate in some human being.' They stay by the corpse for  $1\frac{1}{4}$  *pahars* or watches or some four hours, until either the skull is broken by the chief mourner or breaks of itself with a crack. Then they bathe and come home and after some hours again return to the corpse, to see that it is properly burnt. If the pyre should go out and a dog or other animal should get hold of the corpse when it is half-burnt, all the relatives are put out of caste, and have to give a feast to all the caste, costing for a rich family about Rs. 50 and for a poor one Rs. 10 to Rs. 15. Then they return home and chew *nīm* leaves, which are bitter and purifying, and spit them out of their mouth, thus severing their connection with the corpse. When the mourners have left the deceased's house the women of the family bathe, the bangles of the widow are broken, the vermilion on the parting of her hair and the glass ornament (*tikli*) on her forehead are removed, and she is clad in white clothing of coarse texture to show that henceforth she is only a widow.

On the third day the mourners go again and collect the ashes and throw them into the nearest river. The bones are placed in a silken bag or an earthen pot or a leaf basket, and taken to the Ganges or Nerbudda within ten days if possible, or otherwise after a longer interval, being buried meantime. Some milk, salt and calves urine are sprinkled over the place where the corpse was burnt. These will cool the place, and the soul of the dead will similarly be cooled, and a cow will probably come and lick up the salt, and this will sanctify the place and also the soul. When the bones are to be taken to

a sacred river they are tied up in a little piece of cloth and carried at the end of a stick by the chief mourner, who is usually accompanied by several caste-fellows. At night during the journey this stick is planted in the ground, so that the bones may not touch the earth.

### 23. Burial

Graves are always dug from north to south. Some people say that heaven is to the north, being situated in the Himalayas, and others that In the Satyug or Golden Age the sun rose to the north. The digging of the grave only commences on the arrival of the funeral party, so there is of necessity a delay of several hours at the site, and all who attend a funeral are supposed to help in digging. It is considered to be meritorious to assist at a burial, and there is a saying that a man who has himself conducted a hundred funerals will become a Rāja in his next birth. When the grave has been filled in and a mound raised to mark the spot, each person present makes five small balls of earth and places them in a heap at the head of the grave. This custom is also known as *Pānch lakariya*, and must therefore be an imitation of the placing of the five sticks on the pyre; its original meaning in the latter case may have been that the mourners should assist the family by bringing a contribution of wood to the pyre. As adopted in burial it seems to have no special significance, but somewhat resembles the European custom of the mourners throwing a little dust into the grave.

### 24. Return of the soul

On the third day the *pindās* or sacrificial cakes are offered and this goes on till the tenth day. These cakes are not eaten by the priest or Mahā-Brāhman, but are thrown into a river. On the evening of the third day the son goes, accompanied by a Brāhman and a barber, and carrying a key to avert evil, to a pīpal<sup>67</sup> tree, on whose branches he hangs two earthen pots: one containing water, which trickles out through a hole in the bottom, and the other a lamp. On each succeeding night the son replenishes the contents of these pots, which are intended to refresh the spirit of the deceased and to light it on its way to the lower world. In some localities on the evening of the third day the ashes of the cooking-place are sifted, and laid out on a tray at night on the spot where the deceased died, or near the cooking-place. In the morning the layer of ashes is inspected, and if what appears to be a hand- or footprint is seen, it is held that the spirit of the deceased has visited the house. Some people look for handprints, some for footprints, and some for both, and the Nais look for the print of a cow's hoof, which when seen is held to prove that the deceased in consideration of his singular merits has been reborn a cow. If a woman has died in child-birth, or after the birth of a child and before the performance of the sixth-day ceremony of purification, her hands are tied with a cotton thread when she is buried, in order that her spirit may be unable to rise and trouble the living. It is believed that the souls of such women become evil spirits or *Churels*. Thorns are also placed over her grave for the same purpose.

### 25. Mourning

During the days of mourning the chief mourner sits apart and does no work. The others do their work but do not touch any one else, as they are impure. They leave their hair unkempt, do not worship the gods nor sleep on cots, and abjure betel, milk, butter, curds, meat, the wearing of shoes, new clothes and other luxuries. In these days the friends of the family come and comfort the mourners with conversation on the shortness and uncertainty of human life and kindred topics. During the period of mourning when the family go to bathe they march one behind the other in Indian file. And on the last day all the people of the village accompany them, the men first and after they have

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<sup>67</sup> *Ficus R.*

returned the women, all marching one behind the other. They also come back in this manner from the actual funeral, and the idea is perhaps to prevent the dead man's spirit from following them. He would probably feel impelled to adopt the same formation and fall in behind the last of the line, and then some means is devised, such as spreading thorns in the path, for leaving him behind.

## 26. Shaving, and presents to Brahmins

On the ninth, tenth or eleventh day the males of the family have the front of the head from the crown, and the beard and moustaches, shaved in token of mourning. The Mahā-Brāhman who receives the gifts for the dead is shaved with them. This must be done for an elder relation, but a man need not be shaved on the death of his wife, sister or children. The day is the end of mourning and is called Gauri Ganesh, Gauri being Pārvati or the wife of Siva, and Ganesh the god of good fortune. On the occasion the family give to the Mahā-Brāhman<sup>68</sup> a new cot and bedding with a cloth, an umbrella to shield the spirit from the sun's rays, a copper vessel full of water to quench its thirst, a brass lamp to guide it on its journey, and if the family is well-to-do a horse and a cow, All these things are meant to be for the use of the dead man in the other world. It is also the Brāhman's business to eat a quantity of cooked food, which will form the dead man's food. It is of great spiritual importance to the dead man's soul that the Brāhman should finish the dish set before him, and if he does not do so the soul will fare badly. He takes advantage of this by stopping in the middle of the meal, saying that he has eaten all he is capable of and cannot go on, so that the relations have to give him large presents to induce him to finish the food. These Mahā-Brāhmans are utterly despised and looked down on by all other Brāhmans and by the community generally, and are sometimes made to live outside the village. The regular priest, the Malai or Purohit, can accept no gifts from the time of the death to the end of the period of mourning. Afterwards he also receives presents in money according to the means of his clients, which it is supposed will benefit the dead man's soul in the next world; but no disgrace attaches to the acceptance of these.

## 27. End of mourning

When the mourning is complete on the Gauri-Ganesh day all the relatives take their food at the chief mourner's house, and afterwards the *panchāyat* invest him with a new turban provided by a relative. On the next bazār day the members of the *panchāyat* take him to the bazār and tell him to take up his regular occupation and earn his livelihood. Thereafter all his relatives and friends invite him to take food at their houses, probably to mark his accession to the position of head of the family.

## 28. Anniversaries of the dead

Three months, six months and twelve months after the death presents are made to a Brāhman, consisting of Sīdha, or butter, wheat and rice for a day's food. The anniversaries of the dead are celebrated during Pitripaksh or the dark fortnight of Kunwār (September-October). If a man died on the third day of any fortnight in the year, his anniversary is celebrated on the third day of this fortnight and so on. On that day it is supposed that his spirit will visit his earthly house where his relatives reside. But the souls of women all return to their homes on the ninth day of the fortnight, and on the thirteenth day come the souls of all those who have met with a violent death, as by a fall, or have been killed by wild animals or snakes. The spirits of such persons are supposed, on account of their untimely end, to entertain a special grudge against the living.

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<sup>68</sup> He is also known as Katia or Kattaha Brāhman and as Mahāpātra.

## 29. Beliefs in the hereafter

As regards the belief in the hereafter Mr. Gordon writes:<sup>69</sup> “That they have the idea of hell as a place of punishment may be gathered from the belief that when salt is spilt the one who does this will in Pātāl or the infernal region have to gather up each grain of salt with his eyelids. Salt is for this reason handed round with great care, and it is considered unlucky to receive it in the palm of the hand; it is therefore invariably taken in a cloth or vessel. There is a belief that the spirit of the deceased hovers round familiar scenes and places, and on this account, whenever possible, a house in which any one has died is destroyed or deserted. After the spirit has wandered round restlessly for a certain time it is said that it will again become incarnate and take the form either of man or of one of the lower animals.” In Mandla they think that the soul after death is arraigned and judged before Yama, and is then chained to a flaming pillar for a longer or shorter period according to its sins. The gifts made to Brāhmans for the dead somewhat shorten the period. After that time it is born again with a good or bad body and human or animal according to its deserts.

## 30. Religion. Village gods

The caste worship the principal Hindu deities. Either Bhagwān or Parmeshwar is usually referred to as the supreme deity, as we speak of God. Bhagwān appears to be Vishnu or the Sun, and Parmeshwar is Siva or Mahādeo. There are few temples to Vishnu in villages, but none are required as the sun is daily visible. Sunday or Raviwār is the day sacred to him, and some people fast in his honour on Sundays, eating only one meal without salt. A man salutes the sun after he gets up by joining his hands and looking towards it, again when he has washed his face, and a third time when he has bathed, by throwing a little water in the sun’s direction. He must not spit in front of the sun nor perform the lower functions of the body in its sight. Others say that the sun and moon are the eyes of God, and the light of the sun is the effulgence of God, because by its light and heat all moving and immobile creatures sustain their life and all corn and other products of the earth grow. In his incarnations of Rāma and Krishna there are temples to Vishnu in large villages and towns. Khermāta, the mother of the village, is the local form of Devi or the earth-goddess. She has a small hut and an image of Devi, either black or red. She is worshipped by a priest called Panda, who may be of any caste except the impure castes. The earth is worshipped in various ways. A man taking medicine for the first time in an illness sprinkles a few drops on the earth in its honour. Similarly for the first three or four times that a cow is milked after the birth of a calf the stream is allowed to fall on the ground. A man who is travelling offers a little food to the earth before eating himself. Devi is sometimes considered to be one of seven sisters, but of the others only two are known, Marhai Devi, the goddess of cholera, and Sitala Devi, the goddess of smallpox. When an epidemic of cholera breaks out the Panda performs the following ceremony to avert it. He takes a kid and a small pig or chicken, and some cloth, cakes, glass bangles, vermilion, an earthen lamp, and some country liquor, which is sprinkled all along the way from where he starts to where he stops. He proceeds in this manner to the boundary of the village at a place where there are cross-roads, and leaves all the things there. Sometimes the animals are sacrificed and eaten. While the Panda is doing this every one collects the sweepings of his house in a winnowing-fan and throws them outside the village boundary, at the same time ringing a bell continuously. The Panda must perform his ceremony at night and, if possible, on the day of the new moon. He is accompanied by a few other low-caste persons called Gunias. A Gunia is one who can be possessed by a spirit in the temple of Khermāta. When possessed he shakes his head up and down violently and foams at the mouth, and sometimes strikes his head on the ground. Another favourite godling is Hardaul, who was the brother of Jujhār Singh, Rāja of Orchha, and was suspected by Jujhār

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<sup>69</sup> *Indian Folk Tales*, p. 54.

Singh of loving the latter's wife, and poisoned in consequence by his orders. Hardaul has a platform and sometimes a hut with an image of a man on horseback carrying a spear in his hand. His shrine is outside the village, and two days before a marriage the women of the family visit his shrine and cook and eat their food there and invite him to the wedding. Clay horses are offered to him, and he is supposed to be able to keep off rain and storms during the ceremony. Hardaul is perhaps the deified Rājput horseman. Hanumān or Mahābīr is represented by an image of a monkey coloured with vermilion, with a club in his hand and a slain man beneath his feet. He is principally worshipped on Saturdays so that he may counteract the evil influences exercised by the planet Saturn on that day. His image is painted with oil mixed with vermilion and has a wreath of flowers of the cotton tree; and *gugal* or incense made of resin, sandalwood and other ingredients is burnt before him. He is the deified ape, and is the god of strength and swiftness, owing to the exploits performed by him during Rāma's invasion of Ceylon. Dūlha Deo is another godling whose shrine is in every village. He was a young bridegroom who was carried off by a tiger on his way to his wedding, or, according to another account, was turned into a stone pillar by a flash of lightning. Before the starting of a wedding procession the members go to Dūlha Deo and offer a pair of shoes and a miniature post and marriage-crown. On their return they offer a cocoanut. Dūlha Deo has a stone and platform to the east of the village, or occasionally an image of a man on horseback like Hardaul. Mirohia is the god of the field boundary. There is no sign of him, but every tenant, when he begins sowing and cutting the crops, offers a little curds and rice and a cocoanut and lays them on the boundary of the field, saying the name of Mirohia Deo. It is believed among agriculturists that if this godling is neglected he will flatten the corn by a wind, or cause the cart to break on its way to the threshing-floor.

### 31. Sowing the *Jawaras* or Gardens of Adonis

The sowing of the *Jawaras*, corresponding to the gardens of Adonis, takes place during the first nine days of the months of Kunwār and Chait (September and March). The former is a nine days' fast preceding the Dasahra festival, and it is supposed that the goddess Devi was during this time employed in fighting the buffalo-demon (Bhainsāsūr), whom she slew on the tenth day. The latter is a nine days' fast at the new year, preceding the triumphant entry of Rāma into Ajodhia on the tenth day on his return from Ceylon. The first period comes before the sowing of the spring crop of wheat and other grains, and the second is at the commencement of the harvest of the same crop. In some localities the *Jawaras* are also grown a third time in the rains, probably as a preparation for the *juāri* sowings,<sup>70</sup> as *juāri* is planted in the baskets or 'gardens' at this time. On the first day a small room is cleared and whitewashed, and is known as the *diwāla* or temple. Some earth is brought from the fields and mixed with manure in a basket, and a male member of the family sows wheat in it, bathing before he does so. The basket is kept in the *diwāla* and the same man attends on it throughout the nine days, fasting all day and eating only milk and fruit at night. A similar nine days' fast was observed by the Eleusinians before the sacramental eating of corn and the worship of the Corn Goddess, which constituted the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>71</sup> During the period of nine days, called the *Naorātra*, the plants are watered, and long stalks spring up. On the eighth day the *hom* or fire offering is performed, and the *Gunias* or devotees are possessed by Devi. On the evening of the ninth day the women, putting on their best clothes, walk out of the houses with the pots of grain on their heads, singing songs in praise of Devi. The men accompany them beating drums and cymbals. The devotees pierce their cheeks with long iron needles and walk in the procession. High-caste women, who cannot go themselves, hire the barber's or waterman's wife to go for them. The pots are taken to a tank and thrown in, the stalks of grain being kept and distributed as a mark of amity. The wheat which is sown in Kunwār

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<sup>70</sup> *Sorghum vulgare*, a large millet.

<sup>71</sup> Dr. Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 365.

gives a forecast of the spring crops. A plant is pulled out, and the return of the crop will be the same number of times the seed as it has roots. The woman who gets to the tank first counts the number of plants in her pot, and this gives the price of wheat in rupees per *māni*.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes marks of red rust appear on the plants, and this shows that the crop will suffer from rust. The ceremony performed in Chait is said to be a sort of harvest thanksgiving. On the ninth day of the autumn ceremony another celebration called 'Jhinhia' or 'Norta' takes place in large villages. A number of young unmarried girls take earthen pots and, making holes in them and placing lamps inside, carry them on their heads through the village, singing and dancing. They receive presents from the villagers, with which they hold a feast. At this a small platform is erected and two earthen dolls, male and female, are placed on it; rice and flowers are offered to them and their marriage is celebrated.



Sowing

The following observances in connection with the crops are practised by the agricultural castes in Chhattīsgarh:

### 32. Rites connected with the crops. Customs of cultivation

The agricultural year begins on Akti or the 3rd day of Baisākh (April-May). On that day a cup made of *palās*<sup>73</sup> leaves and filled with rice is offered to Thākur Deo. In some villages the boys sow rice seeds before Thākur Deo's shrine with little toy ploughs. The cultivator then goes to his field, and covering his hand with wheat-flour and turmeric, stamps it five times on the plough. The mālguzār takes five handfuls of the seed consecrated to Thākur Deo and sows it, and each of the cultivators also sows a little. After this regular cultivation may begin on any day, though Monday and Friday are considered auspicious days for the commencement of sowing. On the Hareli, or festival of the fresh verdure, which falls on the 15th day of Shrāwan (July-August), balls of flour mixed with salt are given to the cattle. The plough and all the implements of agriculture are taken to a tank and washed, and are then set up in the courtyard of the house and plastered with cowdung. The plough is set facing towards the sun, and butter and sugar are offered to it. An earthen pot is whitewashed and human

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<sup>72</sup> A measure of 400 lbs.

<sup>73</sup> *Butea frondosa*.

figures are drawn on it with charcoal, one upside down. It is then hung over the entrance to the house and is believed to avert the evil eye. All the holes in the cattle-sheds and courtyards are filled and levelled with gravel. While the rice is growing, holidays are observed on five Sundays and no work is done. Before harvest Thākur Deo must be propitiated with an offering of a white goat or a black fowl. Any one who begins to cut his crop before this offering has been made to Thākur Deo is fined the price of a goat by the village community. Before threshing his corn each cultivator offers a separate sacrifice to Thākur Deo of a goat, a fowl or a broken cocoanut. Each evening, on the conclusion of a day's threshing, a wisp of straw is rubbed on the forehead of each bullock, and a hair is then pulled from its tail, and the hairs and straw made into a bundle are tied to the pole of the threshing-floor. The cultivator prays, 'O God of plenty! enter here full and go out empty.' Before leaving the threshing-floor for the night some straw is burnt and three circles are drawn with the ashes, one round the heap of grain and the others round the pole. Outside the circles are drawn pictures of the sun, the moon, a lion and a monkey, or of a cart and a pair of bullocks. Next morning before sunrise the ashes are swept away by waving a winnowing-fan over them. This ceremony is called *anjan chadhāna* or placing lamp-black on the face of the threshing-floor to avert the evil eye, as women put it on their eyes. Before the grain is measured it must be stacked in the form of a trapezium with the shorter end to the south, and not in that of a square or oblong heap. The measurer stands facing the east, and having the shorter end of the heap on his left hand. On the larger side of the heap are laid the *kalara* or hook, a winnowing-fan, the *dauri*, a rope by which the bullocks are tied to the threshing-pole, one or three branches of the *ber* or wild plum tree, and the twisted bundle of straw and hair of the bullocks which had been tied to the pole. On the top of the heap are placed five balls of cowdung, and the *hom* or fire sacrifice is offered to it. The first *kātha*<sup>74</sup> of rice measured is also laid by the heap. The measurer never quite empties his measure while the work is going on, as it is feared that if he does this the god of abundance will leave the threshing-floor. While measuring he should always wear a turban. It is considered unlucky for any one who has ridden on an elephant to enter the threshing-floor, but a person who has ridden on a tiger brings luck. Consequently the Gonds and Baigas, if they capture a young tiger and tame it, will take it round the country, and the cultivators pay them a little to give their children a ride on it. To enter a threshing-floor with shod feet is also unlucky. Grain is not usually measured at noon but in the morning or evening.

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<sup>74</sup> A measure containing 9 lb. 2 oz. of rice.



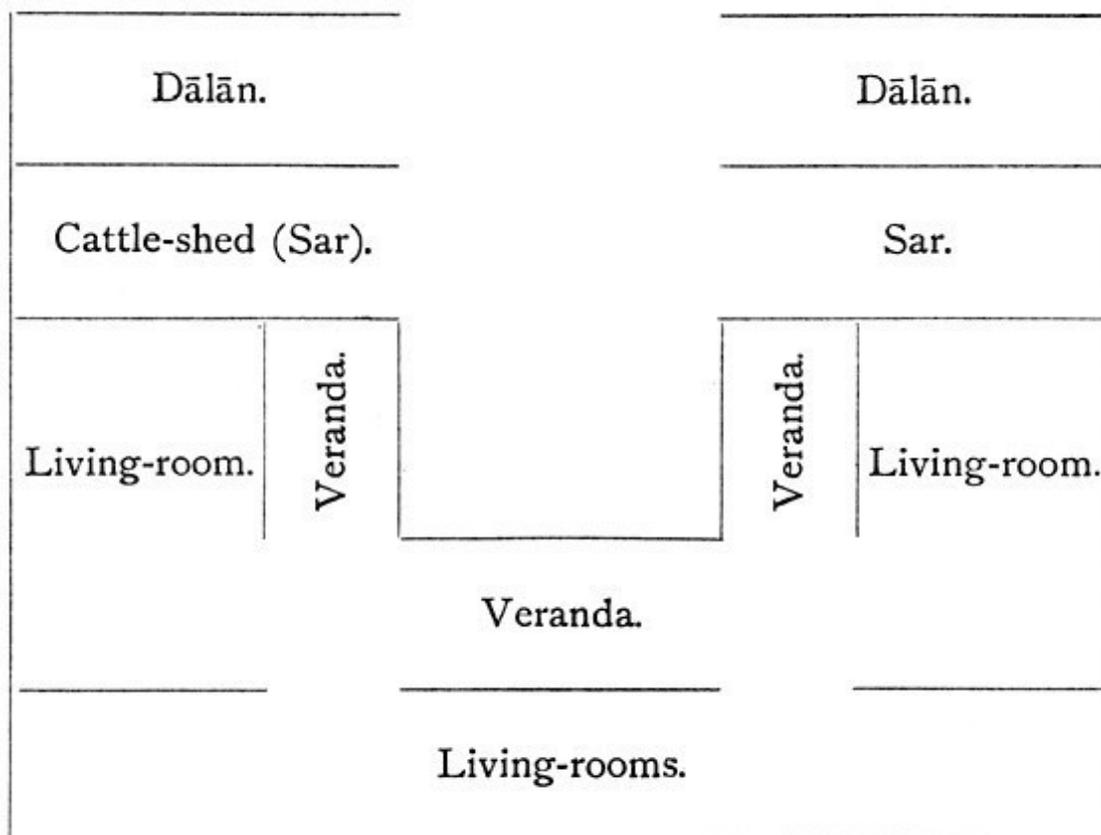
Threshing

### 33. Agricultural superstitions

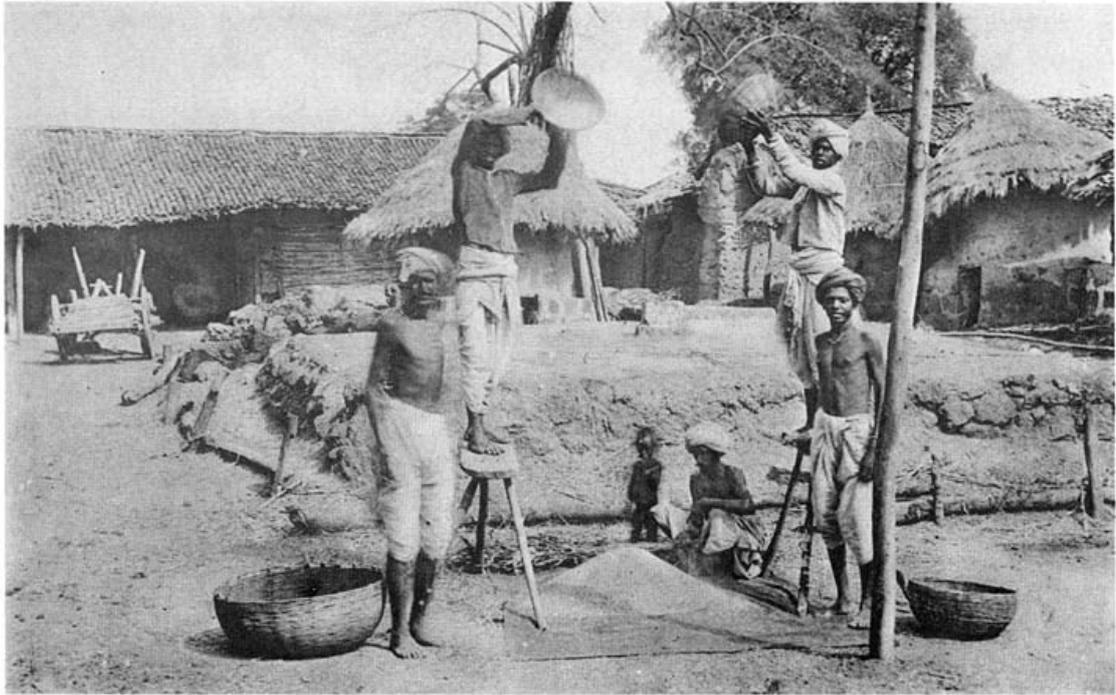
The cultivators think that each grain should bear a hundredfold, but they do not get this as Kuvera, the treasurer of the gods, or Bhainsāsūr, the buffalo demon who lives in the fields, takes it. Bhainsāsūr is worshipped when the rice is coming into ear, and if they think he is likely to be mischievous they give him a pig, but otherwise a smaller offering. When the standing corn in the fields is beaten down at night they think that Bhainsāsūr has been passing over it. He also steals the crop while it is being cut and is lying on the ground. Once Bhainsāsūr was absent while the particular field in the village from which he stole his supply of grain was cut and the crop removed, and afterwards he was heard crying that all his provision for the year had been lost. Sometimes the oldest man in the house cuts the first five bundles of the crop, and they are afterwards left in the field for the birds to eat. And at the end of harvest the last one or two sheaves are left standing in the field, and any one who likes can cut and carry them away. In some localities the last stalks are left standing in the field and are known as *barhona* or the giver of increase. Then all the labourers rush together at this last patch of corn and tear it up by the roots; everybody seizes as much as he can and keeps it, the master having no share in this patch. After the *barhona* has been torn up all the labourers fall on their faces to the ground and worship the field. In other places the *barhona* is left standing for the birds to eat. This custom, arises from the belief demonstrated by Sir J. G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* that the corn-spirit takes refuge in the last patch of grain, and that when it is cut he flies away or his life is extinguished. And the idea is supported by the fact that the rats and other vermin, who have been living in the field, seek shelter in the last patch of corn, and when this is cut have to dart out in front of the reapers. In some countries it is thought, as shown by Sir J. G. Frazer, that the corn-spirit takes refuge in the body of one of these animals.

### 34. Houses

The house of a *mālguzār* or good tenant stands in a courtyard or *angan* 45 to 60 feet square and surrounded by a brick or mud wall. The plan of a typical house is shown below:—



The *dālān* or hall is for the reception of visitors. One of the living-rooms is set apart for storing grain. Those who keep their women secluded have a door at the back of the courtyard for their use. Cooking is done in one of the rooms, and there are no chimneys, the smoke escaping through the tiles. They bathe either in the *chauk* or central courtyard, or go out and bathe in a tank or river or at a well. The family usually sleep inside the house in the winter and outside in the hot weather. A poor *mālguzār* or tenant has only two rooms with a veranda in front, one of which is used by the family, while cattle are kept in the other; while the small tenants and labourers have only one room in which both men and cattle reside. The walls are of bamboo matting plastered on both sides with mud, and the roof usually consists of single small tiles roughly baked in an improvised kiln. The house is surrounded by a mud wall or hedge, and sometimes has a garden behind in which tobacco, maize or vegetables are grown. The interior is dark, for light is admitted only by the low door, and the smoke-stained ceiling contributes to the gloom. The floor is of beaten earth well plastered with cowdung, the plastering being repeated weekly.



Winnowing

### 35. Superstitions about houses

The following are some superstitious beliefs and customs about houses. A house should face north or east and not south or west, as the south is the region of Yama, the god of death, who lives in Ceylon, and the west the quarter of the setting sun. A Muhammadan's house, on the other hand, should face south or west because Mecca lies to the south-west. A house may have verandas front and back, or on the front and two sides, but not on all four sides. The front of a house should be lower than the back, this shape being known as *gai-mukh* or cow-mouthed, and not higher than the back, which is *singh-mukh* or tiger-mouthed. The front and back doors should not be in a straight line, which would enable one to look right through the house. The *angan* or compound of a house should be a little longer than it is wide, no matter how little. Conversely the building itself should be a little wider along the front than it is long from front to rear. The kitchen should always be on the right side if there is a veranda, or else behind. When an astrologer is about to found a house he calculates the direction in which Shesh Nāg, the snake on whom the world reposes, is holding his head at that time, and plants the first brick or stone to the left of that direction, because snakes and elephants do not turn to the left but always to the right. Consequently the house will be more secure and less likely to be shaken down by Shesh Nāg's movements, which cause the phenomenon known to us as an earthquake. Below the foundation-stone or brick are buried a pice, an areca-nut and a grain of rice, and it is lucky if the stone be laid by a man who has been faithful to his wife. There should be no echo in a house, as an echo is considered to be the voice of evil spirits. The main beam should be placed in position on a lucky day, and the carpenter breaks a cocoanut against it and receives a present. The width of the rooms along the front of a house should be five cubits each, and if there is a staircase it must have an uneven number of steps. The door should be low so that a man must bend his head on entering and thus show respect to the household god. The floor of the verandas should be lower than that of the room inside; the Hindus say that the compound should not see the veranda nor the veranda the house. But this rule has of course also the advantage of keeping the house-floor dry. If the main beam of a house breaks it is a very bad omen, as also for a vulture or kite to perch on the roof; if

this should happen seven days running the house will inevitably be left empty by sickness or other misfortune. A dog howling in front of the house is very unlucky, and if, as may occasionally happen, a dog should get on to the roof of the house and bark, the omen is of the worst kind. Neither the pīpal nor banyan trees should be planted in the yard of a house, because the leavings of food might fall upon them, and this would be an insult to the deities who inhabit the sacred trees. Neither is it well to plant the *nīm* tree, because the *nīm* is the tree of anchorites, and the frequent contemplation of it will take away from a man the desire of offspring and lead to the extinction of his family. Bananas should not be grown close to the house, because the sound of this fruit bursting the pod is said to be audible, and to hear it is most unlucky. It is a good thing to have a *gular*<sup>75</sup> tree in the yard, but at a little distance from the house so that the leavings of food may not fall upon it; this is the tree of the saint Dattatreya, and will cause wealth to increase in the house. A plant of the sacred *tulsi* or basil is usually kept in the yard, and every morning the householder pours a vessel of water over it as he bathes, and in the evening places a lamp beside it. This holy plant sanctifies the air which passes over it to the house.

No one should ever sit on the threshold of a house; this is the seat of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and to sit on it is disrespectful to her. A house should never be swept at twilight, because it is then that Lakshmi makes her rounds, and she would curse it and pass by. At this time a lamp should be lighted, no one should be allowed to sleep, and even if a man is sick he should sit up on his bed. At this time the grinding-mill should not be turned nor grain be husked, but reverence should be paid to ancestors and to the household deities. No one must sit on the grinding-mill; it is regarded as a mother because it gives out the flour by which the family is fed. No one must sit on cowdung cakes because they are the seat of Saturn, the Evil One, and their smell is called *Sanīchar ke bās*. No one must step on the *chūlka* or cooking-hearth nor jar it with his foot. At the midday meal, when food is freshly cooked, each man will take a little fire from the hearth and place it in front of him, and will throw a little of everything he eats on to the fire, and some *ghī* as an offering to Agni, the god of fire. And he will also walk round the hearth, taking water in his hand and then throwing it on the ground as an offering to Agni. A man should not sleep with his feet to the south, because a corpse is always laid in that direction. He should not sleep with his feet to the east, nor spit out water from his mouth in the direction of the east.

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<sup>75</sup> *Ficus glomerata*.



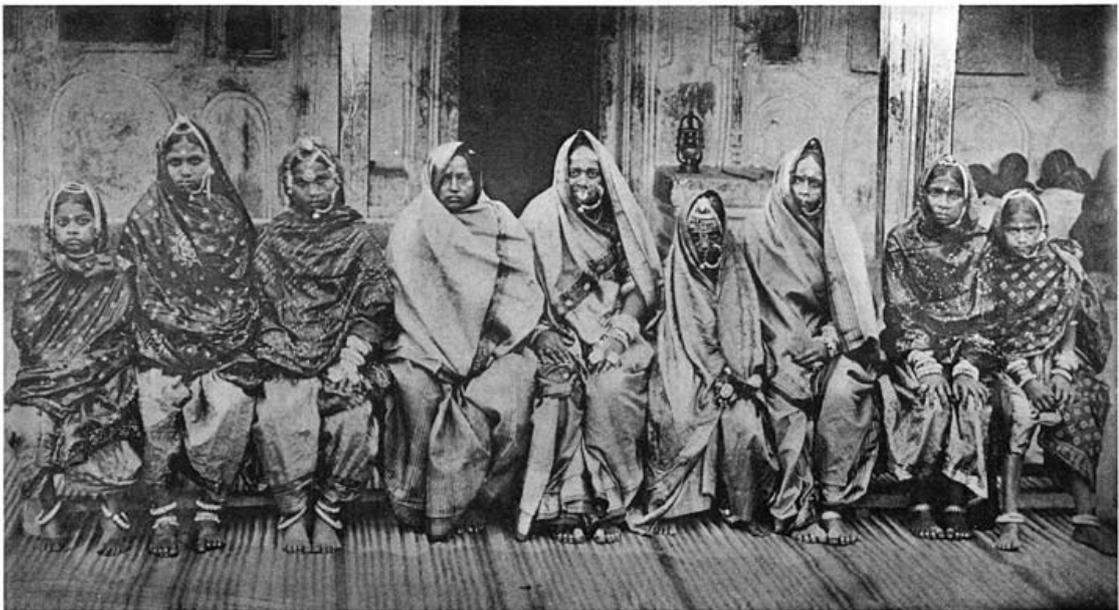
Women grinding wheat and husking rice

### 36. Furniture

Of furniture there is very little. Carefully arranged in their places are the brass cooking-pots, water-pots and plates, well polished with mud and water applied with plenty of elbow-grease by the careful housewife. Poor tenants frequently only have one or two brass plates and cups and an iron girdle, while all the rest of their vessels are of earthenware. Each house has several *chūlhas* or small horseshoe erections of earth for cooking. Each person in the house has a sleeping-cot if the family is comfortably off, and a spare one is also kept. These must be put out and exposed to the sun at least once a week to clear them of fleas and bugs. It is said that the Jains cannot adopt this method of disinfecting their beds owing to the sacrifice of insect life thereby involved; and that there are persons in Calcutta who make it their profession to go round and offer to lie on these cots for a time; they lie on them for some hours, and the little denizens being surfeited with their blood subsequently allow the owner of the cot to have a quiet night. A cot should always be shorter than a man's length, so that his legs project over the end; if it is so long as to contain his whole length it is like a bier, and it is feared that lying on a cot of this kind will cause him shortly to lie on a bier. Poor tenants do not usually have cots, but sleep on the ground, spreading kodon-straw on it for warmth. They have no bedding except a *gudri* or mattress made of old rags and clothes sewn together. In winter they put it over them, and sleep on it in summer. They will have a wooden log to rest their heads on when sleeping, and this will also serve as a seat for a guest. Mālguzārs have a *razai* or quilt, and a *doria* or thick cloth like those used for covering carts. Clothes and other things are kept in *jhāmpis* or round bamboo baskets. For sitting on there are *machnīs* or four-legged stools about a foot high with seats of grass rope or *pīrhis*, little wooden stools only an inch or two from the ground. For lighting, wicks are set afloat in little earthen saucers filled with oil.

### 37. Clothes

Landowners usually have a long coat known as *angarkha* reaching to the knees, with flaps folding over the breasts and tied with strings. The *bandi* is a short coat like this but coming only to the hips, and is more popular with cultivators. In the cold weather it is frequently stuffed with cotton and dyed dark green or dark blue so as not to show the dirt. For visits of ceremony a pair of *paijāmas* are kept, but otherwise the *dhoti* or loin-cloth is commonly worn. Wearing the *dhoti* pulled half-way up to the thighs is called 'cultivator's fashion.' A shirt may be worn under the coat; but cultivators usually have only one garment, nowadays often a sleeveless coat with buttons in front. The proper head-dress is the *pagri*, a piece of coloured cloth perhaps 30 feet long and a foot wide, twisted tightly into folds, which is lifted on and off the head and is only rarely undone. Twisting the *pagri* is an art, and a man is usually hired to do it and paid four annas. The *pagris* have different shapes in different parts of the country, and a Hindu can tell by the shape of a man's *pagri* where he comes from. But nowadays cultivators usually wear a *dupatta* or short piece of cloth tied, loosely round the head. The tenant arranges his head-cloth with a large projection on one side, and in it he carries his *chilam* or pipe-bowl, and also small quantities of vegetables, salt or condiments purchased at the bazār. In case of necessity he can transform it into a loin-cloth, or tie up a bundle of grass with it, or tie his *lota* to it to draw water from a well. 'What can the washerman do in a village where the people live naked?' is a Chhattīsgarhi proverb which aptly indicates that scantiness is the most prominent feature of the local apparel. Here a cloth round the loins, and this usually of meagre dimensions, constituted, until recently, the full dress of a cultivator. Those who have progressed a stage farther throw a cloth loosely over one shoulder, covering the chest, and assume an apology for a turban by wrapping another small rag carelessly round the head, leaving the crown generally bare, as if this part of the person required special sunning and ventilation. Hindus will not be seen out-of-doors with the head bare, though the Gonds and other tribes only begin to wear head-cloths when they are adopting Hinduism. The Gondi fashion was formerly prevalent in Chhattīsgarh. Some sanctity attaches to the turban, probably because it is the covering of the head. To knock off a man's turban is a great insult, and if it drops off or he lets it fall, it is a very bad omen.



Group of women in Hindustāni dress

### 38. Women's clothes

Women, in the northern Districts wear a skirt made of coarse cloth, usually red or blue, and a shoulder-cloth of the same material. Hand-woven cloth is still commonly used in the interior. The skirt is sometimes drawn up through the legs behind so as to give it a divided appearance; this is called *kachhota*. On the upper part of the body they wear an *angia* or breast-cloth, that is a short, tight, sleeveless jacket reaching only to below the breasts. The *angia* is tied behind, while the Marātha *choli*, which is the same thing, is buttoned or tied in front. High-caste women draw their shoulder-cloth right over the head so that the face cannot be seen. When a woman goes before a person of position she covers her head, as it is considered immodest to leave it bare. Women of respectable families wear a sheet of fine white, yellow, or red cloth drawn over the head and reaching to the ankles when they go on a journey, this being known as *pichhora*. In Chhattīsgarh all the requirements of fashion among women are satisfied by one cloth from 8 to 12 yards long and about a yard wide, which envelops the person in one fold from the waist to below the knee, hanging somewhat loosely. It is tied at the waist, and the remaining half is spread over the breast and drawn across the right shoulder, the end covering the head like a sheet and falling over the left shoulder. The simplicity of this solitary garment displays a graceful figure to advantage, especially on festival days, when those who can afford it are arrayed in tasar silk. When a girl is married the bridegroom's family give her expensive clothes to wear at festivals and her own people give her ordinary clothes, but usually not more than will last a year. Whenever she goes back to her father's house after her marriage, he gives her one or two cloths if he can afford it. Women of the middle and lower classes wear ornaments of bell-metal, a mixture of copper and zinc, which are very popular. Some women wear brass and zinc ornaments, and well-to-do persons have them of silver or gold.

### 39. Bathing

Hot water is not used for bathing in Saugor, except by invalids, but is customary in Betūl and other Districts. The bathing-place in the courtyard is usually a large square stone on which the bather sits; he has a big circular brass vessel by him called *gangāl*,<sup>76</sup> and from this he takes water either in a cup or with his hands and throws it over himself, rubbing his body. Where there is a tank or stream people go to bathe in it, and if there is none the poorer classes sometimes bathe at the village well. Each man or woman has two body-or loin-cloths, and they change the cloth whenever they bathe—going into the water in the one which they have worn from the previous day, and changing into the other when they come out; long practice enables them to do this in public without any undue exposure of the body. A good tank or a river is a great amenity to a village, especially if it has a *ghāt* or flight of stone steps. Many people will spend an hour or so here daily, disporting themselves in the water or on the bank, and wedding and funeral parties are held by it, owing to the facilities for ceremonial bathing.

### 40. Food

People who do not cultivate with their own hands have only two daily meals, one at midday and the other at eight or nine in the evening. Agriculturists require a third meal in the early morning before going out to the fields. Wheat and the millets *juāri* and *kodon* are the staple foods of the cultivating classes in the northern Districts, and rice is kept for festivals. The millets are made into thick *chapātis* or cakes, their flour not being sufficiently adhesive for thin ones, and are eaten with the pulses, lentils, arhar,<sup>77</sup> mung<sup>78</sup> and urad.<sup>79</sup> The pulses are split into half and boiled in water, and when

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<sup>76</sup> From Ganga, or the Ganges, and *āla* a pot.

<sup>77</sup> *Cajanus indicus*.

they get soft, chillies, salt and turmeric are mixed with them. Pieces of *chapāti* are broken off and dipped into this mixture. Various vegetables are also eaten. When pulse is not available the *chapātis* are simply dipped into buttermilk. If *chapātis* cannot be afforded at both meals, *ghorna* or the flour of kodon or juār boiled into a paste with water is substituted for them, a smaller quantity of this being sufficient to allay hunger. Wheat-cakes are fried in *ghī* (clarified butter) as a luxury, and at other times in sesamum oil. Rice or ground gram boiled in buttermilk are other favourite foods.

In Chhattīsgarh rice is the common food: it is eaten with pulses at midday and with vegetables cooked in *ghī* in the evening. In the morning they drink a rice-gruel, called *bāsi* which consists of the previous night's repast mixed with water and taken cold. On festivals rice is boiled in milk. Milk is often drunk at night, and there is a saying, "He who drinks water in the morning and milk at night and takes *harra* before he sleeps will never need a doctor." A little powdered *harra* or myrobalan acts as an aperient. The food of landowners and tenants is much the same, except that the former have more butter and vegetables, according to the saying, '*Rāja praja ka ekhi khāna*' or 'The king and peasant eat the same food.' Those who eat flesh have an occasional change of food, but most Kurmis abstain from it. Farmservants eat the gruel of rice or kodon boiled in water when they can afford it, and if not they eat mahua flowers. These are sometimes boiled in water, and the juice is then strained off and mixed with half-ground flour, and they are also pounded and made into *chapātis* with flour and water. The leaves of the young gram-plants make a very favourite vegetable and are eaten raw, either moist or dried. In times of scarcity the poorer classes eat tamarind leaves, the pith of the banyan tree, the seeds of the bamboo, the bark of the *semar* tree,<sup>80</sup> the fruit of the *babūl*,<sup>81</sup> and other articles. A cultivator will eat 2 lbs. of grain a day if he can get it, or more in the case of rice. Their stomachs get distended owing to the large quantities of boiled rice eaten at one time. The leaves of the *chirota* or *chakora* a little plant<sup>82</sup> which grows thickly at the commencement of the rains near inhabited sites, are also a favourite vegetable, and a resource in famine time. The people call it '*Gaon ka thākur*,' or 'lord of the village,' and have a saying:

Amarbel aur kamalgata,  
Gaon ka thākur, gai ka matha,  
Nagar sowāsan, unmen milai,  
Khāj, dād, sehua mīt jāwe.

*Amarbel* is an endless creeper, with long yellow strings like stalks, which infests and destroys trees; it is called *amarbel* or the immortal, because it has no visible root. *Kamalgata* is the seed of the lotus; *gai ka matha* is buttermilk; *nagar sowāsan*, 'the happiness of the town,' is turmeric, because married women whose husbands are alive put turmeric on their foreheads every day; *khāj*, *dād* and *sehua* are itch, ringworm and some kind of rash, perhaps measles; and the verse therefore means:

"Eat *amarbel*, lotus seeds, *chirota*, buttermilk and turmeric mixed together, and you will keep off itch, ringworm and measles." *Chirota* is good for the itch.

## 41. Caste-feasts

At the commencement of a marriage or other ceremonial feast the host must wash the feet of all the guests himself. If he does not do this they will be dissatisfied, and, though they will eat at his house, will consider they have not been properly welcomed. He takes a large brass plate and placing

<sup>78</sup> *Phaseolus mungo*.

<sup>79</sup> *Phaseolus radiatus*.

<sup>80</sup> *Bombax malabaricum*.

<sup>81</sup> *Acacia arabica*.

<sup>82</sup> *Cassia tora*.

the feet of his guest on it, pours water over them and then rubs and dries them; the water is thrown away and fresh water poured out for the next guest unless they should be brothers. Little flat stools about three inches high are provided for the guests, and if there are not enough of them a carpet is spread; or *baithkis* or sitting-mats plaited from five or six large leaves are set out. These serve as a mark of attention, as it would be discourteous to make a man sit on the ground, and they also prevent the body-cloth from getting wet. The guests sit in the *chauk* or yard of the house inside, or in the *angan* or outside yard, either in lines or in a circle; members of the same caste sit with their crossed knees actually touching those of the man on either side of them to emphasise their brotherhood; if a man sat even a few inches apart from his fellows people would say he was out of caste—and this is how a man who is put out of caste actually does sit. Before each guest may be set two plates of leaves and eight *donas* or leaf-cups. On the plates are heaped rice, cakes of wheat fried in butter, and of husked urad pulse cooked with tilli or sesamum oil, and the pulse of gram and lentils. In the cups will be sugar, *ghī*, *dahi* or curded milk, various vegetables, pumpkins, and *besin* or ground gram cooked with buttermilk. All the male members of the host's family serve the food and they take it round, heaping and pouring it into each man's plates or cups until he says enough; and they continue to give further helpings as required. All the food is served at once in the different plates and cups, but owing to the number of guests a considerable time elapses before all are fully served, and the dinner lasts about two hours. The guests eat all the different dishes together with their fingers, taking a little of each according to their fancy. Each man has his *lota* or vessel of water by him and drinks as he eats. When the meal is finished large brass plates are brought in, one being given to about ten guests, and they wash their hands over these, pouring water on them from their vessels. A fresh carpet is then spread in the yard and the guests sit on it, and betel-leaf and tobacco are distributed. The *huqqa* is passed round, and *chilams* and *chongis* (clay pipe-bowls and leaf-pipes) are provided for those who want them. The women do not appear at the feast but stay inside, sitting in the *angan* or inner court, which is behind the *purda*.

## 42. Hospitality

The people still show great hospitality, and it is the custom of many *mālguzārs*, at least in Chhattīsgarh, to afford food and a night's rest to all travellers who may require it. When a Brāhman comes to the village such *mālguzārs* will give him one or two annas, and to a Pandit or learned man as much as a rupee. Formerly it is said that when any stranger came through the village he was at once offered a cup of milk and told to drink it or throw it away. But this custom has died out in Chhattīsgarh, though one has met with it once or twice in Sambalpur. When District Officers go on tour, well-to-do landowners ask to be allowed to supply free provisions for the whole camp at least for a day, and it is difficult to refuse them gracefully. In Mandla, Baniyas and *mālguzārs* in villages near the Nerbudda sometimes undertake to give a pound of grain to every *parikramawāsi* or pilgrim perambulating the Nerbudda. And as the number of these steadily increases in consequence, they often become impoverished as a result of such indiscriminate charity.

## 43. Social customs. Tattooing

The Kurmis employ Brāhmins for their ceremonies. They have *gurus* or spiritual preceptors who may be Brāhmins or Bairāgis; the *guru* is given from 8 annas to Rs. 5 when he initiates a neophyte, as well as his food and a new white cloth. The *guru* is occasionally consulted on some religious question, but otherwise he does nothing for his disciple except to pay him an occasional visit, when he is hospitably entertained. The Kurmis of the northern Districts do not as a rule eat meat and also abstain from alcohol, but in Chhattīsgarh they eat the flesh of clean animals and fish, and also of fowls, and drink country liquor. Old men often give up flesh and wine as a mark of piety, when they are known as Bhagat or holy. They will take food cooked with water only from Brāhmins,

and that cooked without water from Rājput̄s, Banias and Kāyasths as well. Brāhmans and Rājput̄s will take water from Kurmis in the northern Districts though not in Chhattīsgarh. Here the Kurmis do not object to eating cooked food which has been carried from the house to the fields. This is called *rengai roti*, and castes which will eat it are considered inferior to those who always take their food in the *chauka* or purified place in the house. They say ‘Rām, Rām’ to each other in greeting, and the Raipur Kurmis swear by a dog or a pig. Generally they do not plough on the new or full moon days. Their women are tattooed after marriage with dots on the cheeks, marks of flies on the fingers, scorpions on the arms, and other devices on the legs.

#### 44. Caste penalties

Permanent expulsion from caste is inflicted for a change of religion, taking food or having sexual intercourse with a member of an impure caste, and for eating beef. For killing a man, a cow, a buffalo, an ass, a horse, a squirrel, a cat or a monkey a man must purify himself by bathing in the Ganges at Allahābād or Benāres and giving a feast to the caste. It will be seen that all these are domestic animals except the monkey, who is the god Hanumān. The squirrel is counted as a domestic animal because it is always about the house, and the souls of children are believed to go into squirrels. One household animal, the dog, is omitted, and he appears to be less sacred than the others. For getting maggots in a wound the offender must bathe in a sacred river, such as the Nerbudda or Mahānadi, and give a feast to the caste. For eating or having intercourse with a member of any caste other than the impure ones, or for a *liaison* within the caste, or for divorcing a wife or marrying a widow, or in the case of a woman for breaking her bangles in a quarrel with her husband, a penalty feast must be given. If a man omits to feast the caste after a death in his family a second feast is imposed, and if he insults the *panchāyat* he is fined.

#### 45. The cultivating status

The social status of the Kurmi appears to be that of the cultivator. He is above the menial and artisan castes of the village and the impure weaving and labouring castes; he is theoretically equal to the artisan castes of towns, but one or two of these, such as the Sunār or goldsmith and Kasār or brass-worker, have risen in the world owing to the prosperity or importance of their members, and now rank above the Kurmi. The Kurmi’s status appears to be that of the cultivator and member of the village community, but a large proportion of the Kurmis are recruited from the non-Aryan tribes, who have obtained land and been admitted into the caste, and this tends to lower the status of the caste as a whole. In the Punjab Kurmis apparently do not hold land and are employed in grass-cutting, weaving, and tending horses, and are even said to keep pigs.<sup>83</sup> Here their status is necessarily very low as they follow the occupations of the impure castes. The reason why the Kurmi as cultivator ranks above the village handicraftsmen may perhaps be that industrial pursuits were despised in early times and left to the impure Sūdras and to the castes of mixed descent; while agriculture and trade were the occupations of the Vaishya. Further, the village artisans and menials were supported before the general use of current coin by contributions of grain from the cultivators and by presents of grain at seed-time and harvest; and among the Hindus it is considered very derogatory to accept a gift, a man who does so being held to admit his social inferiority to the giver. Some exception to this is made in the case of Brāhmans, though even with them the rule partly applies. Of these two reasons for the cultivator’s superiority to the menial and artisan castes the former has to a large extent lost its force. The handicrafts are no longer considered despicable, and, as has been seen, some of the urban tradesmen, as the Sunār and Kasār, now rank above the Kurmi, or are at least equal to him. Perhaps even in ancient times these urban artificers were not despised like the village menials, as their skill

<sup>83</sup> *Punjab Census Report* (1881), p. 340.

was held in high repute. But the latter ground is still in full force and effect in the Central Provinces at least: the village artisans are still paid by contributions from the cultivator and receive presents from him at seed-time and harvest. The remuneration of the village menials, the blacksmith, carpenter, washerman, tanner, barber and waterman is paid at the rate of so much grain per plough of land according to the estimated value of the work done by them for the cultivators during the year. Other village tradesmen, as the potter, oilman and liquor-vendor, are no longer paid in grain, but since the introduction of currency sell their wares for cash; but there seems no reason to doubt that in former times when no money circulated in villages they were remunerated in the same manner. They still all receive presents, consisting of a sowing-basketful of grain at seed-time and one or two sheaves at harvest. The former are known as *Bījphuti*, or ‘the breaking of the seed,’ and the latter as *Khanvār*, or ‘that which is left.’ In Bilāspur the Kamias or village menials also receive as much grain as will fill a winnowing-fan when it has been threshed. When the peasant has harvested his grain all come and beg from him. The Dhīmar brings waternut, the Kāchhi or market-gardener some chillies, the Teli oil and tobacco, the Kalār some liquor if he drinks it, the Bania some sugar, and all receive grain in excess of the value of their gifts. The village menials come for their customary dues, and the Brāhman, the Nat or acrobat, the Gosain or religious mendicant, and the Fakīr or Muhammadan beggar solicit alms. On that day the cultivator is like a little king in his fields, and it is said that sometimes a quarter of the crop may go in this way; but the reference must be only to the spring crop and not to the whole holding. In former times grain must have been the principal source of wealth, and this old custom gives us a reason for the status of the cultivator in Hindu society. There is also a saying:

Uttam kheti, madhyam bān,  
Kanisht chākri, bhīk nidān,

or ‘Cultivation is the best calling, trade is respectable, service is menial, and begging is degraded.’

## 46. Occupation

The Kurmi is the typical cultivator. He loves his land, and to lose it is to break the mainspring of his life. His land gives him a freedom and independence of character which is not found among the English farm-labourers. He is industrious and plodding, and inured to hardship. In some Districts the excellent tilth of the Kurmi’s fields well portrays the result of his persevering labour, which he does not grudge to the land because it is his own. His wife is in no way behind him; the proverb says, “Good is the caste of the Kurmin; with a hoe in her hand she goes to the fields and works with her husband.” The Chandnāhu Kurmi women are said to be more enterprising than the men, keeping them up to their work, and managing the business of the farm as well as the household.

## Appendix List of Exogamous Clans

Sections of the Chandnāhu subcaste:

<i>Chānwar bambar</i>	Fly fan.
<i>Sandil</i>	Name of a Rishi.
<i>Gaind</i>	Ball.
<i>Sadāphal</i>	A fruit.
<i>Sondeha</i>	Gold-bodied.
<i>Sonkharchi</i>	Spender of gold.
<i>Kathail</i>	<i>Kath</i> , wood, or <i>kaththa</i> , catechu.
<i>Kāshi</i>	Benares. The Desha Kurmis are all of this <i>gotra</i> . It may also be a corruption of Kachhap, tortoise.
<i>Dhorha</i>	<i>Dhor</i> , cattle.
<i>Sumer</i>	A mountain.
<i>Chatur Midalia</i>	<i>Chatur</i> , clever.
<i>Bhāradwāj</i>	After the Rishi of that name; also a bird.
<i>Kousil</i>	Name of a Rishi.
<i>Ishwar</i>	God.
<i>Samund Karkari</i>	A particle in an ocean.
<i>Akālchuwa</i>	<i>Akāl</i> , famine.
<i>Padel</i>	Fallow.
<i>Bāghmār</i>	Tiger-slayer.
<i>Hardūba</i>	Green grass.
<i>Kānsia</i>	<i>Kāns</i> , a kind of grass.
<i>Ghiu Sāgar</i>	Ocean of <i>ghī</i>
<i>Dharam</i>	Most charitable.
<i>Dhurandar</i>	
<i>Singnāha</i>	<i>Singh</i> , a lion.
<i>Chimangarhia</i>	Belonging to Chimangarh.
<i>Khairagarhia</i>	Belonging to Khairagarh.
<i>Gotam</i>	A Rishi.

<i>Kāskyap</i>	A Rishi.
<i>Pandariha</i>	From Pandaria, a village.
<i>Paipakhār</i>	One who washes feet.
<i>Bānhpakhār</i>	One who washes arms.
<i>Chauria</i>	Chaurai, a vegetable.
<i>Sānd Sathi</i>	<i>Sānd</i> , bullock.
<i>Singhi</i>	<i>Singh</i> , lion or horn.
<i>Agra—Chandan</i>	Sandalwood.
<i>Tek Sanichar</i>	Saturday.
<i>Karaiya</i>	Frying-pan.
<i>Pukharia</i>	Pond.
<i>Dhubinha</i>	Dhobi, a caste.
<i>Pāwanbare</i>	<i>Pāwan</i> , air.
<i>Modganga</i>	Ganges.

Sections of the Gabel subcaste:

<i>Gangajal</i>	Ganges water.
<i>Bimba Lohir</i>	Bearer of a <i>lāthi</i> (stick).
<i>Sarang</i>	Peacock.
<i>Rāja Rāwat</i>	Royal prince.
<i>Singūr</i>	Beauty.
<i>Bānk pagar</i>	With a thread on the arm.
<i>Samundha</i>	Ocean.
<i>Parasrām,</i>	Rishi
<i>Katārmal</i>	<i>Katār</i> , dagger.
<i>Chaultān</i>	Sept of Rājput̄s.
<i>Pātan</i>	Village.
<i>Gajmani</i>	Elephant.
<i>Deori Sumer</i>	Village.
<i>Lahura Samudra</i>	Small sea.
<i>Hansbimbraon</i>	<i>Hans</i> , goose.
<i>Sunwāni</i>	Purifier.

Sections of the Santora subcaste:

<i>Narvaria</i>	Narwar, a town in Gwalior State.
<i>Mundharia</i>	Mundhra, a village.
<i>Naigaiyan</i>	Naogaon, a town in Bundelkhand.
<i>Pipraiya</i>	Piparia, a village.
<i>Dindoria</i>	Dindori, a village in Mandla District.
<i>Baheria</i>	A village.
<i>Bāndha</i>	<i>Bāndh</i> , embankment.
<i>Ktmūsar</i>	Wooden pestle.

Sections of the Tirole subcaste:

<i>Baghele</i>	<i>Bāgh</i> , tiger, or a sept of Rājput̄s.
<i>Rāthor</i>	Clan of Rājput̄s.
<i>Panwār</i>	Clan of Rājput̄s.
<i>Solanki</i>	Clan of Rājput̄s.
<i>Aulia</i>	<i>Aonla</i> , a fruit-bearing tree.
<i>Sindia</i>	<i>Sindi</i> , date-palm tree.
<i>Khusia</i>	<i>Khusi</i> , happiness.
<i>Sanoria</i>	<i>San</i> , hemp.
<i>Gora</i>	Fair-coloured.
<i>Bhākrya</i>	<i>Bhākar</i> , a thick bread.

Sections of the Gaur subcaste:

<i>Bhandāri</i>	Storekeeper.
<i>Dudhua</i>	<i>Dūd̄h</i> , milk.
<i>Patele</i>	A headman.
<i>Lonia</i>	Salt-maker.
<i>Kumaria</i>	A potter.
<i>Sionia</i>	Seoni town.
<i>Chhaparia</i>	Chhapāra, a town.
<i>Bijoria</i>	A tree.
<i>Simra</i>	A village.
<i>Ketharia</i>	<i>Keth</i> , a fruit.
<i>Usargūyan</i>	Perhaps a village.
<i>Bhadoria</i>	Village.
<i>Rurgaiyan</i>	Village.
<i>Musrele</i>	<i>Mūsar</i> , a pestle.

Sections of the Usrete subcaste:

<i>Shikāre</i>	Hunter.
<i>Nāhar</i>	Tiger.
<i>Gursaraiyan</i>	Gursarai, a town.
<i>Bardia</i>	A village.
<i>Sandia</i>	<i>Sānd</i> , a bull.
<i>Sirwaiyan</i>	Sirwai, a village.
<i>Itguhān</i>	A village.
<i>Sengaiyan</i> or <i>Singaiyan</i>	Sengai, a village.
<i>Harkotia</i>	Harkoti, a village.
<i>Noria</i>	Norai, a village.
<i>Larent</i>	Lareti, a village.
<i>Rabia</i>	Rabai, a village.
<i>Lakhauria</i>	(Lakori village. It is said that whoever utters the name of this section early in the morning is sure to remain hungry the whole day, or at least will get into some trouble that day.)
<i>Dhandkonya</i>	<i>Dhandakna</i> , to roll.
<i>Badgaiyan</i>	<i>Badagaon</i> , a large village.
<i>Kotia</i>	<i>Kot</i> , a fort
<i>Bilwār</i>	<i>Billi</i> , cat
<i>Thutha</i>	Stump of a tree.

Sections of the Kanaujia subcaste:

- *Tidha*.—From Tidha, a village. This section is subdivided into (a) *Ghureparke* (of the cowdung hill); (b) *Dwārparke* (of the door); and (c) *Jangi* (warrior).
- *Chamania*—From Chamyani (village). This is also subdivided into:
  - (a) *Gomarkya*
  - (b) *Mathuria* (Muttra town).
  - *Chaudhri* (caste headman). This is divided as follows:
    - (a) *Majhgawān* A village.
    - (b) *Purva thok* Eastern group.
    - (c) *Pashchim thok* Western group.
    - (d) *Bamurya* A village.
  - *Rāwat* Title.
  - *Malha* Perhaps sailor or wrestler.
  - *Chiloliān* Chiloli, a village.
  - *Dhanuiyan* Dhanu Kheda, a village.

## Lakhera

### 1. General notice

**Lakhera, Laheri.**—The small caste whose members make bangles and other articles of lac. About 3000 persons were shown as belonging to the caste in the Central Provinces in 1911, being most numerous in the Jubbulpore, Chhīndwāra and Betūl Districts. From Berār 150 persons were returned, chiefly from Amraoti. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *laksha-kara*, a worker in lac. The caste are a mixed functional group closely connected with the Kacheras and Patwas; no distinction being recognised between the Patwas and Lakheras in some localities of the Central Provinces. Mr. Baillie gives the following notice of them in the *Census Report of the North-Western Provinces* (1891): “The accounts given by members of the caste of their origin are very various and sometimes ingenious. One story is that like the Patwas, with whom they are connected, they were originally Kāyasths. According to another account they were made from the dirt washed from Pārvasī before her marriage with Siva, being created by the god to make bangles for his wife, and hence called Deobansi. Again, it is stated, they were created by Krishna to make bangles for the Gopis or milkmaids. The most elaborate account is that they were originally Yāduvansi Rājput̄s, who assisted the Kurus to make a fort of lac, in which the Pāndavas were to be treacherously burned. For this traitorous conduct they were degraded and compelled eternally to work in lac or glass.”

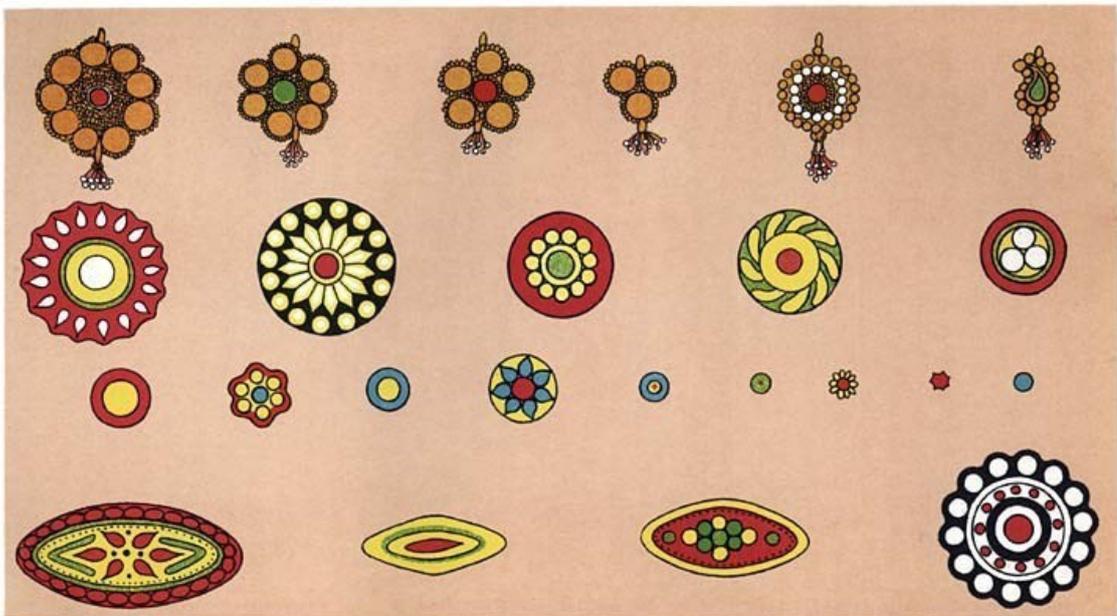
### 2. Social customs

The bulk of these artisan and manufacturing castes tell stories showing that their ancestors were Kāyasths and Rājput̄s, but no importance can be attached to such legends, which are obviously manufactured by the family priests to minister to the harmless vanity of their clients. To support their claim the Lakheras have divided themselves like the Rājput̄s into the Sūrajvansi and Somvansi subcastes or those who belong to the Solar and Lunar races. Other subdivisions are the Mārwarī or those coming from Mārwar in Rājput̄ana, and the Tarkhera or makers of the large earrings which low-caste women wear. These consist of a circular piece of wood or fibre, nearly an inch across, which is worked through a large hole in the lobe of the ear. It is often the stalk of the *ambāri* fibre, and on the outer end is fixed a slab decorated with little pieces of glass. The exogamous sections of the Lakheras are generally named after animals, plants and natural objects, and indicate that the caste is recruited from the lower classes of the population. Their social customs resemble those of the middle and lower Hindustāni castes. Girls are married at an early age when the parents can afford the expense of the ceremony, but no penalty is incurred if the wedding is postponed for want of means. The remarriage of widows and divorce are permitted. They eat flesh, but not fowls or pork, and some of them drink liquor, while others abstain. Rājput̄s and Banias will take water from them, but not Brāhmans. In Bombay, however, they are considered to rank above Kunbis.

### 3. The lac industry

The traditional occupation of the Lakheras is to make and sell bangles and other articles of lac. Lac is regarded with a certain degree of superstitious repugnance by the Hindus because of its red colour, resembling blood. On this account and also because of the sin committed in killing them, no Hindu caste will propagate the lac insect, and the calling is practised only by Gonds, Korkus and other primitive tribes. Even Gonds will often refuse employment in growing lac if they can make their living by cultivation. Various superstitions attach to the propagation of the insects to a fresh tree. This is done in Kunwār (September) and always by men, the insects being carried in a leaf-cup

and placed on a branch of an uninfected tree, usually the *kusum*.<sup>84</sup> It is said that the work should be done at night and the man should be naked when he places the insects on the tree. The tree is fenced round and nobody is allowed to touch it, as it is considered that the crop would thus be spoiled. If a woman has lost her husband and has to sow lac, she takes her son in her arms and places the cup containing the insects on his head; on arriving at the tree she manages to apply the insects by means of a stick, not touching the cup with her own hands. All this ritual attaches simply to the infection of the first tree, and afterwards in January or February the insects are propagated on to other trees without ceremony. The juice of onions is dropped on to them to make them healthy. The stick-lac is collected by the Gonds and Korkus and sold to the Lakheras; they clear it of wood as far as possible and then place the incrustated twigs and bark in long cotton bags and heat them before a fire, squeezing out the gum, which is spread out on flat plates so as to congeal into the shape of a pancake. This is again heated and mixed with white clay and forms the material for the bangles. They are coloured with *chapra*, the pure gum prepared like sealing-wax, which is mixed with vermilion, or arsenic and turmeric for a yellow colour. In some localities at least only the Lakheras and Patwas and no higher caste will sell articles made of lac.



Examples of spangles worn by women on the forehead

#### 4. Lac bangles

The trade in lac bangles has now greatly declined, as they have been supplanted by the more ornamental glass bangles. They are thick and clumsy and five of them will cover a large part of the space between the elbow and the wrist. They may be observed on Banjāra women. Lac bangles are also still used by the Hindus, generally on ceremonial occasions, as at a marriage, when they are presented to and worn by the bride, and during the month of Shrāwan (July), when the Hindus observe a fast on behalf of the growing crops and the women wear bangles of lac. For these customs Mr. Hīra Lāl suggests the explanation that lac bangles were at one time generally worn by the Hindus, while glass ones are a comparatively recent fashion introduced by the Muhammadans. In support of this it may be urged that glass bangles are largely made by the Muhammadan Turkāri or Sīsgar, and also that lac

<sup>84</sup> *Schleichera trijuga*.

bangles must have been worn prior to glass ones, because if the latter had been known the clumsy and unornamental bracelet made of lac and clay could never have come into existence. The wearing of lac bangles on the above occasions would therefore be explained according to the common usage of adhering on religious and ceremonial occasions to the more ancient methods and accessories, which are sanctified by association and custom. Similarly the Holi pyre is often kindled with fire produced by the friction of wood, and temples are lighted with vegetable instead of mineral oil.

## 5. Red, a lucky colour

It may be noted, however, that lac bangles are not always worn by the bride at a wedding, the custom being unknown in some localities. Moreover, it appears that glass was known to the Hindus at a period prior to the Muhammadan invasions, though bangles may not have been made from it. Another reason for the use of lac bangles on the occasions noticed is that lac, as already seen, represents blood. Though blood itself is now repugnant to the Hindus, yet red is pre-eminently their lucky colour, being worn at weddings and generally preferred. It is suggested in the *Bombay Gazetteer*<sup>85</sup> that blood was lucky as having been the first food of primitive man, who learnt to suck the blood of animals before he ate their flesh. But it does not seem necessary to go back quite so far as this. The earliest form of sacrifice, as shown by Professor Robertson Smith,<sup>86</sup> was that in which the community of kinsmen ate together the flesh of their divine or totem animal god and drank its blood. When the god became separated from the animal and was represented by a stone at the place of worship and the people had ceased to eat raw flesh and drink blood, the blood was poured out over the stone as an offering to the god. This practice still obtains among the lower castes of Hindus and the primitive tribes, the blood of animals offered to Devi and other village deities being allowed to drop on to the stones representing them. But the higher castes of Hindus have abandoned animal sacrifices, and hence cannot make the blood-offering. In place of it they smear the stone with vermilion, which seems obviously a substitute for blood, since it is used to colour the stones representing the deities in exactly the same manner. Even vermilion, however, is not offered to the highest deities of Neo-Hinduism, Siva or Mahādeo and Vishnu, to whom animal sacrifices would be abhorrent. It is offered to Hanumān, whose image is covered with it, and to Devi and Bhairon and to the many local and village deities. In past times animal sacrifices were offered to Bhairon, as they still are to Devi, and though it is not known that they were made to Hanumān, this is highly probable, as he is the god of strength and a mighty warrior. The Mānbhao mendicants, who abhor all forms of bloodshed like the Jains, never pass one of these stones painted with vermilion if they can avoid doing so, and if they are aware that there is one on their road will make a circuit so as not to see it.<sup>87</sup> There seems, therefore, every reason to suppose that vermilion is a substitute for blood in offerings and hence probably on other occasions. As the places of the gods were thus always coloured red with blood, red would come to be the divine and therefore the propitious colour among the Hindus and other races.

## 6. Vermilion and spangles

Among the constituents of the Sohāg or lucky *trousseau* without which no Hindu girl of good caste can be married are *sendur* or vermilion, *kunku* or red powder or a spangle (*tikli*), and *mahāwar* or red balls of cotton-wool. In Chhattīsgarh and Bengal the principal marriage rite is usually the smearing of vermilion by the bridegroom on the parting of the bride's hair, and elsewhere this is commonly done as a subsidiary ceremony. Here also there is little reason to doubt that vermilion is a substitute for blood; indeed, in some castes in Bengal, as noted by Sir H. Risley, the blood of

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<sup>85</sup> *Hindus of Gujarat*, App., art. Vaghri, footnote.

<sup>86</sup> *Religion of the Semites*.

<sup>87</sup> Mackintosh, *Report on the Mānbhaos*.

the parties is actually mixed.<sup>88</sup> This marking of the bride with blood is a result of the sacrifice and communal feast of kinsmen already described; only those who could join in the sacrificial meal and eat the flesh of the sacred animal god were kin to it and to each other; but in quite early times the custom prevailed of taking wives from outside the clan; and consequently, to admit the wife into her husband's kin, it was necessary that she also should drink or be marked with the blood of the god. The mixing of blood at marriage appears to be a relic of this, and the marking of the forehead with vermilion is a substitute for the anointing with blood. *Kunku* is a pink powder made of turmeric, lime-juice and borax, which last is called by the Hindus 'the milk of Anjini,' the mother of Hanumān. It seems to be a more agreeable substitute for vermilion, whose constant use has probably an injurious effect on the skin and hair. *Kunku* is used in the Marātha country in the same way as vermilion, and a married woman will smear a little patch on her forehead every day and never allow her husband to see her without it. She omits it only during the monthly period of impurity. The *tikli* or spangle is worn in the Hindustāni Districts and not in the south. It consists of a small piece of lac over which is smeared vermilion, while above it a piece of mica or thin glass is fixed for ornament. Other adornments may be added, and women from Rājputāna, such as the Mārwāri Banias and Banjāras, wear large spangles set in gold with a border of jewels if they can afford it. The spangle is made and sold by Lakheras and Patwas; it is part of the Sohāg at marriages and is affixed to the girl's forehead on her wedding and thereafter always worn; as a rule, if a woman has a spangle it is said that she does not smear vermilion on her forehead, though both may occasionally be seen. The name *tikli* is simply a corruption of *tīka*, which means a mark of anointing or initiation on the forehead; as has been seen, the basis of the *tikli* is vermilion smeared on lac-clay, and it is made by Lakheras; and there is thus good reason to suppose that the spangle is also a more ornamental substitute for the smear of vermilion, the ancient blood-mark by which a married woman was admitted into her husband's clan. At her marriage a bride must always receive the glass bangles and the vermilion, *kunku*, or spangle from her husband, the other ornaments of the Sohāg being usually given to her by her parents. Unmarried girls now also sometimes wear small ornamental spangles, and put *kunku* on their foreheads. But before marriage it is optional and afterwards compulsory. A widow may not wear vermilion, *kunku*, or spangles.

## 7. Red dye on the feet

The Lakheras also sell balls of red cotton-wool known as *māhur ki guleli* or *mahāwar*. The cotton-wool is dipped in the melted lac-gum and is rubbed on to the feet of women to colour them red or pink at marriages and festivals. This is done by the barber's wife, who will colour the feet of the whole party, at the same time drawing lines round the outside of the foot and inward from the toes. The *mahāwar* is also an essential part of the Sohāg of marriage. Instead of lac the Muhammadans use *mehndi* or henna, the henna-leaves being pounded with catechu and the mixture rubbed on to the feet and hands. After a little time it is washed off and a red dye remains on the skin. It is supposed that the similar custom which prevailed among the ancient Greeks is alluded to in the epithet of 'rosy-fingered Aurora.' The Hindus use henna dye only in the month Shrāwan (July), which is a period of fasting; the auspicious *kunku* and *mahāwar* are therefore perhaps not considered suitable at such a time, but as special protection is needed against evil spirits, the necessary red colouring is obtained from henna. When a married woman rubs henna on her hands, if the dye comes out a deep red tinge, the other women say that her husband is not in love with her; but if of a pale yellowish tinge, that he is very much in love.

<sup>88</sup> See articles on Khairwār and Kewat.

## 8. Red threads

The Lakheras and Patwas also make the *kardora* or waist-band of red thread. This is worn by Hindu men and women, except Marātha Brāhmans. After he is married, if a man breaks this thread he must not take food until he has put on a fresh one, and the same rule applies to a woman all her life. Other threads are the *rākhis* tied round the wrists for protection against evil spirits on the day of Rakshābandhan, and the necklets of silk or cotton thread wound round with thin silver wire, which the Hindus put on at Anant Chaudas and frequently retain for the whole year. The colour of all these threads is generally red in the first place, but they soon get blackened by contact with the skin.

## 9. Lac toys

Toys of lac are especially made during the fast of Shrāwan (July). At this time for five years after her marriage a Hindu bride receives annually from her husband a present called Shrāoni, or that which is given in Shrāwan. It consists of a *chakri* or reel, to which a string is attached, and the reel is thrown up into the air and wound and unwound on the string; a *bhora* or wooden top spun by a string; a *bansuli* or wooden flute; a stick and ball, lac bangles and a spangle, and cloth, usually of red chintz. All these toys are made by the carpenter and coloured red with lac by the Lakhera, with the exception of the bangles which may be yellow or green. For five years the bride plays with the toys, and then they are sent to her no longer as her childhood has passed. It is probable that some, if not all of them, are in a manner connected with the crops, and supposed to have a magical influence, because during the same period it is the custom for boys to walk on stilts and play at swinging themselves; and in these cases the original idea is to make the crops grow as high as the stilts or swing. As in the other cases, the red colour appears to have a protective influence against evil spirits, who are more than usually active at a time of fasting.

## Lodhi

### 1. Origin and traditions

**Lodhi, Lodha.**—An important agricultural caste residing principally in the Vindhyan Districts and Nerbudda valley, whence they have spread to the Wainganga valley and the Khairāgarh State of Chhattīsgarh. Their total strength in the Province is 300,000 persons. The Lodhis are immigrants from the United Provinces, in whose Gazetteers it is stated that they belonged originally to the Ludhiāna District and took their name from it. Their proper designation is Lodha, but it has become corrupted to Lodhi in the Central Provinces. A number of persons resident in the Harda tahsīl of Hoshangābād are called Lodha and say that they are distinct from the Lodhis. There is nothing to support their statement, however, and it is probable that they simply represent the separate wave of immigration which took place from Central India into the Hoshangābād and Betūl Districts in the fifteenth century. They spoke a different dialect of the group known as Rajasthāni, and hence perhaps the caste-name did not get corrupted. The Lodhis of the Jubbulpore Division probably came here at a later date from northern India. The Mandla Lodhis are said to have been brought to the District by Raja Hirde Sah of the Gond-Rājput dynasty of Garha-Mandla in the seventeenth century, and they were given large grants of the waste land in the interior in order that they might clear it of forest.<sup>89</sup> The Lodhis are a good instance of a caste who have obtained a great rise in social status on migrating to a new area. In northern India Mr. Nesfield places them lowest among the agricultural castes and states

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<sup>89</sup> Colonel Ward's *Mandia Settlement Report* p. 29.

that they are little better than a forest tribe. He derives the name from *lod*, a clod, according to which Lodhi would mean clodhopper.<sup>90</sup> Another suggestion is that the name is derived from the bark of the *lodh* tree,<sup>91</sup> which is collected by the Lodhas in northern India and sold for use as a dyeing agent. In Bulandshahr they are described as “Of short stature and uncouth appearance, and from this as well as from their want of a tradition of immigration from other parts they appear to be a mixed class proceeding from aboriginal and Aryan parents. In the Districts below Agra they are considered so low that no one drinks water touched by them; but this is not the case in the Districts above Agra.”<sup>92</sup> In Hamīrpur they appear to have some connection with the Kurmis, and a story told of them in Saugor is that the first Lodhi was created by Mahādeo from a scarecrow in a Kurmi woman’s field and given the vocation of a farmservant But the Lodhis themselves claim Rājput ancestry and say that they are descended from Lava, the eldest of the two sons of Rāja Rāmchandra of Ajodhya.

## 2. Position in the central Provinces

In the Central Provinces they have become landholders and are addressed by the honorific title of Thākūr, ranking with the higher cultivating castes. Several Lodhi landholders in Damoh and Saugor formerly held a quasi-independent position under the Muhammadans, and subsequently acknowledged the Raja of Panna as their suzerain, who conferred on some families the titles of Rāja and Diwān. They kept up a certain amount of state, and small contingents of soldiery, attended by whom they went to pay their respects to the representative of the ruling power. “It would be difficult,” says Grant,<sup>93</sup> “to recognise the descendants of the peaceful cultivators of northern India in the strangely accoutred Rājas who support their style and title by a score of ragged matchlockmen and a ruined mud fort on a hill-side.” Sir B. Fuller’s *Damoh Settlement Report* says of them: “A considerable number of villages had been for long time past in the possession of certain important families, who held them by prescription or by a grant from the ruling power, on a right which approximated as nearly to the English idea of proprietorship as native custom permitted. The most prominent of these families were of the Lodhi caste. They have developed tastes for sport and freebooting and have become decidedly the most troublesome item in the population. During the Mutiny the Lodhis as a class were openly disaffected, and one of their proprietors, the Tālukdār of Hindoria, marched on the District headquarters and looted the treasury.” Similarly the Ramgarh family of Mandla took to arms and lost the large estates till then held by them. On the other hand the village of Imjhira in Narsinghpur belonging to a Lodhi mālguzār was gallantly defended against a band of marauding rebels from Saugor. Sir R. Craddock describes them as follows: “They are men of strong character, but their constant family feuds and love of faction militate against their prosperity. A cluster of Lodhi villages forms a hotbed of strife and the nearest relations are generally divided by bitter animosities. The Revenue Officer who visits them is beset by reckless charges and counter-charges and no communities are less amenable to conciliatory compromises. Agrarian outrages are only too common in some of the Lodhi villages.”<sup>94</sup> The high status of the Lodhi caste in the Central Provinces as compared with their position in the country of their origin may be simply explained by the fact that they here became landholders and ruling chiefs.

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<sup>90</sup> *Brief View of the Caste System*, p. 14.

<sup>91</sup> *Symplocos racemosa*.

<sup>92</sup> Rāja Lachman Singh’s *Bulandshahr Memo*, p. 182, quoted in Mr. Crooke’s *Tribes and Castes*, art. Lodha.

<sup>93</sup> *Narsinghpur Settlement Report* (1866), p. 28.

<sup>94</sup> *Nagpur Settlement Report*, p. 24.

### 3. Sub-divisions

In the northern Districts the landholding Lodhis are divided into a number of exogamous clans who marry with each other in imitation of the Rājput̄s. These are the Mahdele, Kerbania, Dongaria, Narwaria, Bhadoria and others. The name of the Kerbanias is derived from Kerbana, a village in Damoh, and the Bālākote family of that District are the head of the clan. The Mahdeles are the highest clan and have the titles of Rāja and Diwān, while the others hold those of Rao and Kunwar, the terms Diwān and Kunwar being always applied to the younger brother of the head of the house. These titles are still occasionally conferred by the Rāja of Panna, whom the Lodhi clans looked on as their suzerain. The name of the Mahdeles is said to be derived from the *mehndi* or henna plant. The above clans sometimes practise hypergamy among themselves and also with the other Lodhis, taking daughters from the latter on receipt of a large bridegroom-price for the honour conferred by the marriage. This custom is now, however, tending to die out. There are also several endogamous subcastes ranking below the clans, of whom the principal are the Singrore, Jarha, Jāngra and Mahālodhi. The Singrore take their name from the old town of Singraur or Shrengera in northern India, Singrore, like Kanaujia, being a common subcaste name among several castes. It is also connected more lately with the Singrām Ghat or ferry of the Ganges in Allahābād District, and the title of Rāwat is said to have been conferred on the Singrore Lodhis by the emperor Akbar on a visit there. The Jarha Lodhis belong to Mandla. The name is probably a form of Jharia or jungly, but since the leading members of the caste have become large landholders they repudiate this derivation. The Jāngra Lodhis are of Chhattīsgarh, and the Mahālodhis or 'Great Lodhis' are an inferior group to which the offspring of irregular unions are or were relegated. The Mahalodhis are said to condone adultery either by a man or woman on penalty of a feast to the caste. Other groups are the Hardiha, who grow turmeric (*haldi*), and the Gwālhare or cowherds. The Lodhas of Hoshangābād may also be considered a separate subcaste. They disclaim connection with the Lodhis, but the fact that the parent caste in the United Provinces is known as Lodha appears to establish their identity. They abstain from flesh and liquor, which most Lodhis consume.

This division of the superior branch of a caste into large exogamous clans and the lower one into endogamous subcastes is only found, so far as is known, among the Rājput̄s and one or two landholding castes who have imitated them. Its origin is discussed in the Introduction.

### 4. Exogamous groups

The subcastes are as usual divided into exogamous groups of the territorial, titular and totemistic classes. Among sections named after places may be mentioned the Chāndpuria from Chāndpur, the Kharpuria from Kharpur, and the Nāgpuriha, Raipuria, Dhamonia, Damauha and Shāhgariha from Nāgpur, Raipur, Dhamoni, Damoh and Shāhgarh. Two-thirds of the sections have the names of towns or villages. Among titular names are Saulākhia, owner of 100 lakhs, Bhainsmār, one who killed a buffalo, Kodonchor, one who stole kodon,<sup>95</sup> Kumharha perhaps from Kumhār a potter, and Rāj̄bhar and Barhai (carpenter), names of castes. Among totemistic names are Baghela, tiger, also the name of a Rājput̄ sept; Kutria, a dog; Khajūria, the date-palm tree; Mirchaunia, chillies; Andwār, from the castor-oil plant; Bhainsaiya, a buffalo; and Nāk, the nose.

### 5. Marriage customs

A man must not marry in his own section nor in that of his mother. He may marry two sisters. The exchange of girls between families is only in force among the Bilāspur Lodhis, who say, 'Eat

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<sup>95</sup> A small millet.

with those who have eaten with you and marry with those who have married with you.' Girls are usually wedded before puberty, but in the northern Districts the marriage is sometimes postponed from desire to marry into a good family or from want of funds to pay a bridegroom-price, and girls of twenty or more may be unmarried. A case is known of a man who had two daughters unmarried at twenty-two and twenty-three years old, because he had been waiting for good *partis*, with the result that one of them went and lived with a man and he then married off the other in the Singhast<sup>96</sup> year, which is forbidden among the Lodhis, and was put out of caste. The marriage and other ceremonies of the Lodhis resemble those of the Kurmis, except in Chhattīsgarh where the Marātha fashion is followed. Here, at the wedding, the bride and bridegroom hold between them a doll made of dough with 21 cowries inside, and as the priest repeats the marriage texts they pull it apart like a cracker and see how many cowries each has got. It is considered auspicious if the bridegroom has the larger number. The priest is on the roof of the house, and before the wedding he cries out:

'Are the king and queen here?' And a man below answers, 'Yes.'

'Have they shoes on their feet?' 'Yes.'

'Have they bracelets on their hands?' 'Yes.'

'Have they rings in their ears?' 'Yes.'

'Have they crowns on their heads?' 'Yes.'

'Has she glass beads round her neck?' 'Yes.'

'Have they the doll in their hands?' 'Yes.'

And the priest then repeats the marriage texts and beats a brass dish while the doll is pulled apart. In the northern Districts after the wedding the bridegroom must untie one of the festoons of the marriage-shed, and if he refuses to do this, it is an indelible disgrace on the bride's party. Before doing so he requires a valuable present, such as a buffalo.

## 6. The gauna ceremony. Fertility rites

When the girl becomes mature the Gauna or going-away ceremony is performed. In Chhattīsgarh before leaving her home the bride goes out with her sister and worships a *palās* tree.<sup>97</sup> Her sister waves a lighted lamp seven times over it, and the bride goes seven times round it in imitation of the marriage ceremony. At her husband's house seven pictures of the family gods are drawn on a wall inside the house and the bride worships these, placing a little sugar and bread on the mouth of each and bowing before them. She is then seated before the family god while an old woman brings a stone rolling-pin<sup>98</sup> wrapped up in a piece of cloth, which is supposed to be a baby, and the old woman imitates a baby crying. She puts the roller in the bride's lap saying, 'Take this and give it milk.' The bride is abashed and throws it aside. The old woman picks it up and shows it to the assembled women saying, 'The bride has just had a baby,' amid loud laughter. Then she gives the stone to the bridegroom who also throws it aside. This ceremony is meant to induce fertility, and it is supposed that by making believe that the bride has had a baby she will quickly have one.

## 7. Widow-marriage and puberty rite

The higher clans of Lodhis in Damoh and Saugor prohibit the remarriage of widows, but instances of it occur. It is said that a man who marries a widow is relegated to the Mahālodhi subcaste or the Lahuri Sen, an illegitimate group, and the Lodhis of his clan no longer acknowledge his family. But if a girl's husband dies before she has lived with him she may marry again. The other Lodhis

<sup>96</sup> Every twelfth year when the planet Jupiter is in conjunction with the constellation Sinh (Leo).

<sup>97</sup> *Butea Frondosa*.

<sup>98</sup> This is known as *lodha*.

freely permit widow-marriage and divorce. When a girl first becomes mature she is secluded, and though she may stay in the house cannot enter the cook-room. At the end of the period she is dressed in red cloth, and a present of cocoanuts stripped of their shells, sweetmeats, and a little money, is placed in her lap, while a few women are invited to a feast. This rite is also meant to induce fertility, the kernel of the coconut being held to resemble an unborn baby.

## 8. Mourning impurity

The higher clans consider themselves impure for a period of 12 days after a birth, and if the birth falls in the Mūl asterism or Nakshatra, for 27 days. After death they observe mourning for 10 days; on the 10th day they offer ten *pindas* or funeral cakes, and on the 11th day make one large *pinda* or cake and divide it into eleven parts; on the 12th day they make sixteen *pindas* and unite the spirit of the dead man with the ancestors; and on the 13th day they give a feast and feed Brāhmans and are clean. The lower subcastes only observe impurity for three days after a birth and a death. Their funeral rites are the same as those of the Kurmis.

## 9. Social customs

The caste employ Brāhmans for weddings, but not necessarily for birth and death ceremonies. They eat flesh and fish, and the bulk of the caste eat fowls and drink liquor, but the landowning section abjures these practices. They will take food cooked with water from Brāhmans, and that cooked without water also from Rājput̄s, Kāyasths and Sunārs. In Narsinghpur they also accept cooked food from such a low caste as Rājjahrs,<sup>99</sup> probably because the Rājjhars are commonly employed by them as farmservants, and hence have been accustomed to carry their master's food. A similar relation has been found to exist between the Panwār Rājput̄s and their Gond farmservants. The higher class Lodhis make an inordinate show of hospitality at their weddings. The plates of the guests are piled up profusely with food, and these latter think it a point of honour never to refuse it or say enough. When melted butter is poured out into their cups the stream must never be broken as it passes from one guest to the other, or it is said that they will all get up and leave the feast. Apparently a lot of butter must be wasted on the ground. The higher clans seclude their women, and these when they go out must wear long clothes covering the head and reaching to the feet. The women are not allowed to wear ornaments of a cheaper metal than silver, except of course their glass bangles. The Mahālodhis will eat food cooked with water in the cook-room and carried to the fields, which the higher clans will not do. Their women wear the *sāri* drawn through the legs and knotted behind according to the Maratha fashion, but whenever they meet their husband's elder brother or any other elder of the family they must undo the knot and let the cloth hang down round their legs as a mark of respect. They wear no breast-cloth. Girls are tattooed before adolescence with dots on the chin and forehead, and marks on one hand. Before she is tattooed the girl is given sweets to eat, and during the process the operator sings songs in order that her attention may be diverted and she may not feel the pain. After she has finished the operator mutters a charm to prevent evil spirits from troubling the girl and causing her pain.

## 10. Greetings and method of address

The caste have some strict taboos on names and on conversation between the sexes. A man will only address his wife, sister, daughter, paternal aunt or niece directly. If he has occasion to speak to some other woman he will take his daughter or other female relative with him and do his business through her. He will not speak even to his own women before a crowd. A woman will similarly only

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<sup>99</sup> The Rājjhars are a low caste of farmservants and labourers, probably an offshoot of the Bhar tribe.

speak to her father, son or nephew, and father-, son- or younger brother-in-law. She will not speak to her elder brother-in-law, and she will not address her husband in the presence of his father, elder brother or any other relative whom he reveres. A wife will never call her husband by his name, but always address him as father of her son, and, if she has no son, will sometimes speak to him through his younger brother. Neither the father nor mother will call their eldest son by his name, but will use some other name. Similarly a daughter-in-law is given a fresh name on coming into the house, and on her arrival her mother-in-law looks at her for the first time through a *guna* or ring of baked gram-flour. A man meeting his father or elder brother will touch his feet in silence. One meeting his sister's husband, sister's son or son-in-law, will touch his feet and say, 'Sāhib, salaam.'

## 11. Sacred thread and social status

The higher clans invest boys with the sacred thread either when they are initiated by a Guru or spiritual preceptor, or when they are married. The thread is made by a Brāhman and has five knots. Recently a large landholder in Mandla, a Jarha Lodhi, has assumed the sacred thread himself for the first time and sent round a circular to his caste-men enjoining them also to wear it. His family priest has produced a legend of the usual type showing how the Jarha Lodhis are Rājput̄s whose ancestors threw away their sacred threads in order to escape the vengeance of Parasurāma. Generally in social position the Lodhis may be considered to rank with, but slightly above, the ordinary cultivating castes, such as the Kurmis. This superiority in no way arises from their origin, since, as already seen, they are a very low caste in their home in northern India, but from the fact that they have become large landholders in the Central Provinces and in former times their leaders exercised quasi-sovereign powers. Many Lodhis are fine-looking men and have still some appearance of having been soldiers. They are passionate and quarrelsome, especially in the Jubbulpore District. This is put forcibly in the saying that 'A Lodhi's temper is as crooked as the stream of a bullock's urine.' They are generally cultivators, but the bulk of them are not very prosperous as they are inclined to extravagance and display at weddings and on other ceremonial occasions.

## Lohar

### 1. Legends of the caste

**Lohar, Khati, Ghantra, Ghisāri, Panchāl.**—The occupational caste of blacksmiths. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *Lauha-kara*, a worker in iron. In the Central Provinces the Loharhas in the past frequently combined the occupations of carpenter and blacksmith, and in such a capacity he is known as Khāti. The honorific designations applied to the caste are Karīgar, which means skilful, and Mistri, a corruption of the English 'Master' or 'Mister.' In 1911 the Lohārs numbered about 180,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār. The Lohār is indispensable to the village economy, and the caste is found over the whole rural area of the Province.

"Practically all the Lohārs," Mr. Crooke writes<sup>100</sup>, "trace their origin to Visvakarma, who is the later representative of the Vedic Twashtri, the architect and handicraftsman of the gods, 'The fashioner of all ornaments, the most eminent of artisans, who formed the celestial chariots of the deities, on whose craft men subsist, and whom, a great and immortal god, they continually worship,' One<sup>101</sup> tradition tells that Visvakarma was a Brāhman and married the daughter of an Ahīr, who in her previous birth had been a dancing-girl of the gods. By her he had nine sons, who became the ancestors of various artisan castes, such as the Lohār, Barhai, Sunār, and Kasera."

<sup>100</sup> *Tribes and Castes of the N.W.P. and Oudh*, art. Lohār.

<sup>101</sup> Dowson, *Classical Dictionary*, s.v.

The Lohārs of the Uriya country in the Central Provinces tell a similar story, according to which Kamar, the celestial architect, had twelve sons. The eldest son was accustomed to propitiate the family god with wine, and one day he drank some of the wine, thinking that it could not be sinful to do so as it was offered to the deity. But for this act his other brothers refused to live with him and left their home, adopting various professions; but the eldest brother became a worker in iron and laid a curse upon the others that they should not be able to practise their calling except with the implements which he had made. The second brother thus became a woodcutter (Barhai), the third a painter (Mahārana), the fourth learnt the science of vaccination and medicine and became a vaccinator (Suthiār), the fifth a goldsmith, the sixth a brass-smith, the seventh a coppersmith, and the eighth a carpenter, while the ninth brother was weak in the head and married his eldest sister, on account of which fact his descendants are known as Ghantra.<sup>102</sup> The Ghantras are an inferior class of blacksmiths, probably an offshoot from some of the forest tribes, who are looked down on by the others. It is said that even to the present day the Ghantra Lohārs have no objection to eating the leavings of food of their wives, whom they regard as their eldest sisters.

## 2. Social position of the Lohar

The above story is noticeable as indicating that the social position of the Lohār is somewhat below that of the other artisan castes, or at least of those who work in metals. This fact has been recorded in other localities, and has been explained by some stigma arising from his occupation, as in the following passage: “His social position is low even for a menial, and he is classed as an impure caste, in so far that Jāts and others of similar standing will have no social communion with him, though not as an outcast like the scavenger. His impurity, like that of the barber, washerman and dyer, springs solely from the nature of his employment; perhaps because it is a dirty one, but more probably because black is a colour of evil omen. It is not improbable that the necessity under which he labours of using bellows made of cowhide may have something to do with his impurity.”<sup>103</sup>

Mr. Nesfield also says: “It is owing to the ubiquitous industry of the Lohār that the stone knives, arrow-heads and hatchets of the indigenous tribes of Upper India have been so entirely superseded by iron-ores. The memory of the stone age has not survived even in tradition. In consequence of the evil associations which Hinduism has attached to the colour of black, the caste of Lohār has not been able to raise itself to the same social level as the three metallurgic castes which follow.” The following saying also indicates that the Lohār is of evil omen:

Ar, Dhār, Chuchkār  
In tinon se bachāwe Kartār.

Here *Ar* means an iron goad and signifies the Lohār; *Dhār* represents the sound of the oil falling from the press and means a Teli or oilman; *Chuchkār* is an imitation of the sound of clothes being beaten against a stone and denotes the Dhobi or washerman; and the phrase thus runs, ‘My Friend, beware of the Lohār, Teli, and Dhobi, for they are of evil omen.’ It is not quite clear why this disrepute should attach to the Lohār, because iron itself is lucky, though its colour, black, may be of bad omen. But the low status of the Lohār may partly arise from the fact of his being a village menial and a servant of the cultivators; whereas the trades of the goldsmith, brass-smith and carpenter are of later origin than the blacksmith’s, and are urban rather than rural industries; and thus these artisans do not commonly occupy the position of village menials. Another important consideration is that the iron industry is associated with the primitive tribes, who furnished the whole supply of the metal prior to

<sup>102</sup> In Uriya the term, *Ghantrabela* means a person who has illicit intercourse with another. The Ghantra Lohārs are thus probably of bastard origin, like the groups known as half-castes and others which are frequently found.

<sup>103</sup> *Punjab Census Report* (1881), para. 624. (Ibbetson.)

its importation from Europe: and it is hence probable that the Lohār caste was originally constituted from these and would thus naturally be looked down upon by the Hindus. In Bengal, where few or no traces of the village community remain, the Lohār ranks as the equal of Koiris and Kurmis, and Brāhmans will take water from his hands;<sup>104</sup> and this somewhat favours the argument that his lower status elsewhere is not due to incidents of his occupation.

### 3. Caste subdivisions

The constitution of the Lohār caste is of a heterogeneous nature. In some localities Gonds who work as blacksmiths are considered to belong to the caste and are known as Gondi Lohārs. But Hindus who work in Gond villages also sometimes bear this designation. Another subdivision returned consists of the Agarias, also an offshoot of the Gonds, who collect and smelt iron-ore in the Vindhyan and Satpūra hills. The Panchāls are a class of itinerant smiths in Berār. The Ghantras or inferior blacksmiths of the Uriya country have already been noticed. The Ghisāris are a similar low class of smiths in the southern Districts who do rough work only, but sometimes claim Rājput origin. Other subcastes are of the usual local or territorial type, as Mahūlia, from Māhul in Berār; Jhāde or Jhādia, those living in the jungles; Ojha, or those professing a Brāhmanical origin; Marātha, Kanaujia, Mathuria, and so on.

### 4. Marriage and other customs

Infant-marriage is the custom of the caste, and the ceremony is that prevalent among the agricultural castes of the locality. The remarriage of widows is permitted, and they have the privilege of selecting their own husbands, or at least of refusing to accept any proposed suitor. A widow is always married from her father's house, and never from that of her deceased husband. The first husband's property is taken by his relatives, if there be any, and they also assume the custody of his children as soon as they are old enough to dispense with a mother's care. The dead are both buried and burnt, and in the eastern Districts some water and a tooth-stick are daily placed at a cross-road for the use of the departed spirit during the customary period of mourning, which extends to ten days. On the eleventh day the relatives go and bathe, and the chief mourner puts on a new loin-cloth. Some rice is taken and seven persons pass it from hand to hand. They then pound the rice, and making from it a figure to represent a human being, they place some grain in its mouth and say to it, 'Go and become incarnate in some human being,' and throw the image into the water. After this the impurity caused by the death is removed, and they go home and feast with their friends. In the evening they make cakes of rice, and place them seven times on the shoulder of each person who has carried the corpse to the cemetery or pyre, to remove the impurity contracted from touching it. It is also said that if this be not done the shoulder will feel the weight of the coffin for a period of six months. The caste endeavour to ascertain whether the spirit of the dead person returns to join in the funeral feast, and in what shape it will be born again. For this purpose rice-flour is spread on the floor of the cooking-room and covered with a brass plate. The women retire and sit in an adjoining room while the chief mourner with a few companions goes outside the village, and sprinkles some more rice-flour on the ground. They call to the deceased person by name, saying, 'Come, come,' and then wait patiently till some worm or insect crawls on to the floor. Some dough is then applied to this and it is carried home and let loose in the house. The flour under the brass plate is examined, and it is said that they usually see the footprints of a person or animal, indicating the corporeal entity in which the deceased soul has found a resting-place. During the period of mourning members of the bereaved family do not follow their ordinary business, nor eat flesh, sweets or other delicate food. They may not make offerings to their deities nor touch any persons outside the family, nor wear head-cloths

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<sup>104</sup> *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Lohār

or shoes. In the eastern Districts the principal deities of the Lohārs are Dūlha Deo and Somlai or Devi, the former being represented by a knife set in the ground inside the house, and the latter by the painting of a woman on the wall. Both deities are kept in the cooking-room, and here the head of the family offers to them rice soaked in milk, with sandal-paste, flowers, vermilion and lamp-black. He burns some melted butter in an earthen lamp and places incense upon it. If a man has been affected by the evil eye an exorcist will place some salt on his hand and burn it, muttering spells, and the evil influence is removed. They believe that a spell can be cast on a man by giving him to eat the bones of an owl, when he will become an idiot.

## 5. Occupation

In the rural area of the Province the Lohār is still a village menial, making and mending the iron implements of agriculture, such as the ploughshare, axe, sickle, goad and other articles. For doing this he is paid in Saugor a yearly contribution of twenty pounds of grain per plough of land<sup>105</sup> held by each cultivator, together with a handful of grain at sowing-time and a sheaf at harvest from both the autumn and spring crops. In Wardha he gets fifty pounds of grain per plough of four bullocks or forty acres. For making new implements the Lohār is sometimes paid separately and is always supplied with the iron and charcoal. The hand-smelting iron industry has practically died out in the Province and the imported metal is used for nearly all purposes. The village Lohārs are usually very poor, their income seldom exceeding that of an unskilled labourer. In the towns, owing to the rapid extension of milling and factory industries, blacksmiths readily find employment and some of them earn very high wages. In the manufacture of cutlery, nails and other articles the capital is often found by a Bhātia or Bohra merchant, who acts as the capitalist and employs the Lohārs as his workmen. The women help their husbands by blowing the bellows and dragging the hot iron from the furnace, while the men wield the hammer. The Panchāls of Berār are described as a wandering caste of smiths, living in grass mat-huts and using as fuel the roots of thorn bushes, which they batter out of the ground with the back of a short-handled axe peculiar to themselves. They move from place to place with buffaloes, donkeys and ponies to carry their kit.<sup>106</sup> Another class of wandering smiths, the Ghisāris, are described by Mr. Crooke as follows: “Occasional camps of these most interesting people are to be met with in the Districts of the Meerut Division. They wander about with small carts and pack-animals, and, being more expert than the ordinary village Lohār, their services are in demand for the making of tools for carpenters, weavers and other craftsmen. They are known in the Punjab as Gādiya or those who have carts (*gādi*, *gāri*). Sir D. Ibbetson<sup>107</sup> says that they come up from Rājputāna and the North-Western Provinces, but their real country is the Deccan. In the Punjab they travel about with their families and implements in carts from village to village, doing the finer kinds of iron-work, which are beyond the capacity of the village artisan. In the Deccan<sup>108</sup> this class of wandering blacksmiths are called Saiqalgar, or knife-grinders, or Ghisāra, or grinders (Hindi, *ghisāna* ‘to rub’). They wander about grinding knives and tools.”

## Lorha

**Lorha.** <sup>109</sup>—A small caste of cultivators in the Hoshangābād and Nimār Districts, whose distinctive occupation is to grow *san*-hemp (*Crotalaria juncea*) and to make sacking and gunny-bags

<sup>105</sup> About 15 acres.

<sup>106</sup> *Berār Census Report*, 1881 (Kitts).

<sup>107</sup> *Punjab Ethnography*, para. 624.

<sup>108</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, xvi. 82.

<sup>109</sup> This article is partly based on papers by Mr. P.B. Telang, Munsiff Seoni-Mālwa, and Mr. Wāman Rao Mandloi, nāib-tahsildār, Harda.

from the fibre. A very strong prejudice against this crop exists among the Hindus, and those who grow it are usually cut off from their parent caste and become a separate community. Thus we have the castes known as Kumrāwat, Patbīna and Dāngur in different parts of the Province, who are probably offshoots from the Kurmis and Kunbis, but now rank below them because they grow this crop; and in the Kurmi caste itself a subcaste of Santora (hemp-picking) Kurmis has grown up. In Bilāspur the Pathāria Kurmis will grow *san*-hemp and ret it, but will not spin or weave the fibre; while the Athāria Kurmis will not grow the crop, but will spin the fibre and make sacking. The Saugor Kewats grow this fibre, and here Brāhmans and other high castes will not take water from Kewats, though in the eastern Districts they will do so. The Narsinghpur Mallāhs, a branch of the Kewats, have also adopted the cultivation of *san*-hemp as a regular profession. The basis of the prejudice against the *san*-hemp plant is not altogether clear. The Lorhas themselves say that they are looked down upon because they use wheat-starch (*lapsi*) for smoothing the fibre, and that their name is somehow derived from this fact. But the explanation does not seem satisfactory. Many of the country people appear to think that there is something uncanny about the plant because it grows so quickly, and they say that on one occasion a cultivator went out to sow hemp in the morning, and his wife was very late in bringing his dinner to the field. He grew hungry and angry, and at last the shoots of the hemp-seeds which he had sown in the morning began to appear above the ground. At this he was so enraged that when his wife finally came he said she had kept him waiting so long that the crop had come up in the meantime, and murdered her. Since then the Hindus have been forbidden to grow *san*-hemp lest they should lose their tempers in the same manner. This story makes a somewhat excessive demand on the hearer's credulity. One probable cause of the taboo seems to be that the process of soaking and retting the stalks of the plant pollutes the water, and if carried on in a tank or in the pools of a stream might destroy the village supply of drinking-water. In former times it may have been thought that the desecration of their sacred element was an insult to the deities of rivers and streams, which would bring down retribution on the offender. It is also the case that the proper separation of the fibres requires a considerable degree of dexterity which can only be acquired by practice. Owing to the recent increase in the price of the fibre and the large profits which can now be obtained from hemp cultivation, the prejudice against it is gradually breaking down, and the Gonds, Korkus and lower Hindu castes have waived their religious scruples and are glad to turn an honest penny by sowing hemp either on their own account or for hire. Other partially tabooed crops are turmeric and *āl* or Indian madder (*Morinda citrifolia*), while onions and garlic are generally eschewed by Hindu cultivators. For growing turmeric and *āl* special subcastes have been formed, as the Alia Kunbis and the Hardia Mālis and Kāchhis (from *haldi*, turmeric), just as in the case of *san*-hemp. The objection to these two crops is believed to lie in the fact that the roots which yield the commercial product have to be boiled, and by this process a number of insects contained in them are destroyed. But the preparation of the hemp-fibre does not seem to involve any such sacrifice of insect life. The Lorhas appear to be a mixed group, with a certain amount of Rājput blood in them, perhaps an offshoot of the Kirārs, with whose social customs their own are said to be identical. According to another account, they are a lower or illegitimate branch of the Lodha caste of cultivators, of whose name their own is said to be a corruption. The Nimār Gūjars have a subcaste named Lorha, and the Lorhas of Hoshangābād may be connected with these. They live in the Seoni and Harda tahsils of Hoshangābād, the *san*-hemp crop being a favourite one in villages adjoining the forests, because it is not subject to the depredations of wild animals. Cultivators are often glad to sublet their fields for the purpose of having a crop of hemp grown upon them, because the stalks are left for manure and fertilise the ground. String and sacking are also made from the hemp-fibre by vagrant and criminal castes like the Banjāras and Bhāmtas, who formerly required the bags for carrying their goods and possessions about with them.

## Mahār

### 1. General Notice

**Mahār, Mehra, Dheda.**—The impure caste of menials, labourers and village watchmen of the Marātha country, corresponding to the Chamārs and Koris of northern India. They numbered nearly 1,200,000 persons in the combined Province in 1911, and are most numerous in the Nāgpur, Bhandāra, Chānda and Wardha Districts of the Central Provinces, while considerable colonies are also found in Bālāghāt, Chhindwāra and Betūl. Their distribution thus follows largely that of the Marāthi language and the castes speaking it. Berār contained 400,000, distributed over the four Districts. In the whole Province this caste is third in point of numerical strength. In India the Mahārs number about three million persons, of whom a half belong to Bombay. I am not aware of any accepted derivation for the word Mahār, but the balance of opinion seems to be that the native name of Bombay, Mahārāshtra, is derived from that of the caste, as suggested by Wilson. Another derivation which holds it to be a corruption of Maha Rāstrakūta, and to be so called after the Rāshtrakūta Rājput dynasty of the eighth and ninth centuries, seems less probable because countries are very seldom named after ruling dynasties.<sup>110</sup> Whereas in support of Mahārāshtra as ‘The country of the Mahārs,’ we have Gujarāshtra or Gujarāt, ‘the country of the Gūjars,’ and Saurāshtra or Surat, ‘the country of the Sauras.’ According to Platts’ Dictionary, however, Mahārāshtra means ‘the great country,’ and this is what the Marātha Brāhmans themselves say. Mehra appears to be a variant of the name current in the Hindustāni Districts, while Dheda, or Dhada, is said to be a corruption of Dharadas or billmen.<sup>111</sup> In the Punjab it is said to be a general term of contempt meaning ‘Any low fellow.’<sup>112</sup>

Wilson considers the Mahārs to be an aboriginal or pre-Aryan tribe, and all that is known of the caste seems to point to the correctness of this hypothesis. In the *Bombay Gazetteer* the writer of the interesting Gujarāt volume suggests that the Mahārs are fallen Rājput; but there seems little to support this opinion except their appearance and countenance, which is of the Hindu rather than the Dravidian type. In Gujarāt they have also some Rājput surnames, as Chauhān, Panwār, Rāthor, Solanki and so on, but these may have been adopted by imitation or may indicate a mixture of Rājput blood. Again, the Mahārs of Gujarāt are the farmservants and serfs of the Kunbis. “Each family is closely connected with the house of some landholder or *pattidār* (sharer). For his master he brings in loads from the fields and cleans out the stable, receiving in return daily allowances of buttermilk and the carcasses of any cattle that die. This connection seems to show traces of a form of slavery. Rich *pattidārs* have always a certain number of Dheda families whom they speak of as ours (*hamāra*) and when a man dies he distributes along with his lands a certain number of Dheda families to each of his sons. An old tradition among Dhedas points to some relation between the Kunbis and Dhedas. Two brothers, Leva and Deva, were the ancestors, the former of the Kunbis, the latter of the Dhedas.”<sup>113</sup> Such a relation as this in Hindu society would imply that many Mahār women held the position of concubines to their Kunbi masters, and would therefore account for the resemblance of the Mahār to Hindus rather than the forest tribes. But if this is to be regarded as evidence of Rājput descent, a similar claim would have to be allowed to many of the Chamārs and sweepers. Others of the lowest castes also have Rājput sept names, as the Pārdis and Bhīls; but the fact can at most be taken, I venture to think, to indicate a connection of the ‘Droit de Seigneur’ type. On the other hand, the

<sup>110</sup> This derivation is also negated by the fact that the name Mahāratta was known in the third century B.C., or long before the Rāstrakūtas became prominent.

<sup>111</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer; Gujarāt Hindus*, p. 338.

<sup>112</sup> Ibbetson, *Punjab Census Report* (1881).

<sup>113</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, l.c. text and footnote by R. v. J. S. Taylor.

Mahārs occupy the debased and impure position which was the lot of those non-Aryan tribes who became subject to the Hindus and lived in their villages; they eat the flesh of dead cattle and this and other customs appear to point decisively to a non-Aryan origin.

## 2. Length of residence in the Central Provinces

Several circumstances indicate that the Mahār is recognised as the oldest resident of the plain country of Berār and Nāgpur. In Berār he is a village servant and is the referee on village boundaries and customs, a position implying that his knowledge of them is the most ancient. At the Holi festival the fire of the Mahārs is kindled first and that of the Kunbis is set alight from it. The Kāmdār Mahār, who acts as village watchman, also has the right of bringing the *toran* or rope of leaves which is placed on the marriage-shed of the Kunbis; and for this he receives a present of three annas. In Bhandrā the Telis, Lohārs, Dhimārs and several other castes employ a Mahār *Mohturia* or wise man to fix the date of their weddings. And most curious of all, when the Panwār Rājput̄s of this tract celebrate the festival of Nārāyan Deo, they call a Mahār to their house and make him the first partaker of the feast before beginning to eat themselves. Again in Berār<sup>114</sup> the Mahār officiates at the killing of the buffalo on Dasahra. On the day before the festival the chief Mahār of the village and his wife with their garments knotted together bring some earth from the jungle and fashioning two images set one on a clay elephant and the other on a clay bullock. The images are placed on a small platform outside the village site and worshipped; a young he-buffalo is bathed and brought before the images as though for the same object. The Patel wounds the buffalo in the nose with a sword and it is then marched through the village. In the evening it is killed by the head Mahār, buried in the customary spot, and any evil that might happen during the coming year is thus deprecated and, it is hoped, averted. The claim to take the leading part in this ceremony is the occasion of many a quarrel and an occasional affray or riot. Such customs tend to show that the Mahārs were the earliest immigrants from Bombay into the Berār and Nāgpur plain, excluding of course the Gonds and other tribes, who have practically been ousted from this tract. And if it is supposed that the Panwārs came here in the tenth century, as seems not improbable,<sup>115</sup> the Mahārs, whom the Panwārs recognise as older residents than themselves, must have been earlier still, and were probably numbered among the subjects of the old Hindu kingdoms of Bhāndak and Nagardhan.

## 3. Legend of origin

The Mahārs say they are descended from Mahāmuni, who was a foundling picked up by the goddess Pārṇvati on the banks of the Ganges. At this time beef had not become a forbidden food; and when the divine cow, Tripād Gayatri, died, the gods determined to cook and eat her body and Mahāmuni was set to watch the pot boiling. He was as inattentive as King Alfred, and a piece of flesh fell out of the pot. Not wishing to return the dirty piece to the pot Mahāmuni ate it; but the gods discovered the delinquency, and doomed him and his descendants to live on the flesh of dead cows.<sup>116</sup>

## 4. Sub-castes

The caste have a number of subdivisions, generally of a local or territorial type, as Daharia, the residents of Dāhar or the Jubbulpore country, Baonia (52) of Berār, Nemādyā or from Nimar, Khāndeshi from Khāndesh, and so on; the Katia group are probably derived from that caste, Katīā meaning a spinner; the Bārkiās are another group whose name is supposed to mean spinners of fine

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<sup>114</sup> Kitts' *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 143.

<sup>115</sup> See article on Panwār Rājput̄.

<sup>116</sup> *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 144.

thread; while the Lonārias are salt-makers. The highest division are the Somvansis or children of the moon; these claim to have taken part with the Pāndavas against the Kauravas in the war of the Mahābhārata, and subsequently to have settled in Mahārāshtra.<sup>117</sup> But the Somvansi Mahārs consent to groom horses, which the Baone and Kosaria subcastes will not do. Baone and Somvansi Mahārs will take food together, but will not intermarry. The Ladwān subcaste are supposed to be the offspring of kept women of the Somvansi Mahārs; and in Wardha the Dhārmik group are also the descendants of illicit unions and their name is satirical, meaning ‘virtuous.’ As has been seen, the caste have a subdivision named Katia, which is the name of a separate Hindustāni caste; and other subcastes have names belonging to northern India, as the Mahobia, from Mahoba in the United Provinces, the Kosaria or those from Chhattīsgarh, and the Kanaujia from Kanauj. This may perhaps be taken to indicate that bodies of the Kori and Katia weaving castes of northern India have been amalgamated with the Mahārs in Districts where they have come together along the Satpūra Hills and Nerbudda Valley.

### 5. Exogamous groups and marriage customs

The caste have also a large number of exogamous groups, the names of which are usually derived from plants, animals, and natural objects. A few may be given as examples out of fifty-seven recorded in the Central Provinces, though this is far from representing the real total; all the common animals have septs named after them, as the tiger, cobra, tortoise, peacock, jackal, lizard, elephant, lark, scorpion, calf, and so on; while more curious names are—Darpan, a mirror; Khānda Phari, sword and shield; Undrimāria, a rat-killer; Aglāvi, an incendiary; Andhāre, a blind man; Kutramāria, a dog-killer; Kodu Dūdh, sour milk; Khobragāde, cocoanut-kernel; Bhājikhai, a vegetable eater, and so on.

A man must not marry in his own sept, but may take a wife from his mother’s or grandmother’s. A sister’s son may marry a brother’s daughter, but not vice versa. A girl who is seduced before marriage by a man of her own caste or any higher one can be married as if she were a widow, but if she has a child she must first get some other family to take it off her hands. The custom of *Lamjhana* or serving for a wife is recognised, and the expectant bridegroom will live with his father-in-law and work for him for a period varying from one to five years. The marriage ceremony follows the customary Hindustāni or Marātha ritual<sup>118</sup> as the case may be. In Wardha the right foot of the bridegroom and the left one of the bride are placed together in a new basket, while they stand one on each side of the threshold. They throw five handfuls of coloured rice over each other, and each time, as he throws, the bridegroom presses his toe on the bride’s foot; at the end he catches the girl by the finger and the marriage is complete. In the Central Provinces the Mohtūria or caste priest officiates at weddings, but in Berār, Mr. Kitts states<sup>119</sup> the caste employ the Brāhman Joshi or village priest. But as he will not come to their house they hold the wedding on the day that one takes place among the higher castes, and when the priest gives the signal the dividing cloth (*Antarpat*) between the couple is withdrawn, and the garments of the bride and bridegroom are knotted, while the bystanders clap their hands and pelt the couple with coloured grain. As the priest frequently takes up his position on the roof of the house for a wedding it is easy for the Mahārs to see him. In Mandla some of the lower class of Brāhman will officiate at the weddings of Mahārs. In Chhindwāra the Mahārs seat the bride and bridegroom in the frame of a loom for the ceremony, and they worship the hide of a cow or bullock filled with water. They drink together ceremoniously, a pot of liquor being placed on a folded cloth and all the guests sitting round it in a circle. An elder man then lays a new piece

<sup>117</sup> Kitts’ *Berār Census Report* p. 144.

<sup>118</sup> Described in the articles on Kurmi and Kunbi.

<sup>119</sup> *Loc. cit.*

of cloth on the pot and worships it. He takes a cup of the liquor himself and hands round a cupful to every person present.

In Mandla at a wedding the barber comes and cuts the bride's nails, and the cuttings are rolled up in dough and placed in a little earthen pot beside the marriage-post. The bridegroom's nails and hair are similarly cut in his own house and placed in another vessel. A month or two after the wedding the two little pots are taken out and thrown into the Nerbudda. A wedding costs the bridegroom's party about Rs. 40 or Rs. 50 and the bride's about Rs. 25. They have no going-away ceremony, but the occasion of a girl's coming to maturity is known as Bolāwan. She is kept apart for six days and given new clothes, and the caste-people are invited to a meal. When a woman's husband dies the barber breaks her bangles, and her anklets are taken off and given to him as his perquisite. Her brother-in-law or other relative gives her a new white cloth, and she wears this at first, and afterwards white or coloured clothes at her pleasure. Her hair is not cut, and she may wear *patelas* or flat metal bangles on the forearm and armlets above the elbow, but not other ornaments. A widow is under no obligation to marry her first husband's younger brother; when she marries a stranger he usually pays a sum of about Rs. 30 to her parents. When the price has been paid the couple exchange a ring and a bangle respectively in token of the agreement. When the woman is proceeding to her second husband's house, her old clothes, necklace and bangles are thrown into a river or stream and she is given new ones to wear. This is done to lay the first husband's spirit, which may be supposed to hang about the clothes she wore as his wife, and when they are thrown away or buried the exorcist mutters spells over them in order to lay the spirit. No music is allowed at the marriage of a widow except the crooked trumpet called *singāra*. A bachelor who marries a widow must first go through a mock ceremony with a cotton-plant, a sword or a ring. Divorce must be effected before the caste *panchāyat* or committee, and if a divorced woman marries again, her first husband performs funeral and mourning ceremonies as if she were dead. In Gujarāt the practice is much more lax and "divorce can be obtained almost to an indefinite extent. Before they finally settle down to wedded life most couples have more than once changed their partners."<sup>120</sup> But here also, before the change takes place, there must be a formal divorce recognised by the caste.

## 6. Funeral rites

The caste either burn or bury the dead and observe mourning for three days,<sup>121</sup> having their houses whitewashed and their faces shaved. On the tenth day they give a feast to the caste-fellows. On the Akshaya Tritia<sup>122</sup> and the 30th day of Kunwār (September) they offer rice and cakes to the crows in the names of their ancestors. In Berār Mr. Kitts writes:<sup>123</sup> "If a Mahār's child has died, he will on the third day place bread on the grave; if an infant, milk; if an adult, on the tenth day, with five pice in one hand and five betel-leaves in the other, he goes into the river, dips himself five times and throws these things away; he then places five lighted lamps on the tomb, and after these simple ceremonies gets himself shaved as though he were an orthodox Hindu."

## 7. Childbirth

In Mandla the mother is secluded at childbirth in a separate house if one is available, and if not they fence in a part of the veranda for her use with bamboo screens. After the birth the mother must remain impure until the barber comes and colours her toe-nails and draws a line round her feet with red *mahur* powder. This is indispensable, and if the barber is not immediately available she must

<sup>120</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarāt Hindus, loc. cit.*

<sup>121</sup> In Berār for ten days—Kitts' *Berār Census Report, l.c.*

<sup>122</sup> 3rd Baisākh (April) Sudi, commencement of agricultural year.

<sup>123</sup> *Berār Census Report, l.c.*

wait until his services can be obtained. When the navel-string drops it is buried in the place on which the mother sat while giving birth, and when this has been done the purification may be effected. The Dhobi is then called to wash the clothes of the household, and their earthen pots are thrown away. The head of the newborn child is shaved clean, as the birth-hair is considered to be impure, and the hair is wrapped up in dough and thrown into a river.

## 8. Names

A child is named on the seventh or twelfth day after its birth, the name being chosen by the Mohtūria or caste headman. The ordinary Hindu names of deities for men and sacred rivers or pious and faithful wives for women are employed; instances of the latter being Ganga, Godāvāri, Jamuna, Sīta, Laxmi and Rādha. Opprobrious names are sometimes given to avert ill-luck, as Damdya (purchased for eight cowries), Kauria (a cowrie), Bhikāria (a beggar), Ghusia (from *ghus*, a mallet for stamping earth), Harchatt (refuse), Akāli (born in famine-time), Langra (lame), Lula (having an arm useless); or the name of another low caste is given, as Bhangi (sweeper), Domari (Dom sweeper), Chamra (tanner), Basori (basket-maker). Not infrequently children are named after the month or day when they were born, as Pusau, born in Pus (December), Chaitu, born in Chait (March), Manglu (born on Tuesday), Buddhi (born on Wednesday), Sukka (born on Friday), Sanīchra (born on Saturday). One boy was called Mulua or 'Sold' (*mol-dena*). His mother had no other children, so sold him for one pice (farthing) to a Gond woman. After five or six months, as he did not get fat, his name was changed to Jhuma or 'lean,' probably as an additional means of averting ill-luck. Another boy was named Ghurka, from the noise he made when being suckled. A child born in the absence of its father is called Sonwa, or one born in an empty house.

## 9. Religion

The great body of the caste worship the ordinary deities Devi, Hanumān, Dūlha Deo, and others, though of course they are not allowed to enter Hindu temples. They principally observe the Holi and Dasahra festivals and the days of the new and full moon. On the festival of Nāg-Panchmi they make an image of a snake with flour and sugar and eat it. At the sacred Ambāla tank at Rāmtek the Mahārs have a special bathing-ghāt set apart for them, and they may enter the citadel and go as far as the lowest step leading up to the temples; here they worship the god and think that he accepts their offerings. They are thus permitted to traverse the outer enclosures of the citadel, which are also sacred. In Wardha the Mahārs may not touch the shrines of Mahādeo, but must stand before them with their hands joined. They may sometimes deposit offerings with their own hands on those of Bhīmsen, originally a Gond god, and Māta Devi, the goddess of smallpox.

## 10. Adoption of foreign religions

In Berār and Bombay the Mahārs have some curious forms of belief. "Of the confusion which obtains in the Mahār theogony the names of six of their gods will afford a striking example. While some Mahārs worship Vithoba, the god of Pandharpur, others revere Varuna's twin sons, Meghoni and Deghoni, and his four messengers, Gabriel, Azrael, Michael and Anādin, all of whom they say hail from Pandharpur."<sup>124</sup> The names of archangels thus mixed up with Hindu deities may most probably have been obtained from the Muhammadans, as they include Azrael; but in Gujarāt their religion appears to have been borrowed from Christianity. "The Karia Dhedas have some rather remarkable beliefs. In the Satya Yug the Dhedas say they were called Satyas; in the Dvāpar Yug they were called Meghas; in the Treta Yug, Elias; and in the Kāli Yug, Dhedas. The name Elias came, they say, from

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<sup>124</sup> *Berār Census Report, l.c.*

a prophet Elia, and of him their religious men have vague stories; some of them especially about a famine that lasted for three years and a half, easily fitting into the accounts of Elijah in the Jewish Scriptures. They have also prophecies of a high future in store for their tribe. The king or leader of the new era, Kuyām Rai by name, will marry a Dheda woman and will raise the caste to the position of Brāhmans. They hold religious meetings or *ochhavas*, and at these with great excitement sing songs full of hope of the good things in store for them. When a man wishes to hold an *ochhava* he invites the whole caste, and beginning about eight in the evening they often spend the night in singing. Except perhaps for a few sweetmeats there is no eating or drinking, and the excitement is altogether religious and musical. The singers are chiefly religious Dhedas or Bhagats, and the people join in a refrain ‘*Avore Kuyām Rai Rāja*’, ‘Oh! come Kuyām Rai, our king.’”<sup>125</sup> It seems that the attraction which outside faiths exercise on the Mahārs is the hope held out of ameliorating the social degradation under which they labour, itself an outcome of the Hindu theory of caste. Hence they turn to Islām, or to what is possibly a degraded version of the Christian story, because these religions do not recognise caste, and hold out a promise to the Mahār of equality with his co-religionists, and in the case of Christianity of a recompense in the world to come for the sufferings which he has to endure in this one. Similarly, the Mahārs are the warmest adherents of the Muhammadan saint Sheikh Farīd, and flock to the fairs held in his honour at Girar in Wardha and Partāpgarh in Bhandāra, where he is supposed to have slain a couple of giants.<sup>126</sup> In Berār<sup>127</sup> also they revere Muhammadan tombs. The remains of the Muhammadan fort and tank on Pimpardol hill in Jalgaon tāluk are now one of the sacred places of the Mahārs, though to the Muhammadans they have no religious associations. Even at present Mahārs are inclined to adopt Islām, and a case was recently reported when a body of twenty of them set out to do so, but turned back on being told that they would not be admitted to the mosque.<sup>128</sup> A large proportion of the Mahārs are also adherents of the Kabīrpanthi sect, one of the main tenets of whose founder was the abolition of caste. And it is from the same point of view that Christianity appeals to them, enabling European missionaries to draw a large number of converts from this caste. But even the Hindu attitude towards the Mahārs is not one of unmixed intolerance. Once in three or four years in the southern Districts, the Panwārs, Mahārs, Pankas and other castes celebrate the worship of Nārāyan Deo or Vishnu, the officiating priest being a Mahār. Members of all castes come to the Panwār’s house at night for the ceremony, and a vessel of water is placed at the door in which they wash their feet and hands as they enter; and when inside they are all considered to be equal, and they sit in a line and eat the same food, and bind wreaths of flowers round their heads. After the cock crows the equality of status is ended, and no one who goes out of the house can enter again. At present also many educated Brāhmans recognise fully the social evils resulting from the degraded position of the Mahārs, and are doing their best to remove the caste prejudices against them.

## 11. Superstitions

They have various spells to cure a man possessed of an evil spirit, or stung by a snake or scorpion, or likely to be in danger from tigers or wild bears; and in the Morsi tāluk of Berār it is stated that they so greatly fear the effect of an enemy writing their name on a piece of paper and tying it

<sup>125</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarat Hindus.*

<sup>126</sup> It was formerly suggested that the fact of the Mahars being the chief worshippers at the shrines of Sheikh Farīd indicated that the places themselves had been previously held sacred, and had been annexed by the Muhammadan priests; and the legend of the giant, who might represent the demonolatry of the aboriginal faith, being slain by the saint might be a parable, so to say, expressing this process. But in view of the way in which the Mehtars worship Musalmān saints, it seems quite likely that the Mahārs might do so for the same reason, that is, because Islām partly frees them from the utter degradation imposed by Hinduism. Both views may have some truth. As regards the legends themselves, it is highly improbable that Sheikh Farid, a well-known saint of northern India, can ever have been within several hundred miles of either of the places with which they connect him.

<sup>127</sup> From Mr. C. Brown’s notes.

<sup>128</sup> *C.P. Police Gazette.*

to a sweeper's broom that the threat to do this can be used with great effect by their creditors.<sup>129</sup> To drive out the evil eye they make a small human image of powdered turmeric and throw it into boiled water, mentioning as they do so the names of any persons whom they suspect of having cast the evil eye upon them. Then the pot of water is taken out at midnight of a Wednesday or a Sunday and placed upside down on some cross-roads with a shoe over it, and the sufferer should be cured. Their belief about the sun and moon is that an old woman had two sons who were invited by the gods to dinner. Before they left she said to them that as they were going out there would be no one to cook, so they must remember to bring back something for her. The elder brother forgot what his mother had said and took nothing away with him; but the younger remembered her and brought back something from the feast. So when they came back the old woman cursed the elder brother and said that as he had forgotten her he should be the sun and scorch and dry up all vegetation with his beams; but the younger brother should be the moon and make the world cool and pleasant at night. The story is so puerile that it is only worth reproduction as a specimen of the level of a Mahār's intelligence. The belief in evil spirits appears to be on the decline, as a result of education and accumulated experience. Mr. C. Brown states that in Malkāpur of Berār the Mahārs say that there are no wandering spirits in the hills by night of such a nature that people need fear them. There are only tiny *pari* or fairies, small creatures in human form, but with the power of changing their appearance, who do no harm to any one.

## 12. Social rules

When an outsider is to be received into the community all the hair on his face is shaved, being wetted with the urine of a boy belonging to the group to which he seeks admission. Mahārs will eat all kinds of food including the flesh of crocodiles and rats, but some of them abstain from beef. There is nothing peculiar in their dress except that the men wear a black woollen thread round their necks.<sup>130</sup> The women may be recognised by their bold carriage, the absence of nose-rings and the large irregular dabs of vermilion on the forehead. Mahār women do not, as a rule, wear the *choli* or breast-cloth. An unmarried girl does not put on vermilion nor draw her cloth over her head. Women must be tattooed with dots on the face, representations of scorpions, flowers and snakes on the arms and legs, and some dots to represent flies on the hands. It is the custom for a girl's father or mother or father-in-law to have her tattooed in one place on the hand or arm immediately on her marriage. Then when girls are sitting together they will show this mark and say, 'My mother or father-in-law had this done,' as the case may be. Afterwards if a woman so desires she gets herself tattooed on her other limbs. If an unmarried girl or widow becomes with child by a man of the Mahār caste or any higher one she is subjected after delivery to a semblance of the purification by fire known as *Agnikāshṭ*. She is taken to the bank of a river and there five stalks of *juāri* are placed round her and burnt. Having fasted all day, at night she gives a feast to the caste-men and eats with them. If she offends with a man of lower caste she is finally expelled. Temporary exclusion from caste is imposed for taking food or drink from the hands of a Māng or Chamār or for being imprisoned in jail, or on a Mahār man if he lives with a woman of any higher caste; the penalty being the shaving of a man's face or cutting off a lock of a woman's hair, together with a feast to the caste. In the last case it is said that the man is not readmitted until he has put the woman away. If a man touches a dead dog, cat, pony or donkey, he has to be shaved and give a feast to the caste. And if a dog or cat dies in his house, or a litter of puppies or kittens is born, the house is considered to be defiled; all the earthen pots must be thrown away, the whole house washed and cleaned and a caste feast given. The most

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<sup>129</sup> Kitts, *l.c.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem.*

solemn oath of a Mahār is by a cat or dog and in Yeotmāl by a black dog.<sup>131</sup> In Berār, the same paper states, the pig is the only animal regarded as unclean, and they must on no account touch it. This is probably owing to Muhammadan influence. The worst social sin which a Mahār can commit is to get vermin in a wound, which is known as Deogan or being smitten by God. While the affliction continues he is quite ostracised, no one going to his house or giving him food or water; and when it is cured the Mahārs of ten or twelve surrounding villages assemble and he must give a feast to the whole community. The reason for this calamity being looked upon with such peculiar abhorrence is obscure, but the feeling about it is general among Hindus.



Weaving: sizing the warp

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<sup>131</sup> Stated by Mr. C. Brown.

### 13. Social subjection

The social position of the Mahārs is one of distressing degradation. Their touch is considered to defile and they live in a quarter by themselves outside the village. They usually have a separate well assigned to them from which to draw water, and if the village has only one well the Mahārs and Hindus take water from different sides of it. Mahār boys were not until recently allowed to attend school with Hindu boys, and when they could not be refused admission to Government schools, they were allotted a small corner of the veranda and separately taught. When Dher boys were first received into the Chānda High School a mutiny took place and the school was boycotted for some time. The people say, ‘*Mahār sarva jātīcha bāhar*’ or ‘The Mahār is outside all castes.’ Having a bad name, they are also given unwarrantably a bad character; and ‘*Mahār jātīchā*’ is a phrase used for a man with no moral or kindly feelings. But in theory at least, as conforming to Hinduism, they were supposed to be better than Muhammadans and other unbelievers, as shown by the following story from the Rāsmāla:<sup>132</sup> A Muhammadan sovereign asked his Hindu minister which was the lowest caste. The minister begged for leisure to consider his reply and, having obtained it, went to where the Dhedas lived and said to them: “You have given offence to the Pādishāh. It is his intention to deprive you of caste and make you Muhammadans.” The Dhedas, in the greatest terror, pushed off in a body to the sovereign’s palace, and standing at a respectful distance shouted at the top of their lungs: “If we’ve offended your majesty, punish us in some other way than that. Beat us, fine us, hang us if you like, but don’t make us Muhammadans.” The Pādishāh smiled, and turning to his minister who sat by him affecting to hear nothing, said, ‘So the lowest caste is that to which I belong.’ But of course this cannot be said to represent the general view of the position of Muhammadans in Hindu eyes; they, like the English, are regarded as distinguished foreigners, who, if they consented to be proselytised, would probably in time become Brāhmans or at least Rājput̄s. A repartee of a Mahār to a Brāhman abusing him is: The Brāhman, ‘*Jāre Mahārya*’ or ‘Avaunt, ye Mahār’; the Mahār, ‘*Kona dūshi nēn tumchi goburya*’ or ‘Some day I shall carry cowdung cakes for you (at his funeral)’; as in the Marātha Districts the Mahār is commonly engaged for carrying fuel to the funeral pyre. Under native rule the Mahār was subjected to painful degradations. He might not spit on the ground lest a Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to hang an earthen pot round his neck to hold his spittle.<sup>133</sup> He was made to drag a thorny branch with him to brush out his footsteps, and when a Brahman came by had to lie at a distance on his face lest his shadow might fall on the Brāhman. In Gujarāt<sup>134</sup> they were not allowed to tuck up the loin-cloth but had to trail it along the ground. Even quite recently in Bombay a Mahār was not allowed to talk loudly in the street while a well-to-do Brāhman or his wife was dining in one of the houses. In the reign of Sidhrāj, the great Solanki Rāja of Gujarāt, the Dheras were for a time at any rate freed from such disabilities by the sacrifice of one of their number.<sup>135</sup> The great tank at Anhilvāda Pātan in Gujarāt had been built by the Ods (navvies), but Sidhrāj desired Jusma Odni, one of their wives, and sought to possess her. But the Ods fled with her and when he pursued her she plunged a dagger into her stomach, cursing Sidhrāj and saying that his tank should never hold water. The Rāja, returning to Anhilvada, found the tank dry, and asked his minister what should be done that water might remain in the tank. The Pardhān, after consulting the astrologers, said that if a man’s life were sacrificed the curse might be removed. At that time the Dheras or outcastes were compelled to live at a distance from the towns; they wore untwisted cotton round their heads and a stag’s horn as a mark hanging from their waists so that people might be able to avoid touching them. The Rāja

<sup>132</sup> Vol. ii. p. 237.

<sup>133</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xii. p. 175.

<sup>134</sup> Rev. A. Taylor in *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarāt Hindus*, p. 341 f.

<sup>135</sup> The following passage is taken from Forbes, *Rāsmāla*, i. p. 112.

commanded that a Dher named Māyo should be beheaded in the tank that water might remain. Māyo died, singing the praises of Vishnu, and the water after that began to remain in the tank. At the time of his death Māyo had begged as a reward for his sacrifice that the Dhers should not in future be compelled to live at a distance from the towns nor wear a distinctive dress. The Rāja assented and these privileges were afterwards permitted to the Dhers for the sake of Māyo.



Winding thread

#### **14. Their position improving**

From the painful state of degradation described above the Mahārs are gradually being rescued by the levelling and liberalising tendency of British rule, which must be to these depressed classes an untold blessing. With the right of acquiring property they have begun to assert themselves, and the extension of railways more especially has a great effect in abolishing caste distinctions. The Brāhman who cannot afford a second-class fare must either not travel or take the risk of rubbing shoulders with a Mahār in a third-class carriage, and if he chooses to consider himself defiled will have to go hungry and thirsty until he gets the opportunity of bathing at his journey's end. The observance of the rules of impurity thus becomes so irksome that they are gradually falling into abeyance.

#### **15. Occupation**

The principal occupations of the Mahārs are the weaving of coarse country cloth and general labour. They formerly spun their own yarn, and their fabrics were preferred by the cultivators for their durability. But practically all thread is now bought from the mills; and the weaving industry is also in a depressed condition. Many Mahārs have now taken to working in the mills, and earn better wages than they could at home. In Bombay a number of them are employed as police-constables.<sup>136</sup> They

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<sup>136</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xi p. 73.

are usually the village watchmen of the Marātha Districts, and in this capacity were remunerated by contributions of grain from the tenants, the hides and flesh of animals dying in the village, and plots of rent-free land. For these have now been substituted in the Central Provinces a cash payment fixed by Government. In Berār the corresponding official is known as the Kāmdār Mahār. Mr. Kitts writes of him:<sup>137</sup> As fourth *balutedār* on the village establishment the Mahār holds a post of great importance to himself and convenience to the village. To the patel (headman), patwāri and big men of the village, he acts often as a personal servant and errand-runner; for a smaller cultivator he will also at times carry a torch or act as escort. He had formerly to clean the horses of travellers, and was also obliged, if required, to carry their baggage.<sup>138</sup> For the services which he thus renders as *pāndhewār* the Mahār receives from the cultivators certain grain-dues. When the cut juāri is lying in the field the Mahārs go round and beg for a measure of the ears (*bhīk payāli*). But the regular payment is made when the grain has been threshed. Another duty performed by the Mahār is the removal of the carcasses of dead animals. The flesh is eaten and the skin retained as wage for the work. The patel and his relatives, however, usually claim to have the skins of their own animals returned; and in some places where half the agriculturists of the village claim kinship with the patel, the Mahārs feel and resent the loss. A third duty is the opening of grain-pits, the noxious gas from which sometimes produces asphyxia. For this the Mahārs receive the tainted grain. They also get the clothes from a corpse which is laid on the pyre, and the pieces of the burnt wood which remain when the body has been consumed. Recent observations in the Nāgpur country show that the position of the Mahārs is improving. In Nāgpur it is stated:<sup>139</sup> “Looked down upon as outcastes by the Hindus they are hampered by no sense of dignity or family prejudice. They are fond of drink, but are also hard workers. They turn their hands to anything and everything, but the great majority are agricultural labourers. At present the rural Mahār is in the background. If there is only one well in the village he may not use it, but has to get his water where he can. His sons are consigned to a corner in the village school, and the schoolmaster, if not superior to caste prejudices, discourages their attendance. Nevertheless, Mahārs will not remain for years downtrodden in this fashion, and are already pushing themselves up from this state of degradation. In some places they have combined to dig wells, and in Nāgpur have opened a school for members of their own community. Occasionally a Mahār is the most prosperous man in the village. Several of them are moneylenders in a small way, and a few are mālguzārs.” Similarly in Bhandāra Mr. Napier writes that a new class of small creditors has arisen from the Mahār caste. These people have given up drinking, and lead an abstemious life, wishing to raise themselves in social estimation. Twenty or more village kotwārs were found to be carrying on moneylending transactions on a small scale, and in addition many of the Mahārs in towns were exceedingly well off.

## Mahli

### 1. Origin of the caste

**Mahli, Mahili.**<sup>140</sup>—A small caste of labourers, palanquin-bearers and workers in bamboo belonging to Chota Nāgpur. In 1911 about 300 Mahlis were returned from the Feudatory States in this tract. They are divided into five subcastes: the Bānsphor-Mahli, who make baskets and do all kinds of bamboo-work; the Pāhar-Mahli, basket-makers and cultivators; the Sulunkhi, cultivators and labourers; the Tānti who carry litters; and the Mahli-Munda, who belong to Lohardaga. Sir H. Risley states that a comparison of the totemistic sections of the Mahlis given in the Appendix to his *Tribes*

<sup>137</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xi. p. 73.

<sup>138</sup> Grant Duff; *History of the Marāthas*, vol. i. p. 24.

<sup>139</sup> *Nāgpur Settlement Report* (1899), p. 29.

<sup>140</sup> This article consists of extracts from Sir H. Risley's account of the caste in the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*.

and *Castes* with those of the Santāls seems to warrant the conjecture that the main body of the caste are merely a branch of the Santāls. Four or five septs, Hansda a wild goose, Hemron, Murmu the nilgai, Saren or Sarihin, and perhaps Tudu or Turu are common to the two tribes. The Mahlis are also closely connected with the Mundas. Seven septs of the main body of the Mahlis, Dumriār the wild fig, Gundli a kind of grain, Kerketa a bird, Mahukal a bird (long-tail), Tirki, Tunduār and Turu are also Munda septs; and the three septs given of the Mahli-Munda subcaste, Bhuktuār, Lāng Chenre, and Sānga are all found among the Mundas; while four septs, Hansda a wild goose, Induār a kind of eel, as well as Kerketa and Tirki, already mentioned, are common to the Mahlis and Turis who are also recognised by Sir H. Risley as an offshoot of the Munda tribe with the same occupation as the Mahlis, of making baskets.<sup>141</sup> The Santāls and Mundas were no doubt originally one tribe, and it seems that the Mahlis are derived from both of them, and have become a separate caste owing to their having settled in villages more or less of the open country, and worked as labourers, palanquin-bearers and bamboo-workers much in the same manner as the Turis. Probably they work for hire for Hindus, and hence their status may have fallen lower than that of the parent tribe, who remained in their own villages in the jungles. Colonel Dalton notes<sup>142</sup> that the gipsy Berias use Mānjhi and Mahali as titles, and it is possible that some of the Mahlis may have joined the Beria community.

## 2. Social customs

Only a very few points from Sir H. Risley's account of the caste need be recorded here, and for further details the reader may be referred to his article in the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. A bride-price of Rs. 5 is customary, but it varies according to the means of the parties. On the wedding day, before the usual procession starts to escort the bridegroom to the bride's house, he is formally married to a mango tree, while the bride goes through the same ceremony with a mahua. At the entrance to the bride's house the bridegroom, riding on the shoulders of some male relation and bearing on his head a vessel of water, is received by the bride's brother, equipped in similar fashion, and the two cavaliers sprinkle one another with water. At the wedding the bridegroom touches the bride's forehead five times with vermilion and presents her with an iron armband. The remarriage of widows and divorce are permitted. When a man divorces his wife he gives her a rupee and takes away the iron armband which was given her at her wedding. The Mahlis will admit members of any higher caste into the community. The candidate for admission must pay a small sum to the caste headman, and give a feast to the Mahlis of the neighbourhood, at which he must eat a little of the leavings of food left by each guest on his leaf-plate. After this humiliating rite he could not, of course, be taken back into his own caste, and is bound to remain a Mahli.

## Majhwār

### 1. Origin of the tribe

**Majhwār, Mānjhi, Mājhia.**<sup>143</sup>—A small mixed tribe who have apparently originated from the Gonds, Mundas and Kawars. About 14,000 Majhwārs were returned in 1911 from the Raigarh, Sargūja and Udaipur States. The word Mānjhi means the headman of a tribal subdivision, being derived from the Sanskrit *madhya*, or he who is in the centre.<sup>144</sup> In Bengal Mānjhi has the meaning of

<sup>141</sup> See lists of exogamous septs of Mahli, Sandāl, Munda and Puri in Appendix to *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*.

<sup>142</sup> *Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 326.

<sup>143</sup> This article is based on papers by Mr. Hira Lal and Suraj Baksh Singh, Assistant Superintendent, Udaipur State, with references to Mr. Crooke's exhaustive article on the Majhwārs in his *Tribes and Castes*.

<sup>144</sup> Crooke, art Majhwār, para. 1.

the steersman of a boat or a ferryman, and this may have been its original application, as the steersman might well be he who sat in the centre.<sup>145</sup> When a tribal party makes an expedition by boat, the leader would naturally occupy the position of steersman, and hence it is easy to see how the term Mānjhi came to be applied to the leader or head of the clan and to be retained as a title for general use. Sir H. Risley gives it as a title of the Kewats or fishermen and many other castes and tribes in Bengal. But it is also the name for a village headman among the Santāls, and whether this meaning is derived from the prior signification of steersman or is of independent origin is, uncertain. In Raigarh Mr. Hīra Lāl states that the Mānjhis or Mājhias are fishermen and are sometimes classed, with the Kewats. They appear to be Kols who have taken to fishing and, being looked down on by the other Kols on this account, took the name of Mājhia or Mānjhi, which they now derive from Machh, a fish. “The appearance of the Mājhias whom I saw and examined was typically aboriginal and their language was a curious mixture of Mundāri, Santāl and Korwa, though they stoutly repudiated connection with any of these tribes. They could count only up to three in their own language, using the Santāl words *mit*, *baria*, *pia*. Most of their terms for parts of the body were derived from Mundāri, but they also used some Santāli and Korwa words. In their own language they called themselves Hor, which means a man, and is the tribal name of the Mundas.”

## 2. The Mīrzāpur Majhwārs derived from the Gonds

On the other hand the Majhwārs of Mīrzāpur, of whom Mr. Crooke gives a detailed and interesting account, clearly appear to be derived from the Gonds. They have five subdivisions, which they say are descended from the five sons of their first Gond ancestor. These are Poiya, Tekām, Marai, Chika and Oiku. Four of these names are those of Gond clans, and each of the five subtribes is further divided into a number of exogamous septs, of which a large proportion bear typical Gond names, as Markām, Netām, Tekām, Mashām, Sindrām and so on. The Majhwārs of Mīrzāpur also, like the Gonds, employ Pathāris or Pardhāns as their priests, and there can thus be no doubt that they are mainly derived from the Gonds. They would appear to have come to Mīrzāpur from Sargūja and the Vindhyan and Satpūra hills, as they say that their ancestors ruled from the forts of Mandla, Garha in Jubbulpore, Sārangarh, Raigarh and other places in the Central Provinces.<sup>146</sup> They worship a deified Ahīr, whose legs were cut off in a fight with some Rāja, since when he has become a troublesome ghost. “He now lives on the Ahlor hill in Sargūja, where his petrified body may still be seen, and the Mānjhis go there to worship him. His wife lives on the Jhoba hill in Sargūja. Nobody but a Baiga dares to ascend the hill, and even the Rāja of Sargūja when he visits the neighbourhood sacrifices a black goat. Mānjhis believe that if these two deities are duly propitiated they can give anything they need.” The story makes it probable that the ancestors of these Mānjhis dwelt in Sargūja. The Mānjhis of Mīrzāpur are not boatmen or fishermen and have no traditions of having ever been so. They are a backward tribe and practise shifting cultivation on burnt-out patches of forest. It is possible that they may have abandoned their former aquatic profession on leaving the neighbourhood of the rivers, or they may have simply adopted the name, especially since it has the meaning of a village headman and is used as a title by the Santāls and other castes and tribes. Similarly the term Munda, which at first meant the headman of a Kol village, is now the common name for the Kol tribe in Chota Nāgpur.

## 3. Connection with the Kawars

Again the Mānjhis appear to be connected with the Kawar tribe. Mr. Hīra Lāl states that in Raigarh they will take food with Kewats, Gonds, Kawars and Rāwats or Ahīrs, but they will not eat rice and pulse, the most important and sacred food, with any outsiders except Kawars; and this they

<sup>145</sup> *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Mānjhi.

<sup>146</sup> Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Mānjhi, para. 4.

explain by the statement that their ancestors and those of the Kawars were connected. In Mirzāpur the Kaurai Ahirs will take food and water from the Majhwārs, and these Ahīrs are not improbably derived from the Kawars.<sup>147</sup> Here the Majhwārs also hold an oath taken when touching a broadsword as most binding, and the Kawars of the Central Provinces worship a sword as one of their principal deities.<sup>148</sup> Not improbably the Mānjhis may include some Kewats, as this caste also use Mānjhi for a title; and Mānjhi is both a subcaste and title of the Khairwārs. The general conclusion from the above evidence appears to be that the caste is a very heterogeneous group whose most important constituents come from the Gond, Munda, Santāl and Kavar tribes. Whether the original bond of connection among the various people who call themselves Mānjhi was the common occupation of boating and fishing is a doubtful point.

#### 4. Exogamy and totemism

The Mānjhis of Sargūja, like those of Raigarh, appear to be of Munda and Santāl rather than of Gond origin. They have no subdivisions, but a number of totemistic septs. Those of the Bhainsa or buffalo sept are split into the Lotan and Singhan subsepts, *lotan* meaning a place where buffaloes wallow and *singh* a horn. The Lotan Bhainsa sept say that their ancestor was born in a place where a buffalo had wallowed, and the Singhan Bhainsa that their ancestor was born while his mother was holding the horn of a buffalo. These septs consider the buffalo sacred and will not yoke it to a plough or cart, though they will drink its milk. They think that if one of them killed a buffalo their clan would become extinct. The Bāghani Majhwārs, named after the *bāgh* or tiger, think that a tiger will not attack any member of their sept unless he has committed an offence entailing temporary excommunication from caste. Until this offence has been expiated his relationship with the tiger as head of his sept is in abeyance and the tiger will eat him as he would any other stranger. If a tiger meets a member of the sept who is free from sin, he will run away. When the Bāghani sept hear that any Majhwār has killed a tiger they purify their houses by washing them with cowdung and water. Members of the Khoba or peg sept will not make a peg or drive one into the ground. Those of the Dūmar<sup>149</sup> or fig-tree sept say that their first ancestor was born under this tree. They consider the tree to be sacred and never eat its fruit, and worship it once a year. Members of the sept named after the *shiroti* tree worship the tree every Sunday.

#### 5. Marriage customs

Marriage within the sept is prohibited and for three generations between persons related through females. Marriage is adult, but matches are arranged by the parents of the parties. At betrothal the elders of the caste must be regaled with *cheora* or parched rice and liquor. A bride-price of Rs. 10 is paid, but a suitor who cannot afford this may do service to his father-in-law for one or two years in lieu of it. At the wedding the bridegroom puts a copper ring on the bride's finger and marks her forehead with vermilion. The couple walk seven times round the sacred post, and seven little heaps of rice and pieces of turmeric are arranged so that they may touch one of them with their big toes at each round. The bride's mother and seven other women place some rice in the skirts of their cloths and the bridegroom throws this over his shoulder. After this he picks up the rice and distributes it to all the women present, and the bride goes through the same ceremony. The rice is no doubt an emblem of fertility, and its presentation to the women may perhaps be expected to render them fertile.

<sup>147</sup> Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Mānjhi, para. 63.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibidem*, para. 54.

<sup>149</sup> *Ficus glomerata*.

## 6. Birth and funeral rites

On the birth of a child the navel-string is buried in front of the house. When a man is at the point of death they place a little cooked rice and curds in his mouth so that he may not go hungry to the other world, in view of the fact that he has probably eaten very little during his illness. Some cotton and rice are also placed near the head of the corpse in the grave so that he may have food and clothing in the next world. Mourning is observed for five days, and at the end of this period the mourners should have their hair cut, but if they cannot get it done on this day, the rite may be performed on the same day in the following year.

## 7. Religious dance

The tribe worship Dūlha Deo, the bridegroom god, and also make offerings to their ploughs at the time of eating the new rice and at the Holi and Dasahra festivals. They dance the *karma* dance in the months of Asārḥ and Kunwār or at the beginning and end of the rains. When the time has come the Gaontia headman or the Baiga priest fetches a branch of the *karma* tree from the forest and sets it up in his yard as a notice and invitation to the village. After sunset all the people, men, women and children, assemble and dance round the tree, to the accompaniment of a drum known as Māṅdar. The dancing continues all night, and in the morning the host plucks up the branch of the *karma* tree and consigns it to a stream, at the same time regaling the dancers with rice, pulse and a goat. This dance is a religious rite in honour of Karam Rāja, and is believed to keep sickness from the village and bring it prosperity. The tribe eat flesh, but abstain from beef and pork. Girls are tattooed on arrival at puberty with representations of the *tulsi* or basil, four arrow-heads in the form of a cross, and the foot-ornament known as *pairi*.

## Māl

**Māl, Māle, Māler, Māl Pahāria.**<sup>150</sup>—A tribe of the Rājmahal hills, who may be an isolated branch of the Savars. In 1911 about 1700 Māls were returned from the Chota Nāgpur Feudatory States recently transferred to the Central Provinces. The customs of the Māls resemble those of the other hill tribes of Chota Nāgpur. Sir H. Risley states that the average stature is low, the complexion dark and the figure short and sturdy. The following particulars are reproduced from Colonel Dalton's account of the tribe:

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<sup>150</sup> Based entirely on Colonel Dalton's account in the *Ethnology of Bengal*, and Sir H. Risley's in the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*.

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