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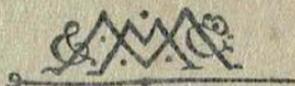


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THE TRIBES AND CASTES  
OF THE  
CENTRAL PROVINCES OF INDIA



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THE

# TRIBES AND CASTES

OF THE

# CENTRAL PROVINCES OF INDIA

BY

R. V. RUSSELL

OF THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE

SUPERINTENDENT OF ETHNOGRAPHY, CENTRAL PROVINCES

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RAI BAHADUR HIRA LĀL

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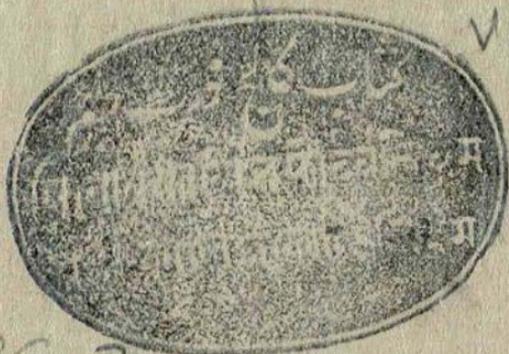
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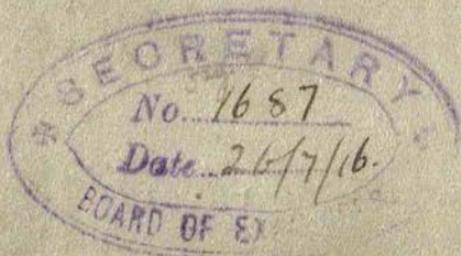
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### SUBCASTES OF BRĀHMAN

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## PRONUNCIATION

a has the sound of u in *but* or *murmur*.

ā   "   "    a in *bath* or *tar*.

e   "   "    é in *écarté* or ai in *maid*.

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

ī   "   "    ee in *beet*.

o   "   "    o in *bore* or *bowl*.

u   "   "    u in *put* or *bull*.

ū   "   "    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 krore ten million.



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PART II  
ARTICLES ON CASTES AND TRIBES  
AGARIA—FAKĪR



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## AGARIA

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

r. Origin and subdivisions.

The name probably signifies a worker with *āg* or fire. An Agaria subcaste of Lohārs also exists, many of whom are quite probably Gonds, but they are not included in the regular caste. Similar Dravidian castes of Agarias are to be found in Mirzāpur and Bengal. The Agarias are quite distinct from the Agharia cultivating caste of the Uriya country. The Raipur Agarias still intermarry with the Rāwanbansi Gonds of the District. The Agarias think that their caste has existed from the beginning of the world, and that the first Agaria made the ploughshare with which the first bullocks furrowed the primeval soil. The caste has two endogamous divisions, the Patharia and the Khuntia Agarias. The Patharias place a stone on the mouth of the bellows to fix them in the ground for smelting, while the Khuntias use a peg. The two subcastes do not even take water from one another.

Their exogamous sections have generally the same names as those of the Gonds, as Sonwāni, Dhurua, Tekām, Markām, Uika, Purtai, Marai, and others. A few names of Hindi origin are also found, as Ahindwār, Ranchirai and Rāthoria, which show that some Hindus have probably been amalgamated with the caste. Ahindwār or Aindwār and Ranchirai mean a fish and a bird respectively in Hindi, while Rāthoria is a *gotra* both of Rājput and Telis. The Gond names are probably also those of animals, plants or other objects, but their meaning has now generally been

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



forgotten. Tekām or *teka* is a teak tree. Sonwāni is a sept found among several of the Dravidian tribes, and the lower Hindu castes. A person of the Sonwāni sept is always chosen to perform the ceremony of purification and readmission into caste of persons temporarily excommunicated. His duty often consists in pouring on such a person a little water in which gold has been placed to make it holy, and hence the name is considered to mean Sonāpāni or gold-water. The Agarias do not know the meanings of their section names and therefore have no totemistic observances. But they consider that all persons belonging to one *gotra* are descended from a common ancestor, and marriage within the *gotra* is therefore prohibited. As among the Gonds, first cousins are allowed to marry.

2. Mar-  
riage.

Marriage is usually adult. When the father of a boy wishes to arrange a marriage he sends emissaries to the father of the girl. They open the proceedings by saying, 'So-and-so has come to partake of your stale food.'<sup>1</sup> If the father of the girl approves he gives his consent by saying, 'He has come on foot, I receive him on my head.' The boy's father then repairs to the girl's house, where he is respectfully received and his feet are washed. He is then asked to take a drink of plain water, which is a humble method of offering him a meal. After this, presents for the girl are sent by a party accompanied by tomtom players, and a date is fixed for the marriage, which, contrary to the usual Hindu rule, may take place in the rains. The reason is perhaps because iron-smelting is not carried on during the rains and the Agarias therefore have no work to do. A few days before the wedding the bride-price is paid, which consists of 5 seers each of *urad* and til and a sum of Rs. 4 to Rs. 12. The marriage is held on any Monday, Tuesday or Friday, no further trouble being taken to select an auspicious day. In order that they may not forget the date fixed, the fathers of the parties each take a piece of thread in which they tie a knot for every day intervening between the date when the marriage day is settled and the day itself, and they then untie one knot for every day. Previous to the marriage all the village gods are propitiated by being anointed with oil

<sup>1</sup> *Bāsi* or rice boiled in water the previous day.



by the Baiga or village priest. The first clod of earth for the ovens is also dug by the Baiga, and received in her cloth by the bride's mother as a mark of respect. The usual procedure is adopted in the marriage. After the bridegroom's arrival his teeth are cleaned with tooth-sticks, and the bride's sister tries to push *sāj* leaves into his mouth, a proceeding which he prevents by holding his fan in front of his face. For doing this the girl is given a small present. A *paili*<sup>1</sup> measure of rice is filled alternately by the bride and bridegroom twelve times, the other upsetting it each time after it is filled. At the marriage feast, in addition to rice and pulse, mutton curry and cakes of *urad* pulse fried in oil are provided. *Urad* is held in great respect, and is always given as a food at ceremonial feasts and to honoured guests. The greater part of the marriage ceremony is performed a second time at the bridegroom's house. Finally, the decorations of the marriage-shed and the palm-leaf crowns of the bride and bridegroom are thrown into a tank. The bride and bridegroom go into the water, and each in turn hides a jar under water, which the other must find. They then bathe, change their clothes, and go back to the bridegroom's house, the bride carrying the jar filled with water on her head. The boy is furnished with a bow and arrows and has to shoot at a stuffed deer over the girl's shoulder. After each shot she gives him a little sugar, and if he does not hit the deer in three shots he must pay 4 annas to the *sawāsa* or page. After the marriage the bridegroom does not visit his wife for a month in order to ascertain whether she is already pregnant. They then live together. The marriage expenses usually amount to Rs. 15 for the bridegroom's father and Rs. 40 for the bride's father. Sometimes the bridegroom serves his father-in-law for his wife, and he is then not required to pay anything for the marriage, the period of service being three years. If the couple anticipate the ceremony, however, they must leave the house, and then are recalled by the bride's parents, and readmitted into caste on giving a feast, which is in lieu of the marriage ceremony. If they do not comply with the first summons of the parents, the latter finally sever connec-

<sup>1</sup> A measure containing about 2½ lbs. of grain.



tion with them. Widow marriage is freely permitted, and the widow is expected to marry her late husband's younger brother, especially if he is a bachelor. If she marries another man with his consent, the new husband gives him a turban and shoulder-cloth. The children by the first husband are made over to his relatives if there are any. Divorce is permitted for adultery or extravagance or ill-treatment by either party. A divorced wife can marry again, but if she absconds with another man without being divorced the latter has to pay Rs. 12 to the husband.

3. Birth and death ceremonies.

When a woman becomes pregnant for the first time, her mother goes to her taking a new cloth and cakes and a preparation of milk, which is looked on as a luxurious food, and which, it is supposed, will strengthen the child in the womb. After birth the mother is impure for five days. The dead are usually burnt, but children under six whose ears have not been pierced, and persons dying a violent death or from cholera or smallpox are buried. When the principal man of the family dies, the caste-fellows at the mourning feast tie a cloth round the head of his successor to show that they acknowledge his new position. They offer water to the dead in the month of Kunwār (September-October).

4. Religion and social customs.

They have a vague belief in a supreme God but do not pay much attention to him. Their family god is Dulha Deo, to whom they offer goats, fowls, cocoanuts and cakes. In the forest tracts they also worship Bura Deo, the chief god of the Gonds. The deity who presides over their profession is Lohā-Sur, the Iron demon, who is supposed to live in the smelting-kilns, and to whom they offer a black hen. Formerly, it is said, they were accustomed to offer a black cow. They worship their smelting implements on the day of Dasahra and during Phāgun, and offer fowls to them. They have little faith in medicine, and in cases of sickness requisition the aid of the village sorcerer, who ascertains what deity is displeased with them by moving grain to and fro in a winnowing-fan and naming the village gods in turn. He goes on repeating the names until his hand slackens or stops at some name, and the offended god is thus indicated. He is then summoned and enters into the body of one of the persons present,



and explains his reason for being offended with the sick person, as that he has passed by the god's shrine without taking off his shoes, or omitted to make the triennial offering of a fowl or the like. Atonement is then promised and the offering made, while the sick person on recovery notes the deity in question as one of a vindictive temper, whose worship must on no account be neglected. The Agarias say that they do not admit outsiders into the caste, but Gonds, Kawars and Ahirs are occasionally allowed to enter it. They refuse to eat monkeys, jackals, crocodiles, lizards, beef and the leavings of others. They eat pork and fowls and drink liquor copiously. They take food from the higher castes and from Gonds and Baigas. Only Bahelias and other impure castes will take food from them. Temporary excommunication from caste is imposed for conviction of a criminal offence, getting maggots in a wound, and killing a cow, a dog or a cat. Permanent excommunication is imposed for adultery or eating with a very low caste. Readmission to caste after temporary exclusion entails a feast, but if the offender is very poor he simply gives a little liquor or even water. The Agarias are usually sunk in poverty, and their personal belongings are of the scantiest description, consisting of a waist-cloth, and perhaps another wisp of cloth for the head, a brass *lota* or cup and a few earthen vessels. Their women dress like Gond women, and have a few pewter ornaments. They are profusely tattooed with representations of flowers, scorpions and other objects. This is done merely for ornament.

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

5. Occupation.



and tongs, and building a small furnace under a tree, make and repair iron implements for the villagers.

## I. Origin.

**Agharia**<sup>1</sup> (a corruption of Agaria, meaning one who came from Agra).—A cultivating caste belonging to the Sambalpur District<sup>2</sup> and adjoining States. They number 27,000 persons in the Raigarh and Sārangarh States and Bilāspur District of the Central Provinces, and are found also in some of the Chota Nāgpur States transferred from Bengal. According to the traditions of the Agharias their forefathers were Rājput̄s who lived near Agra. They were accustomed to salute the king of Delhi with one hand only and without bending the head. The king after suffering this for a long time determined to punish them for their contumacy, and summoned all the Agharias to appear before him. At the door through which they were to pass to his presence he fixed a sword at the height of a man's neck. The haughty Agharias came to the door, holding their heads high and not seeing the sword, and as a natural consequence they were all decapitated as they passed through. But there was one Agharia who had heard about the fixing of the sword and who thought it better to stay at home, saying that he had some ceremony to perform. When the king heard that there was one Agharia who had not passed through the door, he sent again, commanding him to come. The Agharia did not wish to go but felt it impossible to decline. He therefore sent for a Chamār of his village and besought him to go instead, saying that he would become a Rājput̄ in his death and that he would ever be held in remembrance by the Agharia's descendants. The Chamār consented to sacrifice himself for his master, and going before the king was beheaded at the door. But the Agharia fled south, taking his whole village with him, and came to Chhattisgarh, where each of the families in the village founded a clan of the Agharia caste. And in memory of this, whenever an Agharia makes a libation to his ancestors, he first pours a little water on the ground in honour of the dead Chamār. According to

<sup>1</sup> This article is mainly compiled from papers by the late Mr. Baikunth Nāth Pujāri, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Sambalpur ; Sitāram, Head

Master of the Raigarh English School, and Kanhyā Lāl, clerk in the Gazetteer office.

<sup>2</sup> Now transferred to Bengal.



another version of the story three brothers of different families escaped and first went to Orissa, where they asked the Gajpati king to employ them as soldiers. The king caused two sheaths of swords to be placed before them, and telling them that one contained a sword and the other a bullock-goad, asked them to select one and by their choice to determine whether they would be soldiers or husbandmen. From one sheath a haft of gold projected and from the other one of silver. The Agharias pulled out the golden haft and found that they had chosen the goad. The point of the golden and silver handles is obvious, and the story is of some interest for the distant resemblance which it bears to the choice of the caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*. Condemned, as they considered, to drive the plough, the Agharias took off their sacred threads, which they could no longer wear, and gave them to the youngest member of the caste, saying that he should keep them and be their Bhāt, and they would support him with contributions of a tenth of the produce of their fields. He assented, and his descendants are the genealogists of the Agharias and are termed Dashānshi. The Agharias claim to be Somvansi Rājput̄s, a claim which Colonel Dalton says their appearance favours. "Tall, well-made, with high Aryan features and tawny complexions, they look like Rājput̄s, though they are more industrious and intelligent than the generality of the fighting tribe."<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the fact that with the transfer of the Sambalpur District, a considerable portion of the Agharias have ceased to be residents of the Central Provinces, it is unnecessary to give the details of their caste organisation at length. They have two subdivisions, the Bad or superior Agharias and the Chhote, Sarolia or Sarwaria, the inferior or mixed Agharias. The latter are a cross between an Agharia and a Gaur (Ahīr) woman. The Bad Agharias will not eat with or even take water from the others. Further local subdivisions are now in course of formation, as the Ratanpuria, Phuljharā and Raigarhia or those living round Ratanpur, Phuljhar and Raigarh. The caste is said to have 84 *gotras* or exogamous sections, of which 60 bear the title of Patel, 18 that of Nāik, and 6 of Chaudhri. The section names

2. Subdivisions.

<sup>1</sup> Dalton's *Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 322.



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

Marriage within the exogamous section and also with first cousins is forbidden, though in some places the union of a sister's son with a brother's daughter is permitted. Child marriage is usual, and censure visits a man who allows an unmarried daughter to arrive at adolescence. The bridegroom should always be older than the bride, at any rate by a day. When a betrothal is arranged some ornaments and a cloth bearing the *swastik* or lucky mark are sent to the girl. Marriages are always celebrated during the months of Māgh and Phāgun, and they are held only once in five or six years, when all children whose matches can be arranged for are married off. This custom is economical, as it saves expenditure on marriage feasts. Colonel Dalton also states that the Agharias always employ Hindustāni Brāhmans for their ceremonies, and as very few of these are available, they make circuits over large areas, and conduct all the weddings of a locality at the same period. Before the marriage a kid is sacrificed at the bride's house to celebrate the removal of her status of maidenhood. When the bridegroom arrives at the bride's house he touches with his dagger the



string of mango-leaves suspended from the marriage-shed and presents a rupee and a hundred betel-leaves to the bride's *sawāsin* or attendant. Next day the bridegroom's father sends a present of a bracelet and seven small earthen cups to the bride. She is seated in the open, and seven women hold the cups over her head one above the other. Water is then poured from above from one cup into the other, each being filled in turn and the whole finally falling on the bride's head. This probably symbolises the fertilising action of rain. The bride is then bathed and carried in a basket seven times round the marriage-post, after which she is seated in a chair and seven women place their heads together round her while a male relative winds a thread seven times round the heads of the women. The meaning of this ceremony is obscure. The bridegroom makes his appearance alone and is seated with the bride, both being dressed in clothes coloured yellow with turmeric. The bridegroom's party follows, and the feet of the couple are washed with milk. The bride's brother embraces the bridegroom and changes cloths with him. Water is poured over the hands of the couple, the girl's forehead is daubed with vermilion, and a red silk cloth is presented to her and the couple go round the marriage-post. The bride is taken for four days to the husband's house and then returns, and is again sent with the usual *gauna* ceremony, when she is fit for conjugal relations. No price is usually paid for the bride, and each party spends about Rs. 100 on the marriage ceremony. Polygamy and widow marriage are generally allowed, the widow being disposed of by her parents. The ceremony at the marriage of a widow consists in putting vermilion on the parting of her hair and bangles on her wrists. Divorce is allowed on pain of a fine of Rs. 50 if the divorce is sought by the husband, and of Rs. 25 if the wife asks for it. In some localities divorce and also polygamy are said to be forbidden, and in such cases a woman who commits adultery is finally expelled from the caste, and a funeral feast is given to symbolise her death.

The family god of the Agharias is Dulha Deo, who exists in every household. On the Haraiti day or the commencement of the agricultural year they worship the implements

4. Religious and social customs.



of cultivation, and at Dasahra the sword if they have one. They have a great reverence for cows and feed them sumptuously at festivals. Every Agharia has a *guru* or spiritual guide who whispers the *mantra* or sacred verse into his ear and is occasionally consulted. The dead are usually burnt, but children and persons dying of cholera or smallpox are buried, males being placed on the pyre or in the grave on their faces and females on their backs, with the feet pointing to the south. On the third day the ashes are thrown into a river and the bones of each part of the body are collected and placed under the pīpal tree, while a pot is slung over them, through which water trickles continually for a week, and a lighted lamp, cooked food, a leaf-cup and a tooth-stick are placed beside them daily for the use of the deceased during the same period. Mourning ends on the tenth day, and the usual purification ceremonies are then performed. Children are mourned for a shorter period. Well-to-do members of the caste feed a Brāhman daily for a year after a death, believing that food so given passes to the spirit of the deceased. On the anniversary of the death the caste-fellows are feasted, and after that the deceased becomes a *purkha* or ancestor and participates in devotions paid at the *shrādh* ceremony. When the head of a joint family dies, his successor is given a turban and betel-leaves, and his forehead is marked by the priest and other relations with sandalwood. After a birth the mother is impure for twenty-one days. A feast is given on the twelfth day, and sometimes the child is named then, but often children are not named until they are six years old. The names of men usually end in *Rām*, *Nāth* or *Singh*, and those of women in *Kunwar*. Women do not name their husbands, their elderly relations, nor the sons of their husband's eldest brother. A man does not name his wife, as he thinks that to do so would tend to shorten his life in accordance with the Sanskrit saying, 'He who is desirous of long life should not name himself, his *guru*, a miser, his eldest son, or his wife.' The Agharias do not admit outsiders into the caste. They will not take cooked food from any caste, and water only from a Gaur or Rāwat. They refuse to take water from an Uriya Brāhman, probably in retaliation for the refusal of Uriya Brāhmans to accept



water from an Agharia, though taking it from a Kolta. Both the Uriya Brāhmans and Agharias are of somewhat doubtful origin, and both are therefore probably the more concerned to maintain the social position to which they lay claim. But Kewats, Rāwats, Telis and other castes eat cooked food from Agharias, and the caste therefore is admitted to a fairly high rank in the Uriya country. The Agharias do not drink liquor or eat any food which a Rājput would refuse.

As cultivators they are considered to be proficient. In the census of 1901 nearly a quarter of the whole caste were shown as mālguzārs or village proprietors and lessees. They wear a coarse cloth of homespun yarn which they get woven for them by Gāndas; probably in consequence of this the Agharias do not consider the touch of the Gānda to pollute them, as other castes do. They will not grow turmeric, onions, garlic, *san*-hemp or tomatoes, nor will they rear tasar silk-cocoons. Colonel Dalton says that their women do no outdoor work, and this is true in the Central Provinces as regards the better classes, but poor women work in the fields.

**Aghori, Aghorpanthi.**<sup>1</sup>—The most disreputable class of Saiva mendicants who feed on human corpses and excrement, and in past times practised cannibalism. The sect is apparently an ancient one, a supposed reference to it being contained in the Sanskrit drama *Mālati Mādhava*, the hero of which rescues his mistress from being offered as a sacrifice by one named Aghori Ghanta.<sup>2</sup> According to Lassen, quoted by Sir H. Risley, the Aghoris of the present day are closely connected with the Kapālika sect of the Middle Ages, who wore crowns and necklaces of skulls and offered human sacrifices to Chāmunda, a form of Devi. The Aghoris now represent their filthy habits as merely giving practical expression to the abstract doctrine that the whole universe is full of Brahma, and consequently that one thing is as pure as another. By eating the most horrible food they utterly subdue their natural appetites, and hence acquire great power

<sup>1</sup> This article is mainly based on a paper on *Aghoris and Aghorpanthis*, by Mr. H. W. Barrow, in the *Journal Anthr. Soc. Bombay*, iii. p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> Bhattachārya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 392.

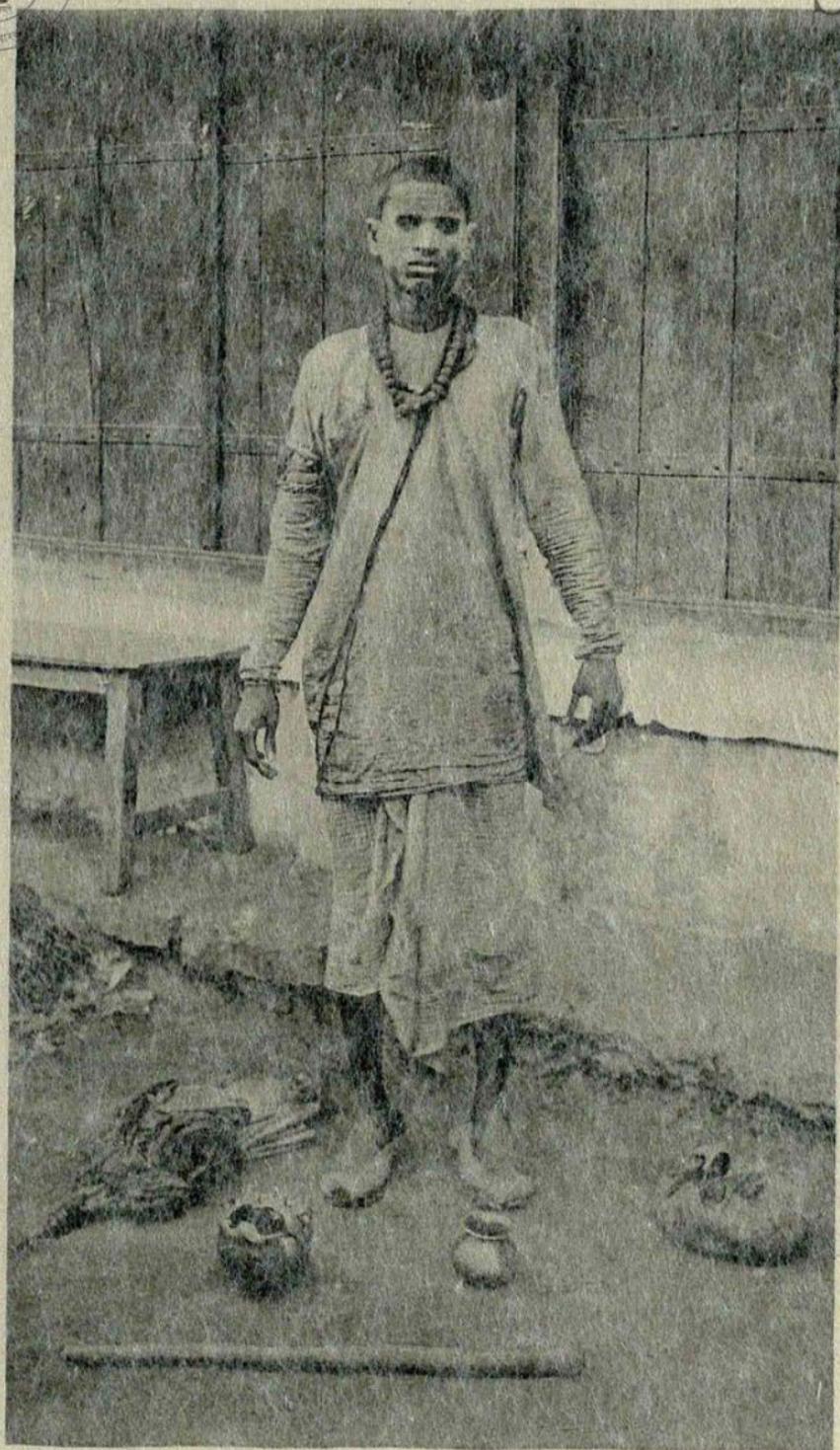
5. Occupation.

1. General accounts of the caste.



over themselves and over the forces of nature. It is believed that an Aghori can at will assume the shapes of a bird, an animal or a fish, and that he can bring back to life a corpse of which he has eaten a part. The principal resort of the Aghoris appears to be at Benāres and at Girnar near Mount Abu, and they wander about the country as solitary mendicants. A few reside in Saugor, and they are occasionally met with in other places. They are much feared and disliked by the people owing to their practice of extorting alms by the threat to carry out their horrible practices before the eyes of their victims, and by throwing filth into their houses. Similarly they gash and cut their limbs so that the crime of blood may rest on those who refuse to give. "For the most part," Mr. Barrow states,<sup>1</sup> "the Aghorpanthis lead a wandering life, are without homes, and prefer to dwell in holes, clefts of rocks and burning-*ghāts*. They do not cook, but eat the fragments given them in charity as received, which they put as far as may be into the cavity of the skull used as a begging-bowl. The bodies of *chelas* (disciples) who die in Benāres are thrown into the Ganges, but the dead who die well off are placed in coffins. As a rule, Aghoris do not care what becomes of their bodies, but when buried they are placed in the grave sitting cross-legged. The Aghori *gurus* keep dogs, which may be of any colour, and are said to be maintained for purposes of protection. The dogs are not all pariahs of the streets, although some *gurus* are followed by three or four when on pilgrimage. Occasionally the dogs seem to be regarded with real affection by their strange masters. The Aghori is believed to hold converse with all the evil spirits frequenting the burning-*ghāts*, and funeral parties must be very badly off who refuse to pay him something. In former days he claimed five pieces of wood at each funeral in Benāres; but the Doms interfere with his perquisites, and in some cases only let him carry off the remains of the unburned wood from each pyre. When angered and excited, Aghoris invoke Kāli and threaten to spread devastation around them. Even among the educated classes, who should know better, they are dreaded, and as an instance of the terror which they create among the ignorant, it may be

<sup>1</sup> *Aghoris and Aghorpanthis*, pp. 224, 226.



*Bemrose, Colla., Derby.*

AGHORI MENDICANT.



mentioned that in the Lucknow District it is believed that if alms are refused them the Aghoris will cause those who refuse to be attacked with fever.

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

In former times it is believed that the Aghoris used to kidnap strangers, sacrifice them to the goddess and eat the bodies, and Mr. Barrow relates the following incident of the murder of a boy:<sup>1</sup> “Another horrible case, unconnected with magic and apparently arising from mere blood-thirst, occurred at Neirād in June 1878. An Aghori mendicant of Dwārka staying at the temple of Sitārām Lāldās seized a boy of twelve, named Shankar Rāmdās, who was playing with two other boys, threw him down on the *oatla* of the temple, ripped open his abdomen, tore out part of his entrails, and, according to the poor little victim’s dying declaration, began to eat them. The other boys having raised an alarm, the monster was seized. When interrogated by the magistrate as to whether he had committed the crime in order to perform Aghorbīdya, the prisoner said that as the boy was Bhakshan he had eaten his flesh. He added that if he had not been interrupted he would have eaten all the entrails. He was convicted, but only sentenced to transportation for life. The High Court, however, altered the sentence and ordered the prisoner to be hanged.”

2. Instances of cannibalism.

The following instance, quoted by Mr. Barrow from Rewah, shows how an Aghori was hoist with his own petard: “Some years ago, when Mahārāja Bishnāth Singh was Chief of Rewah, a man of the Aghori caste went to Rewah and sat *dharna* on the steps of the palace; having made ineffectual demands for alms, he requested to be supplied with human flesh, and for five days abstained from food. The Mahārāja was much troubled, and at last, in order to get rid of his unwelcome visitor, sent for Ghansīām Dās,

<sup>1</sup> Page 208.



another Aghori, a Fakīr, who had for some years lived in Rewah. Ghansiām Dās went up to the other Aghori and asked him if it was true that he had asked to be supplied with human flesh. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, Ghansiām Dās said: 'Very well, I too am extremely partial to this form of food; here is my hand, eat it and I will eat you'; and at the same time he seized hold of the other's hand and began to gnaw at it. The Aghori on this became much alarmed and begged to be excused. He shortly afterwards left Rewah and was not heard of again, while Ghansiām Dās was rewarded for his services."

The following recent instance of an Aghori devouring human corpses is reported from the Punjab:<sup>1</sup> "The loathsome story of a human ghoul from Patiāla shows that the influence of the Aghorpanthi has not yet completely died out in this country. It is said that for some time past human graves have been found robbed of their contents, and the mystery could not be solved until the other day, when the police succeeded in arresting a man in the act of desecrating a child's grave, some forty miles distant from the capital (Patiāla). The ghoul not only did not conceal the undevoured portion of the corpse he had with him, but told his captors the whole story of his gruesome career. He is a low-caste Hindu named Rām Nāth, and is, according to a gentleman who saw him, 'a singularly mild and respectful-looking man, instead of a red-eyed and ravenous savage,' as he had expected to find him from the accounts of his disgusting propensities. He became an orphan at five and fell into the hands of two Sādhus of his own caste, who were evidently Aghorpanthis. They taught him to eat human flesh, which formed the staple of their food. The meat was procured from the graves in the villages they passed through. When Rām Nāth was thoroughly educated in this rank the Sādhus deserted him. Since then he had been living on human carrion only, roaming about the country like a hungry vulture. He cannot eat cooked food, and therefore gets two seers of raw meat from the State every day. It is also reported that the Mahārāja has

<sup>1</sup> *The Tribune* (Lahore), November 29, 1898, quoted in Oman's *Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India*, pp. 164, 165.



now prohibited his being given anything but cooked food with a view to reforming him."

Sir J. B. Fuller relates the following incident of the employment of an Aghori as a servant:<sup>1</sup> "There are actually ten thousand persons who at census time classed themselves as Aghoris. All of them do not practise cannibalism and some of them attempt to rise in the world. One of them secured service as a cook with a British officer of my acquaintance. My friend was in camp in the jungle with his wife and children, when his other servants came to him in a body and refused to remain in service unless the cook was dismissed, since they had discovered, they declared, that during the night-time he visited cemeteries and dug up the bodies of freshly buried children. The cook was absent, but they pointed to a box of his that emitted a sickening smell. The man was incontinently expelled, but for long afterwards the family were haunted by reminiscences of the curries they had eaten."

<sup>1</sup> *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment*, p. 44.



## AHĪR

## LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

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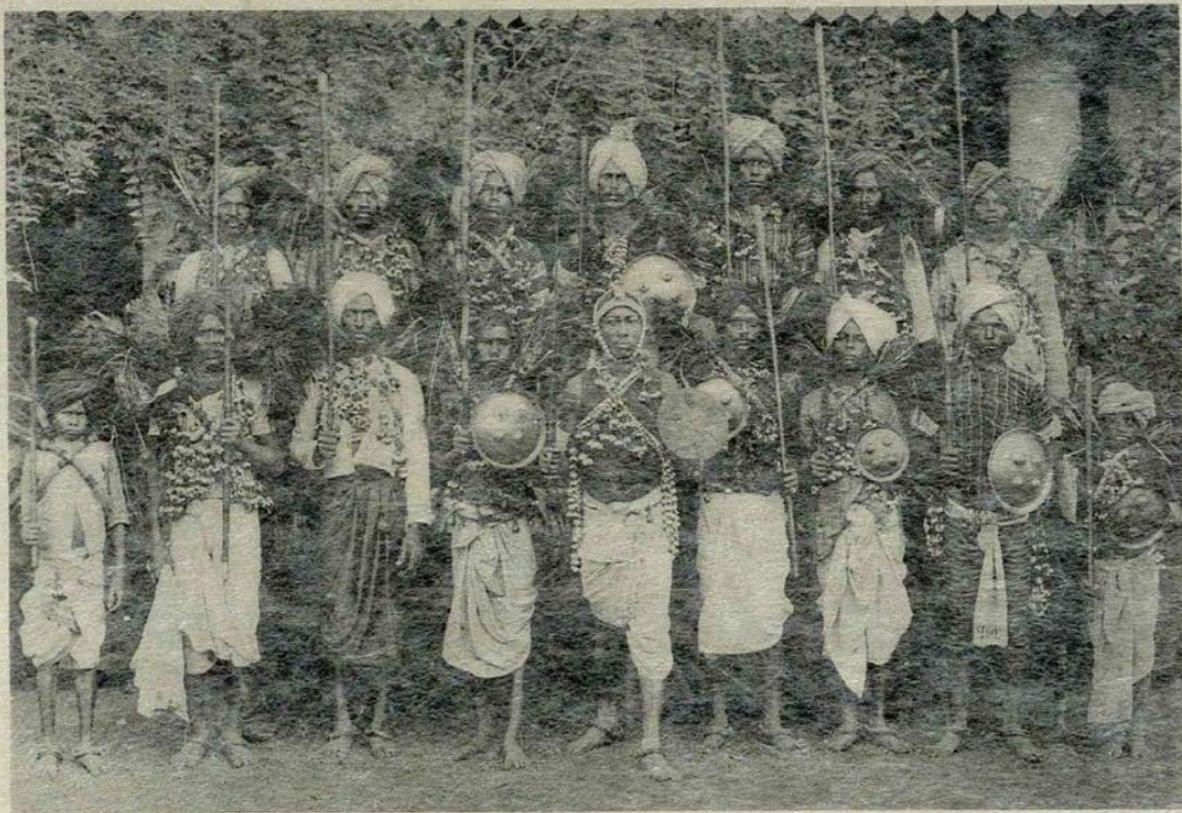
1. General notice.

Ahīr,<sup>1</sup> Gaoli, Guāla, Golkar, Gaolān, Rāwat, Gahra, Mahākul.—The caste of cowherds, milkmen and cattle-breeders. In 1911 the Ahīrs numbered nearly 750,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār, being the sixth caste in point of numbers. This figure, however, excludes 150,000 Gowāris or graziers of the Marātha Districts, and if these were added the Ahīrs would outnumber the Telis and rank fifth. The name Ahīr is derived from Abhīra, a tribe mentioned several times in inscriptions and the Hindu sacred books. Goāla, a cowherd, from Gopāla,<sup>2</sup> a protector of cows, is the Bengali name for the caste, and Gaoli, with the same signification, is now used in the Central Provinces to signify a dairyman as opposed to a grazier. The Gaolāns appear to be an inferior class of Gaolis in Berār. The Golkars of Chānda may be derived from the Telugu Golars or graziers, with a probable

<sup>1</sup> The information about birth customs in this article is from a paper by Mr. Kālika Prasād, Tahsildār, Rāj-

Nandgaon State.

<sup>2</sup> *Go, gau* or *gai*, an ox or cow, and *pāl* or *pālak*, guardian.



*Beunrose, Collo., Derby.*

AHĪRS DECORATED WITH CŌWRIES FOR THE STICK DANCE AT DIWĀLI.



admixture of Gond blood. They are described as wild-looking people scattered about in the most thickly forested tracts of the District, where they graze and tend cattle. Rāwat, a corruption of Rājputra or a princeling, is the name borne by the Ahir caste in Chhattisgarh; while Gahra is their designation in the Uriya country. The Mahākul Ahīrs are a small group found in the Jashpur State, and said to belong to the Nāndvansi division. The name means 'Great family.'

The Abhīras appear to have been one of the immigrant tribes from Central Asia who entered India shortly before or about the commencement of the Christian era. In the Purānas and Mahābhārata they are spoken of as Dasyu or robbers, and Mlechchhas or foreigners, in the story which says that Arjuna, after he had burned the dead bodies of Krishna and Balārām at Dwārka, was proceeding with the widows of the Yādava princes to Mathura through the Punjab when he was waylaid by the Abhīras and deprived of his treasures and beautiful women.<sup>1</sup> An inscription of the Sāka era 102, or A.D. 180, speaks of a grant made by the Senapati or commander-in-chief of the state, who is called an Abhīra, the locality being Sunda in Kāthiāwār. Another inscription found in Nāsik and assigned by Mr. Enthoven to the fourth century speaks of an Abhīra king, and the Purānas say that after the Andhrabhṛityas the Deccan was held by the Abhīras, the west coast tract from the Tāpti to Deogarh being called by their name.<sup>2</sup> In the time of Samudragupta in the middle of the fourth century the Abhīras were settled in Eastern Rājputana and Mālwa.<sup>3</sup> When the Kāthis arrived in Gujarāt in the eighth century, they found the greater part of the country in the possession of the Ahīrs.<sup>4</sup> In the Mirzāpur District of the United Provinces a tract known as Ahraura is considered to be named after the tribe; and near Jhānsi another piece of country is called Ahīrwār.<sup>5</sup> Elliot states that Ahīrs were also Rājās of Nepāl about the commencement of our era.<sup>6</sup> In Khāndesh, Mr. Enthoven states,

2. Former dominance of the Abhīras.

<sup>1</sup> *Ind. Ant.* (Jan. 1911), 'Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population,' by Mr. D. R. Bhandarkar.

<sup>2</sup> Elliot, *Supplemental Glossary*, s.v. Ahīr.

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

<sup>4</sup> Elliot, *ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Bombay Monograph on Ahir*.

<sup>6</sup> Elliot, *ibidem*.



the settlements of the Ahirs were important. In many castes there is a separate division of Ahirs, such as the Ahir Sunārs, Sutārs, Lohārs, Shimpīs, Salīs, Guraos and Kolīs. The fort of Asīrgarh in Nīmār bordering on Khāndesh is supposed to have been founded by one Asa Ahīr, who lived in the beginning of the fifteenth century. It is said that his ancestors had held land here for seven hundred years, and he had 10,000 cattle, 20,000 sheep and 1000 mares, with 2000 followers; but was still known to the people, to whom his benevolence had endeared him, by the simple name of Asa. This derivation of Asīrgarh is clearly erroneous, as it was known as Asīr or Asirgarh, and held by the Tāk and Chauhān Rājput̄s from the eleventh century. But the story need not on that account, Mr. Grant says,<sup>1</sup> be set down as wholly a fable. Firishṭa, who records it, has usually a good credit, and more probably the real existence of a line of Ahīr chieftains in the Tapti valley suggested a convenient ethnology for the fortress. Other traditions of the past domination of the pastoral tribes remain in the Central Provinces. Deogarh on the Chhindwāra plateau was, according to the legend, the last seat of Gaoli power prior to its subversion by the Gonds in the sixteenth century. Jātba, the founder of the Deogarh Gond dynasty, is said to have entered the service of the Gaoli rulers, Mansur and Gansur, and subsequently with the aid of the goddess Devi to have slain them and usurped their kingdom. But a Gaoli chief still retained possession of the fort of Narnāla for a few years longer, when he also was slain by the Muhammadans. Similarly the fort of Gāwilgarh on the southern crest of the Satpūras is said to be named after a Gaoli chief who founded it. The Saugor traditions bring down the Gaoli supremacy to a much later date, as the tracts of Etāwa and Khurai are held to have been governed by their chieftains till the close of the seventeenth century.

3. Ahir  
dialects.

Certain dialects called after the Abhīras or Ahirs still remain. One, known as Ahīrwatī, is spoken in the Rohtak and Gurgaon Districts of the Punjab and round Delhi. This is akin to Mewātī, one of the forms of Rājasthānī or the

<sup>1</sup> *Central Provinces Gazetteer* (1871), Introduction.



language of Rājputāna. The Mālwi dialect of Rājasthāni is also known as Ahīri; and that curious form of Gujarāti, which is half a Bhīl dialect, and is generally known as Khāndeshi, also bears the name of Ahīrani.<sup>1</sup> The above linguistic facts seem to prove only that the Abhīras, or their occupational successors, the Ahīrs, were strongly settled in the Delhi country of the Punjab, Mālwa and Khāndesh. They do not seem to throw much light on the origin of the Abhīras or Ahīrs, and necessarily refer only to a small section of the existing Ahīr caste, the great bulk of whom speak the Aryan language current where they dwell. Another authority states, however, that the Ahīrs of Gujarāt still retain a dialect of their own, and concludes that this and the other Ahīr dialects are the remains of the distinct Abhīra language.

It cannot necessarily be assumed that all the above traditions relate to the Abhīra tribe proper, of which the modern Ahīr caste are scarcely more than the nominal representatives. Nevertheless, it may fairly be concluded from them that the Abhīras were widely spread over India and dominated considerable tracts of country. They are held to have entered India about the same time as the Sakas, who settled in Gujarāt, among other places, and, as seen above, the earliest records of the Abhīras show them in Nāsik and Kāthiāwār, and afterwards widely spread in Khāndesh, that is, in the close neighbourhood of the Sakas. It has been suggested in the article on Rājput that the Yādava and other lunar clans of Rājput may be the representatives of the Sakas and other nomad tribes who invaded India shortly before and after the Christian era. The god Krishna is held to have been the leader of the Yādavas, and to have founded with them the sacred city of Dwārka in Gujarāt. The modern Ahīrs have a subdivision called Jāduvāsi or Yāduvāsi, that is, of the race of the Yādavas, and they hold that Krishna was of the Ahīr tribe. Since the Abhīras were also settled in Gujarāt it is possible that they may have been connected with the Yādavas, and that this may be the foundation for their claim that Krishna was of their tribe. The Dyashraya-Kavya of Hemachandra speaks of a Chordasama prince reigning near Junagarh as

4. The  
Yādavas  
and  
Krishna.

<sup>1</sup> *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. ix. part ii. p. 50.



an Abhīra and a Yādava. But this is no doubt very conjectural, and the simple fact that Krishna was a herdsman would be a sufficient reason for the Ahīrs to claim connection with him. It is pointed out that the names of Abhīra chieftains given in the early inscriptions are derived from the god Siva, and this would not have been the case if they had at that epoch derived their origin from Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu. "If the Abhīras had really been the descendants of the cowherds (Gopas) whose hero was Krishna, the name of the rival god Siva would never have formed components of the names of the Abhīras, whom we find mentioned in inscriptions. Hence the conclusion may safely be drawn that the Abhīras were by no means connected with Krishna and his cowherds even as late as about A.D. 300, to which date the first of the two inscriptions mentioned above is to be assigned. Precisely the same conclusion is pointed to by the contents of the Harivansha and Bhagwat Purāna. The upbringing of Krishna among the cowherds and his flirtations with the milkmaids are again and again mentioned in these works, but the word Abhīra does not occur even once in this connection. The only words we find used are Gopa, Gopi and Vraja. This is indeed remarkable. For the descriptions of the removal of Krishna as an infant to Nanda, the cowherd's hut, of his childhood passed in playing with the cowherd boys, and of his youth spent in amorous sports with the milkmaids are set forth at great length, but the word Abhīra is not once met with. From this only one conclusion is possible, that is, that the Abhīras did not originally represent the Gopas of Krishna. The word Abhīra occurs for the first time in connection with the Krishna legend about A.D. 550, from which it follows that the Abhīras came to be identified with the Gopas shortly before that date."<sup>1</sup>

This argument is interesting as showing that Abhīra was not originally an occupational term for a herdsman, nor a caste name, but belonged to an immigrant tribe. Owing apparently to the fact that the Abhīras, like the Gūjars, devoted themselves to a pastoral mode of life in India, whereas the previous Aryan immigrants had settled down to cultivation,

<sup>1</sup> *Bombay Ethnographic Survey.*



they gave their name to the great occupational caste of herdsmen which was subsequently developed, and of which they may originally have constituted the nucleus. The Gūjars, who came to India at a later period, form a parallel case; although the Gūjar caste, which is derived from them, is far less important than the Ahīr, the Gūjars have also been the parents of several Rājput clans. The reason why the early Mathura legends of Krishna make no mention of the Ahīrs may be that the deity Krishna is probably compounded of at least two if not more distinct personalities. One is the hero chief of the Yādavas, who fought in the battle of the Pandavas and Kauravas, migrated to Gujarāt and was killed there. As he was chief of the Yādavas this Krishna must stand for the actual or mythical personality of some leader of the immigrant nomad tribes. The other Krishna, the boy cowherd, who grazed cattle and sported with the milkmaids of Brindāban, may very probably be some hero of the indigenous non-Aryan tribes, who, then as now, lived in the forests and were shepherds and herdsmen. His lowly birth from a labouring cowherd, and the fact that his name means black and he is represented in sculpture as being of a dark colour, lend support to this view. The cult of Krishna, Mr. Crooke points out, was comparatively late, and probably connected with the development of the worship of the cow after the decay of Buddhism. This latter Krishna, who is worshipped with his mother as a child-god, was especially attractive to women, both actual and prospective mothers. It is quite probable therefore that as his worship became very popular in Hindustān in connection with that of the cow, he was given a more illustrious origin by identification with the Yādava hero, whose first home was apparently in Gujarāt. In this connection it may also be noted that the episodes connected with Krishna in the Mahābhārata have been considered late interpolations.

But though the Ahīr caste takes its name and is perhaps partly descended from the Abhīra tribe, there is no doubt that it is now and has been for centuries a purely occupational caste, largely recruited from the indigenous tribes. Thus in Bengal Colonel Dalton remarks that the features of the Mathurāvāsī Gōālas are high, sharp and delicate, and

5. The modern Ahirs an occupational caste.



they are of light-brown complexion. Those of the Magadha subcaste, on the other hand, are undefined and coarse. They are dark-complexioned, and have large hands and feet. "Seeing the latter standing in a group with some Singhbhūm Kols, there is no distinguishing one from the other. There has doubtless been much mixture of blood."<sup>1</sup> Similarly in the Central Provinces the Ahīrs are largely recruited from the Gonds and other tribes. In Chānda the Gowāris are admittedly descended from the unions of Gonds and Ahīrs, and one of their subcastes, the Gond-Gowāris, are often classed as Gonds. Again, the Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandia are descended from the unions of Ahīrs either with the Gonds or Kawars, and many of them are probably pure Gonds. They have Gond sept-names and eat pork. Members of one of their subdivisions, the Gond-Kaonra, will take water from Gonds, and rank below the other Kaonras, from whom they will accept food and water. As cattle have to go into the thick jungles to graze in the hot weather, the graziers attending them become intimate with the forest tribes who live there, and these latter are also often employed to graze the cattle, and are perhaps after a time admitted to the Ahīr caste. Many Ahīrs in Mandia are scarcely considered to be Hindus, living as they do in Gond villages in sole company with the Gonds.

6. Sub-castes.

The principal subcastes of the Ahīrs in northern India are the Jāduvansi, Nāndvansi and Gowālvansi. The Jāduvansi claimed to be descended from the Yādavas, who now form the Yādu and Jādon-Bhatti clans of Rājput. The probability of a historical connection between the Abhīras and Yādavas has already been noticed. The Nāndvansi consider their first ancestor to have been Nānd, the cowherd, the foster-father of Krishna; while the name of the Gowālvansi is simply Goāla or Gaulī, a milkman, a common synonym for the caste. The Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandia and the Kamarias of Jubbulpore are considered to belong to the Nāndvansi group. Other subcastes in the northern Districts are the Jijhotia, who, like the Jijhotia Brāhmins, take their name from Jajhoti, the classical term for Bundelkhand; the Bharotia; and the Narwaria from Narwar. The Rāwats

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Goāla.



of Chhattisgarh are divided into the Jhadia, Kosaria and Kanaujia groups. Of these the Jhadia or 'jungly,' and Kosaria from Kosala, the ancient name of the Chhattisgarh country, are the oldest settlers, while the Kanaujia are largely employed as personal servants in Chhattisgarh, and all castes will take water from their hands. The superior class of them, however, refuse to clean household cooking vessels, and are hence known as Thethwār, or exact or pure, as distinguished from the other Rāwats, who will perform this somewhat derogatory work.

The Dauwa or wet-nurse Ahirs are descended from the illegitimate offspring of Bundela Rājput fathers by Ahir mothers who were employed in this capacity in their families. An Ahir woman kept by a Bundela was known as Pardwārin, or one coming from another house. This is not considered a disgraceful origin; though the Dauwa Ahirs are not recognised by the Ahirs proper, they form a separate section of the caste, and Brāhmans will take water from them. The children of such mothers stood in the relation of foster-brothers to the Rājputs, whom their mothers had nursed. The giving of milk, in accordance with the common primitive belief in the virtue attaching to an action in itself, was held to constitute a relation of quasi-maternity between the nurse and infant, and hence of fraternity between her own children and her foster-children. The former were called Dhai-bhais or foster-brothers by the Rājputs; they were often given permanent grants of land and employed on confidential missions, as for the arrangement of marriages. The minister of a Rāja of Karauli was his Dauwa or foster-father, the husband of his nurse. Similarly, Colonel Tod says that the Dhai-bhai or foster-brother of the Rāja of Boondi, commandant of the fortress of Tanagarh, was, like all his class, devotion personified.<sup>1</sup> A parallel instance of the tie of foster-kinship occurs in the case of the foster-brothers of Conachar or Hector in *The Fair Maid of Perth*. Thus the position of foster-brother of a Rājput was an honourable one, even though the child might be illegitimate. Ahir women were often employed as wet-nurses, because domestic service was a profession in which they commonly engaged. Owing

7. The  
Dauwa or  
wet-nurse  
Ahirs.  
Fosterage.

<sup>1</sup> Rājasthān, ii. p. 639.



to the comparatively humble origin of a large proportion of them they did not object to menial service, while the purity of their caste made it possible to use them for the supply of water and food. In Bengal the Uriya Ahīrs were a common class of servants in European houses.

The Gaolis or milkmen appear to form a distinct branch of the caste with subcastes of their own. Among them are the Nāndvans, common to the Ahīrs, the Mālwi from Mālwa and the Rāghuvansi, called after the Rājput clan of that name. The Rānyas take their designation from *rān*, forest, like the Jhādia Rāwats.

8. Exo-  
gamy.

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

9. Mar-  
riage  
customs.

As a rule, girls may be married before or after puberty, but the Golkars of Chānda insist on infant marriage, and fine the parents if an unmarried girl becomes adolescent. On the other hand, the Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla make a practice of not getting a girl married till the signs of puberty have appeared. It is said that in Mandla if an unmarried girl becomes pregnant by a man of the caste the *pañchāyat* give her to him and fine him Rs. 20 or 30, which they appropriate themselves, giving nothing to the father. If an Ahīr girl is seduced by an outsider, she is made over to him, and a fine of Rs. 40 or 50 is exacted from him if possible. This is paid to the girl's father, who has to spend it on a penalty feast to the caste. Generally, sexual offences within the community are leniently regarded. The wedding ceremony is of the type prevalent in the locality. The proposal comes from the boy's family, and a price is usually given for the bride. The Kaonra Ahīrs of Mandla and the Jharia and Kosaria Rāwats of Chhattisgarh employ a Brāhman only to write the *lagun* or paper fixing the date of the wedding, and the ceremony is conducted by the *sawāsins* or relatives of



the parties. In Chhattisgarh the bridegroom is dressed as a girl to be taken to the wedding. In Betūl the weddings of most Gaolis are held in Māgh (January), and that of the Rānya subcaste in the bright fortnight of Kārtik (October). At the ceremony the bride is made to stand on a small stone roller; the bridegroom then takes hold of the roller facing the bride and goes round in a circle seven times, turning the roller with him. Widow remarriage is permitted, and a widow is often expected to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband. If a bachelor wishes to marry a widow he first goes through the ceremony with a dagger or an earthen vessel. Divorce is freely permitted. In Hoshangābād a strip is torn off the clothes worn by husband and wife as a sign of their divorce. This is presumably in contrast to the knotting of the clothes of the couple together at a wedding.

Among the Rāwats of Chhattisgarh, when a child is shortly to be born the midwife dips her hand in oil and presses it on the wall, and it is supposed that she can tell by the way in which the oil trickles down whether the child will be a boy or a girl. If a woman is weak and ill during her pregnancy it is thought that a boy will be born, but if she is strong and healthy, a girl. A woman in advanced pregnancy is given whatever she desires to eat, and on one occasion especially delicate kinds of food are served to her, this rite being known as Sidhori. The explanation of the custom is that if the mother does not get the food she desires during pregnancy the child will long for it all through life. If delivery is delayed, a line of men and boys is sometimes made from the door of the house to a well, and a vessel is then passed from hand to hand from the house, filled with water, and back again. Thus the water, having acquired the quality of speed during its rapid transit, will communicate this to the woman and cause her quick delivery. Or they take some of the clay left unmoulded on the potter's wheel and give it her to drink in water; the explanation of this is exactly similar, the earth having acquired the quality of swiftness by the rapid transit on the wheel. If three boys or three girls have been born to a woman, they think that the fourth should be of the same sex, in order to make up

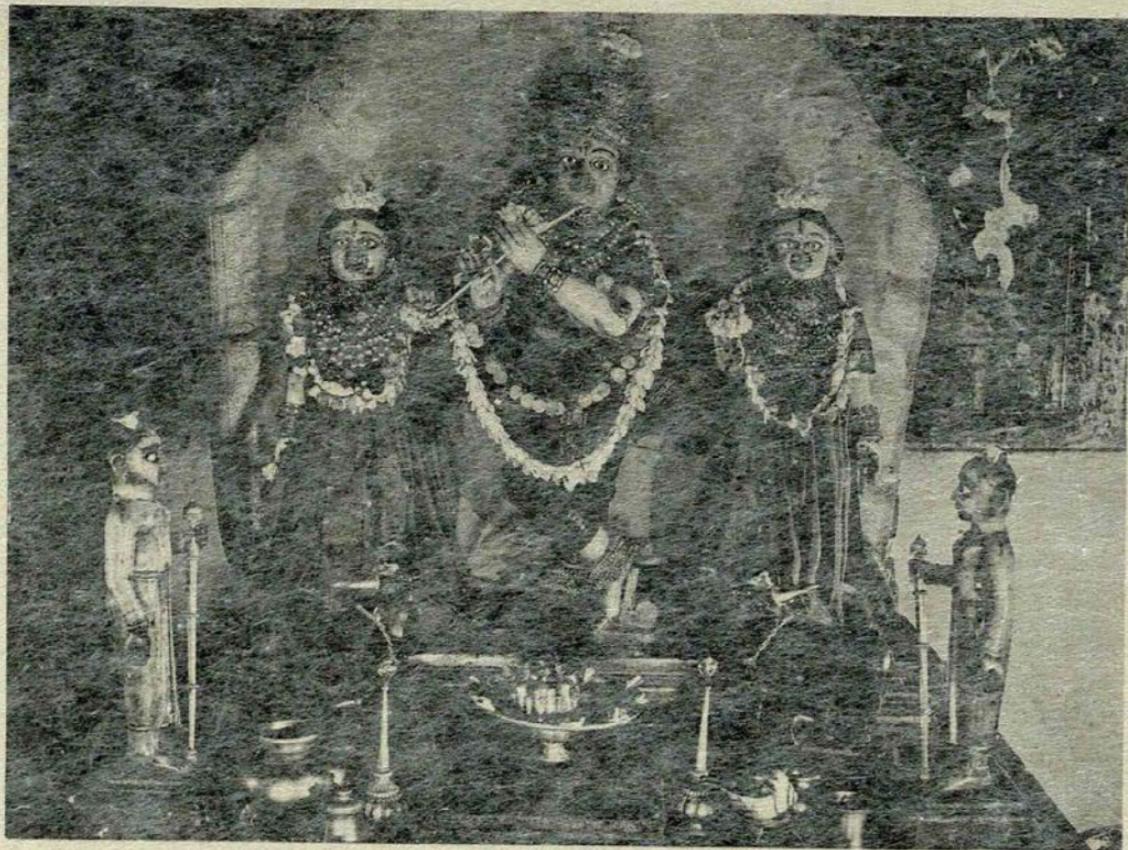
10. Birth customs.



two pairs. A boy or girl born after three of the opposite sex is called Titra or Titri, and is considered very unlucky. To avert this misfortune they cover the child with a basket, kindle a fire of grass all round it, and smash a brass pot on the floor. Then they say that the baby is the fifth and not the fourth child, and the evil is thus removed. When one woman gives birth to a male and another to a female child in the same quarter of a village on the same day and they are attended by the same midwife, it is thought that the boy child will fall ill from the contagion of the girl child communicated through the midwife. To avoid this, on the following Sunday the child's maternal uncle makes a banghy, which is carried across the shoulders like a large pair of scales, and weighs the child in it against cowdung. He then takes the banghy and deposits it at cross-roads outside the village. The father cannot see either the child or its mother till after the Chathi or sixth-day ceremony of purification, when the mother is bathed and dressed in clean clothes, the males of the family are shaved, all their clothes are washed, and the house is whitewashed; the child is also named on this day. The mother cannot go out of doors until after the Bārhi or twelfth-day ceremony. If a child is born at an unlucky astrological period its ears are pierced in the fifth month after birth as a means of protection.

The dead are either buried or burnt. When a man is dying they put basil leaves and boiled rice and milk in his mouth, and a little piece of gold, or if they have not got gold they put a rupee in his mouth and take it out again. For ten days after a death, food in a leaf-cup and a lamp are set out in the house-yard every evening, and every morning water and a tooth-stick. On the tenth day they are taken away and consigned to a river. In Chhattisgarh on the third day after death the soul is brought back. The women put a lamp on a red earthen pot and go to a tank or stream at night. The fish are attracted towards the light, and one of them is caught and put in the pot, which is then filled with water. It is brought home and set beside a small heap of flour, and the elders sit round it. The son of the deceased or other near relative anoints himself with turmeric and picks up a stone. This is washed with the water from

11. Funeral  
rites.  
Bringing  
back the  
soul.



*Bemrose, Collo., Derby.*

IMAGE OF KRISHNA AS MURLIDHAR OR THE FLUTE-PLAYER, WITH ATTENDANT DEITIES.



the pot, and placed on the floor, and a sacrifice of a cock or hen is made to it according as the deceased was a man or a woman. The stone is then enshrined in the house as a family god, and the sacrifice of a fowl is repeated annually. It is supposed apparently that the dead man's spirit is brought back to the house in the fish, and then transferred to the stone by washing this with the water.

The Ahīrs have a special relation to the Hindu religion, owing to their association with the sacred cow, which is itself revered as a goddess. When religion gets to the anthropomorphic stage the cowherd, who partakes of the cow's sanctity, may be deified as its representative. This was probably the case with Krishna, one of the most popular gods of Hinduism, who was a cowherd, and, as he is represented as being of a dark colour, may even have been held to be of the indigenous races. Though, according to the legend, he was really of royal birth, Krishna was brought up by Nānd, a herdsman of Gokul, and Jasoda or Dasoda his wife, and in the popular belief these are his parents, as they probably were in the original story. The substitution of Krishna, born as a prince, for Jasoda's daughter, in order to protect him from destruction by the evil king Kānsa of Mathura, is perhaps a later gloss, devised when his herdsman parentage was considered too obscure for the divine hero. Krishna's childhood in Jasoda's house with his miraculous feats of strength and his amorous sports with Rādhā and the other milkmaids of Brindāwan, are among the most favourite Hindu legends. Govind and Gopāl, the protector or guardian of cows, are names of Krishna and the commonest names of Hindus, as are also his other epithets, Murlidhar and Bansidhar, the flute-player; for Krishna and Balārām, like Greek and Roman shepherds, were accustomed to divert themselves with song, to the accompaniment of the same instrument. The child Krishna is also very popular, and his birthday, the Janam-Ashtami on the 8th of dark Bhādon (August), is a great festival. On this day potsful of curds are sprinkled over the assembled worshippers. Krishna, however, is not the solitary instance of the divine cowherd, but has several companions, humble indeed compared to him, but perhaps owing their apotheosis to the same reasons. Bhīlat, a popular local godling of the

12. Religion. Krishna and other deified cowherds.



Nerbudda Valley, was the son of an Ahīr or Gaoli woman ; she was childless and prayed to Pārvati for a child, and the goddess caused her votary to have one by her own husband, the god Mahādeo. Bhīlat was stolen away from his home by Mahādeo in the disguise of a beggar, and grew up to be a great hero and made many conquests ; but finally he returned and lived with his herdsman parents, who were no doubt his real ones. He performed numerous miracles, and his devotees are still possessed by his spirit. Singāji is another godling who was a Gaoli by caste in Indore. He became a disciple of a holy Gokulastha Gosain or ascetic, and consequently a great observer of the Janam-Ashtami or Krishna's birthday.<sup>1</sup> On one occasion Singāji was late for prayers on this day, and the *guru* was very angry, and said to him, 'Don't show your face to me again until you are dead.' Singāji went home and told the other children he was going to die. Then he went and buried himself alive. The occurrence was noised abroad and came to the ears of the *guru*, who was much distressed, and proceeded to offer his condolences to Singāji's family. But on the way he saw Singāji, who had been miraculously raised from the dead on account of his virtuous act of obedience, grazing his buffaloes as before. After asking for milk, which Singāji drew from a male buffalo calf, the *guru* was able to inform the bereaved parents of their son's joyful reappearance and his miraculous powers ; of these Singāji gave further subsequent demonstration, and since his death, said to have occurred 350 years ago, is widely venerated. The Gaolis pray to him for the protection of their cattle from disease, and make thank-offerings of butter if these prayers are fulfilled. Other pilgrims to Singāji's shrine offer unripe mangoes and sugar, and an annual fair is held at it, when it is said that for seven days no cows, flies or ants are to be seen in the place. In the Betūl district there is a village godling called Dait, represented by a stone under a tree. He is the spirit of any Ahīr who in his lifetime was credited in the locality with having the powers of an exorcist. In Mandla and other Districts when any buffalo herdsman dies at a very advanced

<sup>1</sup> Gokul was the place where Krishna was brought up, and the Gokulastha Gosains are his special devotees.



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

Among the special deities of the Ahirs is Kharak Deo, who is always located at the *khirkha*, or place of assembly of the cattle, on going to and returning from pasture. He appears to be the spirit or god of the *khirkha*. He is represented by a platform with an image of a horse on it, and when cattle fall ill the owners offer flour and butter to him. These are taken by the Ahirs in charge, and it is thought that the cattle will get well. Matar Deo is the god of the pen or enclosure for cattle made in the jungle. Three days after the Diwāli festival the Rāwats sacrifice one or more goats to him, cutting off their heads. They throw the heads into the air, and the cattle, smelling the blood, run together and toss them with their horns as they do when they scent a tiger. The men then say that the animals are possessed by Matar Deo. Guraya Deo is a deity who lives in the cattle-stalls in the village and is worshipped once a year. A man holds an egg in his hand, and walks round the stall pouring liquid over the egg all the way, so as to make a line round it. The egg is then buried beneath the shrine of the god, the rite being probably meant to ensure his aid for the protection of the cattle from disease in their stalls. A favourite saint of the Ahirs is Haridās Bāba. He was a Jogi, and could separate his soul from his body at pleasure. On one occasion he had

13. Caste deities.



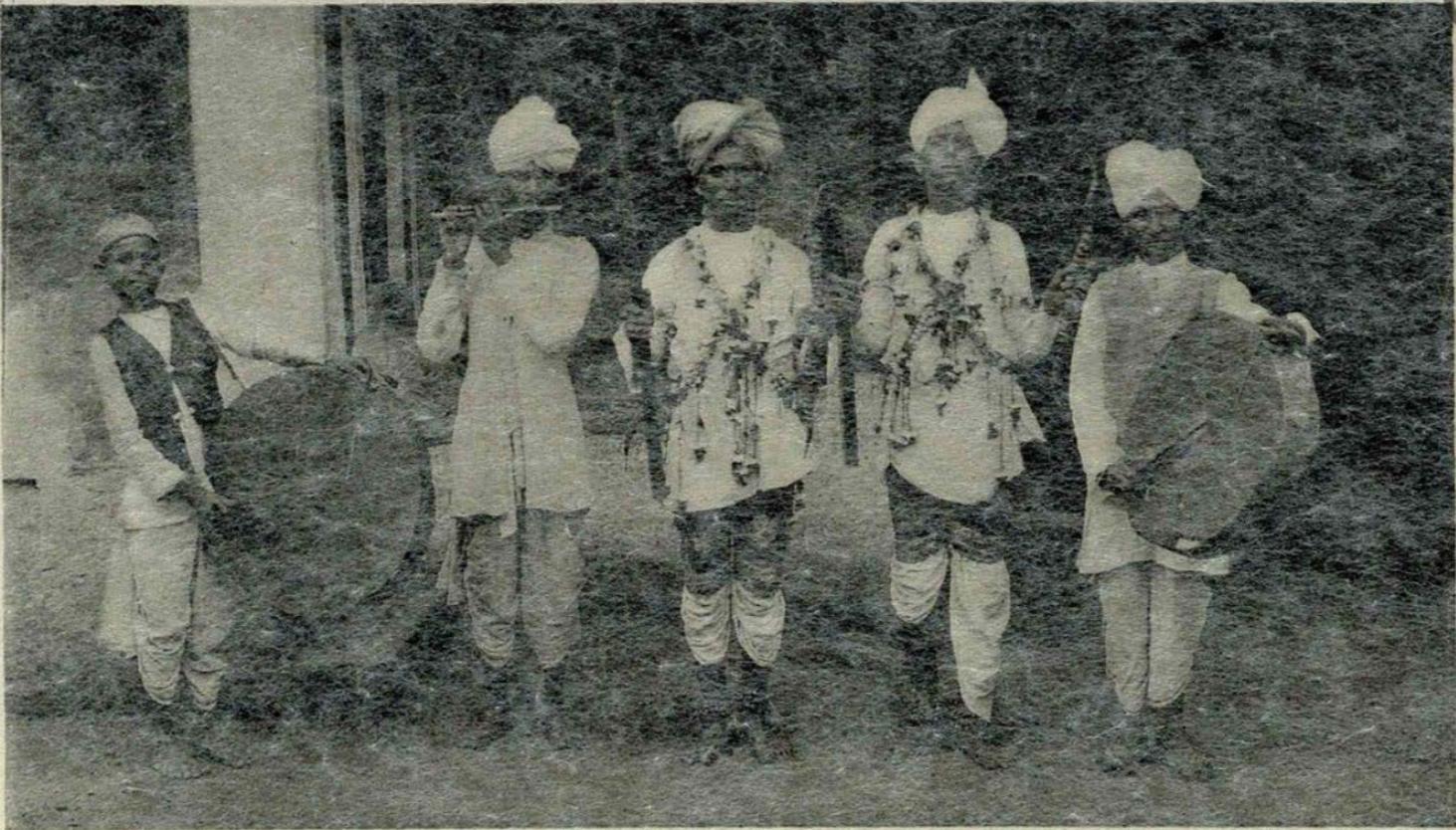
gone in spirit to Benāres, leaving his body in the house of one of his disciples, who was an Ahīr. When he did not return, and the people heard that a dead body was lying there, they came and insisted that it should be burnt. When he came back and found that his body was burnt, he entered into a man and spoke through him, telling the people what had happened. In atonement for their unfortunate mistake they promised to worship him.

14. Other deities.

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

15. The Diwāli festival.

[ The principal festival of the Ahīrs is the Diwāli, falling about the beginning of November, which is also the time when the autumn crops ripen. All classes observe this feast by illuminating their houses with many small saucer-lamps and letting off crackers and fireworks, and they generally gamble with money to bring them good luck during the coming year. The Ahīrs make a mound of earth, which is called Govardhan, that is the mountain in Mathura which Krishna held upside down on his finger for seven days and nights, so that all the people might gather under it and be protected from the devastating storms of rain sent by Indra. After dancing round the mound they drive their cattle over it and make them trample it to pieces. At this time a festival called Marhai is held, at which much liquor is drunk and all classes disport themselves. In Damoh on this day the Ahīrs go to the standing-place for village cattle, and after worshipping the god, frighten the cattle by waving leaves of the basil-plant at them, and then put on fantastic dresses, decorating themselves with cowries, and go round the village, singing and dancing. Elsewhere at the time of the Marhai they dance round a pole with peacock feathers tied to the top, and sometimes wear peacock feathers themselves, as well as aprons sewn all over with cowries. It is said that Krishna and Balārām used to wear peacock feathers when they danced in the jungles of Mathura, but this rite has probably some connection with



AHĪR DANCERS IN DIWĀLĪ COSTUME.

*Bemrose, Collo., Derby.*



the worship of the peacock.] This bird might be venerated by the Ahīrs as one of the prominent denizens of the jungle. In Raipur they tie a white cock to the top of the pole and dance round it. In Mandla, Khila Mutha, the god of the threshing-floor, is worshipped at this time, with offerings of a fowl and a goat. They also perform the rite of *jagāna* or waking him up. They tie branches of a small shrub to a stick and pour milk over the stone which is his emblem, and sing, 'Wake up, Khila Mutha, this is the night of Amāwas' (the new moon). Then they go to the cattle-shed and wake up the cattle, crying, 'Poraiya, god of the door, watchman of the window, open the door, Nānd Gowāl is coming.' Then they drive out the cattle and chase them with the branches tied to their sticks as far as their grazing-ground. Nānd Gowāl was the foster-father of Krishna, and is now said to signify a man who has a lakh (100,000) of cows. This custom of frightening the cattle and making them run is called *dhor jagāna* or *bichkāna*, that is, to wake up or terrify the cattle. Its meaning is obscure, but it is said to preserve the cattle from disease during the year. In Raipur the women make an image of a parrot in clay at the Diwāli and place it on a pole and go round to the different houses, singing and dancing round the pole, and receiving presents of rice and money. They praise the parrot as the bird who carries messages from a lover to his mistress, and as living on the mountains and among the green verdure, and sing :

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

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

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

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

It is probable that the parrot is revered as a spirit of the forest, and also perhaps because it is destructive to the corn. The parrot is not, so far as is known, associated with any god, but the Hindus do not kill it. In Bilāspur an ear of rice is put into the parrot's mouth, and it is said there that the object of the rite is to prevent the parrots from preying on the corn.



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

17. Social  
customs.

The Ahirs will eat the flesh of goats and chickens, and most of them consume liquor freely. The Kaonra Ahirs of Mandla eat pork, and the Rāwats of Chhattisgarh are said not to object to field-mice and rats, even when caught in the houses. The Kaonra Ahirs are also said not to consider a woman impure during the period of menstruation. Nevertheless the Ahirs enjoy a good social status, owing to their relations with the sacred cow. As remarked by Eha : "His family having been connected for many generations with the sacred animal he enjoys a certain consciousness of moral respectability, like a man whose uncles are deans or canons."<sup>1</sup> All castes will take water from the hands of an Ahir, and in Chhattisgarh and the Uriya country the Rāwats and Gahras, as the Ahir caste is known respectively in these localities, are the only caste from whom Brāhmins and all other Hindus will take water. On this account, and because of their comparative purity, they are largely employed as personal servants. In Chhattisgarh the ordinary Rāwats will clean the cooking-vessels even of Muhammadans, but the Thethwār or pure Rāwats refuse this menial work. In Mandla, when a man is to be brought back into caste after a serious offence, such as getting vermin in a wound, he is made to stand in the middle of a stream, while some elderly relative pours water over him.

<sup>1</sup> *Behind the Bungalow.*



He then addresses the members of the caste *panchāyat* or committee, who are standing on the bank, saying to them, 'Will you leave me in the mud or will you take me out?' Then they tell him to come out, and he has to give a feast. At this a member of the Meliha sept first eats food and puts some into the offender's mouth, thus taking the latter's sin upon himself. The offender then addresses the *panchāyat* saying, 'Rājas of the Panch, eat.' Then the *panchāyat* and all the caste take food with him and he is readmitted. In Nāndgaon State the head of the caste *panchāyat* is known as Thethwār, the title of the highest subcaste, and is appointed by the Rāja, to whom he makes a present. In Jashpur, among the Mahākul Ahīrs, when an offender is put out of caste he has on readmission to make an offering of Rs. 1-4 to Bālāji, the tutelary deity of the State. These Mahākuls desire to be considered superior to ordinary Ahīrs, and their social rules are hence very strict. A man is put out of caste if a dog, fowl or pig touches his water or cooking-pots, or if he touches a fowl. In the latter case he is obliged to make an offering of a fowl to the local god, and eight days are allowed for procuring it. A man is also put out of caste for beating his father. In Mandla, Ahīrs commonly have the title of Patel or headman of a village, probably because in former times, when the country consisted almost entirely of forest and grass land, they were accustomed to hold large areas on contract for grazing.

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

Only about thirty per cent of the Ahīrs are still occupied in breeding cattle and dealing in milk and butter. About four per cent are domestic servants, and nearly all the remainder cultivators and labourers. In former times the

18. Ornaments.

19. Occupation.



Ahirs had the exclusive right of milking the cow, so that on all occasions an Ahir must be hired for this purpose even by the lowest castes. Any one could, however, milk the buffalo, and also make curds and other preparations from cow's milk.<sup>1</sup> This rule is interesting as showing how the caste system was maintained and perpetuated by the custom of preserving to each caste a monopoly of its traditional occupation. The rule probably applied also to the bulk of the cultivating and the menial and artisan castes, and now that it has been entirely abrogated it would appear that the gradual decay and dissolution of the caste organisation must follow. The village cattle are usually entrusted jointly to one or more herdsmen for grazing purposes. The grazier is paid separately for each animal entrusted to his care, a common rate being one anna for a cow or bullock and two annas for a buffalo per month. When a calf is born he gets four annas for a cow-calf and eight annas for a she-buffalo, but except in the rice districts nothing for a male buffalo-calf, as these animals are considered useless outside the rice area. The reason is that buffaloes do not work steadily except in swampy or wet ground, where they can refresh themselves by frequent drinking. In the northern Districts male buffalo-calves are often neglected and allowed to die, but the cow-buffaloes are extremely valuable, because their milk is the principal source of supply of *ghī* or boiled butter. When a cow or buffalo is in milk the grazier often gets the milk one day out of four or five. When a calf is born the teats of the cow are first milked about twenty times on to the ground in the name of the local god of the Ahirs. The remainder of the first day's milk is taken by the grazier, and for the next few days it is given to friends. The village grazier is often also expected to prepare the guest-house for Government officers and others visiting the village, fetch grass for their animals, and clean their cooking vessels. For this he sometimes receives a small plot of land and a present of a blanket annually from the village proprietor. Mālguzārs and large tenants have their private herdsmen. The pasturage afforded by the village waste lands and forest is, as a rule, only sufficient for the plough-

<sup>1</sup> *Eastern India*, ii. p. 467.



bullocks and more valuable milch-animals. The remainder are taken away sometimes for long distances to the Government forest reserves, and here the herdsmen make stockades in the jungle and remain there with their animals for months together. The cattle which remain in the village are taken by the owners in the early morning to the *khirkha* or central standing-ground. Here the grazier takes them over and drives them out to pasture. He brings them back at ten or eleven, and perhaps lets them stand in some field which the owner wants manured. Then he separates the cows and milch-buffaloes and takes them to their masters' houses, where he milks them all. In the afternoon all the cattle are again collected and driven out to pasture. The cultivators are very much in the grazier's hands, as they cannot supervise him, and if dishonest he may sell off a cow or calf to a friend in a distant village and tell the owner that it has been carried off by a tiger or panther. Unless the owner succeeds by a protracted search or by accident in finding the animal he cannot disprove the herdsman's statement, and the only remedy is to dispense with the latter's services if such losses become unduly frequent. On this account, according to the proverbs, the Ahir is held to be treacherous and false to his engagements. They are also regarded as stupid because they seldom get any education, retain their rustic and half-aboriginal dialect, and on account of their solitary life are dull and slow-witted in company. 'The barber's son learns to shave on the Ahir's head.' 'The cow is in league with the milkman and lets him milk water into the pail.' The Ahirs are also hot-tempered, and their propensity for drinking often results in affrays, when they break each other's head with their cattle-staffs. 'A Gaoli's quarrel: drunk at night and friends in the morning.'

Hindus nearly always boil their milk before using it, as the taste of milk fresh from the cow is considered unpalatable. After boiling, the milk is put in a pot and a little old curds added, when the whole becomes *dahi* or sour curds. This is a favourite food, and appears to be exactly the same substance as the Bulgarian sour milk which is now considered to have much medicinal value. Butter is also made by churning these curds or *dahi*. Butter is never used

20. Preparations of milk.



without being boiled first, when it becomes converted into a sort of oil; this has the advantage of keeping much better than fresh butter, and may remain fit for use for as long as a year. This boiled butter is known as *ghī*, and is the staple product of the dairy industry, the bulk of the surplus supply of milk being devoted to its manufacture. It is freely used by all classes who can afford it, and serves very well for cooking purposes. There is a comparatively small market for fresh milk among the Hindus, and as a rule only those drink milk who obtain it from their own animals. The acid residue after butter has been made from *dahi* (curds) or milk is known as *matha* or butter-milk, and is the only kind of milk drunk by the poorer classes. Milk boiled so long as to become solidified is known as *khīr*, and is used by confectioners for making sweets. When the milk is boiled and some sour milk added to it, so that it coagulates while hot, the preparation is called *chhana*. The whey is expressed from this by squeezing it in a cloth, and a kind of cheese is obtained.<sup>1</sup> The liquid which oozes out at the root of a cow's horns after death is known as *gaolochan* and sells for a high price, as it is considered a valuable medicine for children's cough and lung diseases.

**Andh.**<sup>2</sup>—A low cultivating caste of Berār, who numbered 52,000 persons in 1911, and belong to the Yeotmal, Akola and Buldāna Districts. The Andhs appear to be a non-Aryan tribe of the Andhra or Tamil country, from which they derive their name. The territories of the Andhra dynasty extended across southern India from sea to sea in the early part of the Christian era. This designation may, however, have been given to them after migration, emigrants being not infrequently called in their new country by the name of the place from which they came, as Berāri, Purdesi, Aūdhiā (from Oudh), and so on. At present there seems to be no caste called Andh in Madras. Mr. Kitts<sup>3</sup> notes that they still come from Hyderābād across the Penganga river.

<sup>1</sup> Buchanan, *Eastern India*, ii. pp. 924, 943.

<sup>2</sup> This article is mainly based on a

paper by Mr. W. S. Slaney, E.A.C., Akola.

<sup>3</sup> *Berār Census Report* (1881).



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

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



in opposition to the Hindu custom. The Andhs will eat the flesh of fowls and pigs, and even cats, rats and snakes in some localities, though the more civilised have abjured these latter. They are very fond of pork, and drink liquor, and will take food from Kunbis, Mālis and Kolis, but not from Gonds. They have a caste *panchāyat* or committee, with a headman called Mohtaria, and two officers known as Phopatia and Dukria. When a caste offence is committed the Dukria goes to call the offender, and is given the earthen pots used at the penalty-feast, while the Phopatia receives a new piece of cloth. The Mohtaria or headman goes from village to village to decide cases, and gets a share of the fine. The caste are *shikāris* or hunters, and cultivators. They catch antelope, hares, pig and nilgai in their nets, and kill them with sticks and stones, and they dam up streams and net fish. Birds are not caught. Generally, the customs of the Andhs clearly point to an aboriginal origin, but they are rapidly being Hinduised, and in some tracts can scarcely be distinguished from Kunbis.

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

**Arakh.**—A small caste of cultivators and labourers found principally in the Chānda District and Berār and scattered over other localities. The Arakhs are considered to be an offshoot of the Pāsi or Bahelia caste of hunters and fowlers. Mr. Crooke<sup>1</sup> writes of them: "All their traditions connect them with the Pāsis and Parasurāma, the sixth Avatāra of Vishnu. One story runs that Parasurāma was bathing in the sea, when a leech bit his foot and caused it to bleed. He divided the blood into two parts; out of one part he made the first Pāsi and out of the second the first Arakh. Another story is that the Pāsis were made out of the sweat (*pasīna*) of Parasurāma. While Parasurāma was away the Pāsi shot some animals with his bow, and the deity was so enraged that he cursed the Pāsi, and swore that his descendants should keep pigs. This accounts

<sup>1</sup> *Tribes and Castes*, art. Arakh.



for the degradation of the Pāsis. Subsequently Parasurāma sent for some Pāsis to help him in one of his wars; but they ran away and hid in an *arhar*<sup>1</sup> field and were hence called Arakhs." This connection with the Pāsis is also recognised in the case of the Arakhs of Berār, of whom Mr. Kitts writes:<sup>2</sup> "The Arakhs found in Morsi are a race akin to the Bahelias. Their regular occupation is bird-catching and *shikār* (hunting). They do not follow Hindu customs in their marriages, but although they keep pigs, eat flesh and drink spirits, they will not touch a Chamār. They appear to be a branch of the Pāsi tribe, and are described as a semi-Hinduised class of aborigines." In the Chānda District, however, the Arakhs are closely connected with the Gond tribe, as is evident from their system of exogamy. Thus they say that they are divided into the Mātia, Tekām, Tesli, Godām, Madai, Sayām and Chorliu septs, worshipping respectively three, four, five, six, seven, eight and twelve gods; and persons who worship the same number of gods cannot marry with one another. This system of divisions according to the different number of gods worshipped is found in the Central Provinces only among the Gonds and one or two other tribes like the Baigas, who have adopted it from them, and as some of the names given above are also Gondi words, no doubt need be entertained that the Arakhs of Chānda are largely of Gond descent. They are probably, in fact, the offspring of irregular connections between the Gonds and Pāsis, who, being both frequenters of the forests, would naturally come much into contact with each other. And being disowned by the true Pāsis on account of their defective pedigree, they have apparently set up as a separate caste and adopted the name of Arakh to hide the deficiencies of their ancestry.

The social customs of the Arakhs resemble those of other low Hindu castes, and need not be given in detail. Their weddings are held near a temple of Māroti, or if there be none such, then at the place where the Holi fire was lit in the preceding year. A bride-price varying from Rs. 25 to Rs. 40 is usually paid. In the case of the

<sup>1</sup> *Cajanus indicus*.

<sup>2</sup> *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 157.



marriage of a widow, the second husband goes to the house of the woman, where the couple are bathed and seated on two wooden boards, a branch of a cotton-plant being placed near them. The bridegroom then ties five strings of black glass beads round the woman's neck. The dead are mourned for one day only, and a funeral feast is given to the caste-fellows. The Arakhs are a very low caste, but their touch does not convey impurity.

1. General notice.

**Atāri,<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, Bukekari.**—A small Muhammadan caste of retailers of scent, incense, tooth-powder and *kunku* or pink powder. Atāri is derived from *atar* or *itra*, attar of roses. Gandhi comes from *gandh*, a Sanskrit word for scent. Bukekāri is a Marāthi word meaning a seller of powder. The Atāris number about two hundred persons in Nāgpur, Wardha and Berār. Both Hindus and Muhammadans follow the profession, but the Hindu Atāris are not a separate caste, and belong to the Teli, Gurao and Beldār castes. The Muhammadan Atāris, to whom this article refers, may marry with other Muhammadans, with the exception of low-class tradesmen like the Pinjāras, Kasais and Kunjras. One instance of an Atāri marrying a Rangrez is known, but usually they decline to do so. But since they are not considered to be the equals of ordinary Muhammadans, they constitute more or less a distinct social group. They are of the same position as Muhammadan tin-workers, bangle-makers and pedlars, and sometimes intermarry with them. They admit Hindu converts into the community, but the women refuse to eat with them, and the better class families will not intermarry with converts. A new convert must be circumcised, but if he is of advanced age, or if his foreskin is wanting, as sometimes happens, they take a rolled-up betel-leaf and cut it in two in substitution for the rite.

2. Marriage customs.

It is essential that a girl should be married before adolescence, as it is said that when the signs of puberty appear in her before wedlock her parents commit a crime equivalent to the shedding of human blood. The father

<sup>1</sup> Based on papers by Mr. Bijai Hinganghāt, and Munshi Kanhya Lāl Bahādur Royzāda, Naib-Tahsildār of the Gazetteer office.



of the boy looks for a bride, and after dropping hints to the girl's family to see if his proposal is acceptable, he sends some female relatives or friends to discuss the marriage. Before the wedding the boy is presented with a *chhāp* or ring of gold or silver with a small cup-like attachment. A *mehar* or dowry must be given to the bride, the amount of which is not below Rs. 50 or above Rs. 250. The bride's parents give her cooking vessels, bedding and a bedstead. After the wedding, the couple are seated on a cot while the women sing songs, and they see each other's face reflected in a mirror. The procession returns after a stay of four days, and is received by the women of the bridegroom's family with some humorous ceremonies bearing on the nature of marriage. A feast called *Tāmm Walima* follows, and the couple are shut up together in an inner room, even though they may be under age. The marriage includes some Hindu customs, such as the erection of the *pandal* or shed, rubbing the couple with turmeric and oil, and the tying on of *kankans* or wrist-bands. A girl going wrong before marriage may be wedded with full rites so long as she has not conceived, but after conception until her child is born she cannot go through the ceremony at all. After the birth of the child she may be married simply with the rite for widows. She retains the child, but it has no claim to succeed to her husband's property. A widow may marry again after an interval of forty days from her first husband's death, and she may wed her younger brother-in-law. Divorce is permitted at the instance of either party, and for mere disagreement. A man usually divorces his wife by vowing in the presence of two witnesses that he will in future consider intercourse with her as incestuous in the same degree as with his mother. A divorced woman has a claim to her *mehar* or dowry if not already paid, but forfeits it if she marries again. A man can marry the daughter of his paternal uncle. The services of a *Kāzi* at weddings are paid for with a fee of Rs. 1-4, and well-to-do persons also give him a pair of turbans.

The *Atāris* are Muhammadans of the Sunni sect. They <sup>3. Religion.</sup> revere the Muhammadan saints, and on the night of *Shabrāt* they let off fireworks in honour of their ancestors and make



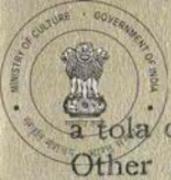
offerings of *halwa*<sup>1</sup> to them and place lamps and scent on their tombs. They swear by the pig and abstain from eating its flesh. The dog is considered an unclean animal and its tail, ears and tongue are especially defiling. If the hair of a dog falls on the ground they cannot pray in that place because the souls of the prophets cannot come there. To see a dog flapping its ears is a bad omen, and a person starting on a journey should postpone his departure. They esteem the spider, because they say it spread its web over the mouth of the cave where Hasan and Husain lay concealed from their enemies and thus prevented it from being searched. Some of them have Pirs or spiritual preceptors, these being Muhammadan beggars, not necessarily celibate. The ceremony of adhesion is that a man should drink sherbet from the cup from which his preceptor has drunk. They do not observe impurity after a death nor bathe on returning from a funeral.

4. Social  
customs.

Liquor is of course prohibited to the Atāris as to other Muhammadans, but some of them drink it nevertheless. Some of them eat beef and others abstain. The blood of animals killed must flow before death according to the rite of *halāl*, but they say that fish are an exception, because when Abraham was offering up his son Ishmael and God substituted a goat, the goat bleated before it was killed, and this offended Abraham, who threw his sacrificial knife into the sea: the knife struck and killed a fish, and on this account all fish are considered to be *halāl* or lawful food without any further rite. The Atāris observe the Hindu law of inheritance, and some of them worship Hindu deities, as Māta the goddess of smallpox. As a rule their women are not secluded. The Atāris make *missi* or tooth-powder from myrobalans, cloves and cardamoms, and other constituents. This has the effect of blackening the teeth. They also sell the *kunku* or red powder which women rub on their foreheads, its constituents being turmeric, borax and the juice of limes. They sell scent and sometimes deal in tobacco. The scents most in demand are *gulāb-pāni* or rose-water and *phulel* or essence of tilli or sesamum. Scents are usually sold by the tola of 18 annas silver weight,<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> A preparation of raisins and other fruits and rice.

<sup>2</sup> The ordinary tola is a rupee weight or two-fifths of an ounce.



a tola of attar may vary in price from 8 annas to Rs. 80. Other scents are made from *khas-khas* grass, the mango, henna and musk, the *bela* flower,<sup>1</sup> the champak<sup>2</sup> and cucumber. Scent is manufactured by distillation from the flowers boiled in water, and the drops of congealed vapour fall into sandalwood oil, which they say is the basis of all scents. Fragrant oils are also sold for rubbing on the hair, made from orange flowers, jasmine, cotton-seed and the flowers of the *aonla* tree.<sup>3</sup> Scent is sold in tiny circular glass bottles, and the oils in little bottles made from thin leather. The Atāris also retail the little black sticks of incense which are set up and burnt at the time of taking food and in temples, so that the smell and smoke may keep off evil spirits. When professional exorcists are called upon to clear any building, such as a hospital, supposed to be haunted by spirits or the ghosts of the dead, they commence operations by placing these sticks of incense at the entrance and setting them alight as in a temple.

**Audhelia (Audhalia).**—A small hybrid caste found almost exclusively in the Bilāspur District, where they number about 1000 persons. The name is derived from the word Udharia, meaning a person with clandestine sexual intimacies. The Audheliās are a mixed caste and trace their origin from a Daharia Rājput ancestor, by one Bhūri Bāndi, a female slave of unknown caste. This couple is supposed to have resided in Ratanpur, the old capital of Chhattīsgarh, and the female ancestors of the Audheliās are said to have been prostitutes until they developed into a caste and began to marry among themselves. Their proper avocation at present is the rearing of pigs, while some of them are also tenants and farm-labourers. Owing to the base descent and impure occupation of the caste they are held in very low esteem, and their touch is considered to convey pollution. 1. Origin.

The caste have at present no endogamous divisions and still admit members of other castes with the exception of the very lowest. But social gradations exist to a certain 2. Marriage.

<sup>1</sup> *Jasminum sambac.*

<sup>2</sup> *Michelia champaca.*

<sup>3</sup> *Phyllanthus emblica.*



extent among the members according to the position of their male ancestors, a Daharia Audhelia, for instance, being reluctant to eat or intermarry with a Panka Audhelia. Under these circumstances it has become a rule among the Audhelias not to eat with their caste-fellows excepting their own relations. On the occasion of a caste feast, therefore, each guest prepares his own food, taking only uncooked grain from his host. At present seven *gotras* or exogamous divisions appear to have been formed in the caste with the names of Pachbhैया, Chhahri, Kalkhor, Bachhawāt, Dhanawat, Bhainsa and Limuān. The following story exists as to the origin of these *gotras*: There were formerly three brothers, Sahasmān, Budha and Mangal, who were Sānsis or robbers. One evening the three brothers halted in a forest and went to look for food. One brought back a buffalo-horn, another a peacock's feather and the youngest, Mangal, brought plums. The other brothers asked Mangal to let them share his plums, to which he agreed on condition that one of the brothers should give his daughter to him in marriage. As Mangal and his brothers were of one *gotra* or section, and the marriage would thus involve splitting up the *gotra*, the brothers were doubtful whether it could be performed. They sought about for some sign to determine this difficult question, and decided that if Mangal succeeded in breaking in pieces an iron image of a cat simply by blows of his naked fist, it would be a sufficient indication that they might split up their *gotra*. Mangal was therefore put to the ordeal and succeeded in breaking the image, so the three brothers split up their *gotra*, the eldest assuming the *gotra* name of Bhainsa because he had found a buffalo-horn, the second that of Kalkhor, which is stated to mean peacock, and the third that of Chhahri, which at any rate does not mean a plum. The word Chhahri means either 'shadow,' or 'one who washes the clothes of a woman in confinement.' If we assume it to have the latter meaning, it may be due to the fact that Mangal had to wash the clothes of his own wife, not being able to induce a professional washerman to do so on account of the incestuous nature of the connection. As the eldest brother gave his daughter in an incestuous marriage he was also degraded, and became the ancestor



of the Kanjars or prostitutes, who, it is said, to the present day do not solicit Audheliās in consideration of the consanguinity existing between them. The story itself sufficiently indicates the low and mixed descent of the Audheliās, and its real meaning may possibly be that when they first began to form a separate caste they permitted incestuous marriages on account of the paucity of their members. A curious point about the story is that the incestuous nature of the connection is not taken to be the most pressing objection to the marriage of Mangal with his own niece, but the violation of the caste rule prohibiting marriage within the same *gotra*. Bachhāwat and Dhanāwat are the names of sections of the Banjāra caste, and the persons of these *gotras* among the Audheliās are probably the descendants of illicit connections among Banjāras. The word Pachbhāiya means 'five brothers,' and this name possibly commemorates a polyandrous connection of some Audheliā woman. Limuān means a tortoise, which is a section of many castes. Several of the section-names are thus totemistic, and, as in other castes, some reverence is paid to the animal from whom the name is derived. At present the Audheliās forbid marriage within the same *gotra* and also the union of first cousins. Girls are married between five and seven years of age as their numbers are scarce, and they are engaged as early as possible. Unless weddings are arranged by exchanging girls between two families, a high bride-price, often amounting to as much as Rs. 60, is paid. No stigma is incurred, however, if a girl should remain unmarried till she arrives at adolescence, but, on the contrary, a higher price is then obtained for her. Sexual licence either before or after marriage is considered a venial offence, but a woman detected in a *liaison* with a man of one of the lowest castes is turned out of caste. Widow marriage and divorce are freely allowed.

The Audheliās venerate Dulha Deo and Devi, to whom they usually offer pigs. Their principal festival is the Holi, at which their women were formerly engaged to perform as professional dancers. They usually burn their dead and remove the ashes on the third day, throwing them into the nearest stream. A few of the bones are picked up and

3. Religion,  
birth and  
death.