



the effect that their ancestor was a Rāja who was turned into stone with his seventy-two followers by some ascetics whose devotions they had interrupted in the forest. But when their wives came to commit *sati* by the stone figures the god Siva intervened and brought them to life again. He told them to give up the profession of arms and take to trade. So the seventy-two followers were the ancestors of the seventy-two *gotras* or sections of the Maheshris, and the Rāja became their tribal *Bhāt* or genealogist, and they were called Maheshri or Maheswari, from Mahesh, a name of Siva. In Gujarāt the term Maheshri or Meshri appears to be used for all Banias who are not Jains, including the other important Hindu subcastes.¹ This is somewhat peculiar, and perhaps tends to show that several of the local subcastes are of recent formation. But though they profess to be named after Siva, the Maheshris, like practically all other Hindu Banias, are Vaishnava by sect, and wear the *kuntī* or necklace of beads of basil. A small minority are Jains. It is to be noticed that both the place of their origin, an early Rājput settlement of the Yādava clan, and their own legend tend to show that they were derived from the Rājput caste; for as their ancestors were attendants on a Rāja and followed the profession of arms, which they were told to abandon, they could be none other than Rājputs. The Maheshris also have the Rājput custom of sending a coconut as a symbol of a proposal of marriage. In Nimār the Maheshri Banias say they belong to the Dhākar subcaste, a name which usually means illegitimate, though they themselves explain that it is derived from a place called Dhākargarh, from which they migrated. As already stated they are divided into seventy-two exogamous clans, the names of which appear to be titular or territorial. It is said that at their weddings when the bridegroom gets to the door of the marriage-shed, the bride's mother ties a scarf round his neck and takes hold of his nose and drags him into the shed. Sometimes they make the bridegroom kneel down and pay reverence to a shoe as a joke. They do not observe the custom of the *pangat* or formal festal assembly, which is usual among Hindu castes; according to this, none

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer, Hindus of Gujarāt*, p. 70.



can begin to eat until all the guests have assembled, when they all sit down at once. Among the Maheshris the guests sit down as they come in, and are served and take their food and go. They only have the *pangat* feast on very rare occasions. The Maheshris are one of the richest, most enterprising and influential classes of Banias. They are intelligent, of high-bred appearance, cleanly habits and courteous manners. The great bankers, Sir Kastūrchand Daga of Kamptee, of the firm of Bansi Lāl Abīrchand, and Rai Bahādur Seth Jīwan Das and Diwān Bahādur Seth Ballabh Das, of Jubbulpore, belong to this subcaste.

Bania, Nema.—This subcaste numbers nearly 4000 persons, the bulk of whom reside in the Saugor, Damoh, Narsinghpur and Seoni Districts. The Nemas are most largely returned from Central India, and are probably a Bundelkhand group; they will eat food cooked without water with Gola-pūrab Banias, who are also found in Bundelkhand. They are mainly Hindus, with a small minority of Jains. The origin of the name is obscure; the suggestion that it comes from Nimār appears to be untenable, as there are very few Nemas in that District. They say that when Parasurāma was slaying the Kshatriyas fourteen young Rājput princes, who at the time were studying religion with their family priests, were saved by the latter on renouncing their Kshatriya status and declaring themselves to be Vaishyas. These fourteen princes were the ancestors of the fourteen *gotras* of the Nema subcaste, but the *gotras* actually bear the names of the fourteen Rīshis or saints who saved their lives. These sections appear to be of the usual Brāhmanical type, but marriage is regulated by another set of fifty-two subsections, with names which are apparently titular or territorial. Like other Bania groups the Nemas are divided into Bīsa and Dasa subdivisions or twenties and tens, the Bīsa being of pure and the Dasa of irregular descent. There is also a third group of Pacha or fives, who appear to be the offspring of kept women. After some generations, when the details of their ancestry are forgotten, the Pachas probably obtain promotion into the Dasa group. The Bīsa and Dasa groups take food together, but do not intermarry. The Nemas wear



the sacred thread and apparently prohibit the remarriage of widows. The Nemas are considered to be very keen business men, and a saying about them is, "Where a sheep grazes or a Nema trades, what is there left for anybody else?"

Bania, Oswāl.—This is perhaps the most important subdivision of the Banias after the Agarwāla. The Oswāls numbered nearly 10,000 persons in the Central Provinces in 1911, being found in considerable numbers in all the Berār Districts, and also in Nimār, Wardha and Raipur. The name is derived from the town of Osia or Osnagar in Mārwarz. According to one legend of their origin the Rāja of Osnagar had no son, and obtained one through the promise of a Jain ascetic. The people then drove the ascetic from the town, fearing that the Rāja would become a Jain; but Osadev, the guardian goddess of the place, told the ascetic, Sri Ratan Suri, to convert the Rāja by a miracle. So she took a small hank (*phūni*) of cotton and passed it along the back of the saint, when it immediately became a snake and bit Jaichand, the son of the Rāja, in the toe, while he was asleep beside his wife. Every means was tried to save his life, but he died. As his corpse was about to be burnt, the ascetic sent one of his disciples and stopped the cremation. Then the Rāja came with the body of his son and stood with hands clasped before the saint. He ordered that it was to be taken back to the place where the prince had been bitten, and that the princess was to lie down beside it as before. At midnight the snake returned and licked the bite, when the prince was restored to life. Then the Rāja, with all his Court and people, became a Jain. He and his family founded the *gotra* or section now known as Sri Srimāl or most noble; his servants formed that known as Srimāl or excellent, while the other Rājapūts of the town became ordinary Oswāls. When the Brāhmans of the place heard of these conversions they asked the saint how they were to live, as all their clients had become Jains. The saint directed that they should continue to be the family priests of the Oswāls and be known as Bhojak or 'eaters.' Thus the Oswāls, though Jains, continue to employ Mārwarzī



Brāhmins as their family priests. Another version of the story is that the king of Srimāli¹ allowed no one who was not a millionaire to live within his city walls. In consequence of this a large number of persons left Srimāl, and, settling in Mandovād, called it Osa or the frontier. Among them were Srimāli Banias and also Bhatti, Chauhān, Gahlot, Gaur, Yādava, and several other clans of Rājput̄s, and these were the people who were subsequently converted by the Jain ascetic, Sri Ratan Suri, and formed into the single caste of Oswāl.² Finally, Colonel Tod states that the Oswāls are all of pure Rājput̄ descent, of no single tribe, but chiefly Panwārs, Solankis and Bhattis.³ From these legends and the fact that their headquarters are in Rājputāna, it may safely be concluded that the Oswāl Banias are of Rājput̄ origin.

The large majority of the Oswāls are Jain by religion, but a few are Vaishnava Hindus. Inter-marriage between the Hindu and Jain sections is permitted. Like the Agarwālas, the Oswāls are divided into Bīsa, Dasa and Pacha sections or twenties, tens and fives, according to the purity of their lineage. The Pacha subcaste still permit the remarriage of widows. The three groups take food together but do not intermarry. In Bombay, Dasa Oswāls intermarry with the Dasa groups of Srimāli and Parwār Banias,⁴ and Oswāls generally can marry with other good Bania subcastes so long as both parties are Jains. The Oswāls are divided into eighty-four *gotras* or exogamous sections for purposes of marriage, a list of which is given by Mr. Crooke.⁵ Most of these cannot be recognised, but a few of them seem to be titular, as Lorha a caste which grows hemp, Nunia a salt-refiner, Seth a banker, Daftari an office-boy, Vaid a physician, Bhandāri a cook, and Kukara a dog. These may indicate a certain amount of admixture of foreign elements in the caste. As stated from Benāres, the exogamous rule is that a man cannot marry in his own section, and he cannot marry a girl whose father's or mother's section is the same as that of either his father or mother. This would bar the marriage of first cousins.

¹ A town near Jhalor in Mārwar, now called Bhinnmāl.

² *Rājasthān*, ii. p. 210, footnote.

³ *Hindus of Gujarāt*, loc. cit., and *Bombay Gazetteer*, xvi. 45.

⁴ *Bombay Gazetteer*, *Hindus of Gujarāt*, p. 97.

⁵ *Tribes and Castes*, art. Oswāl.



Though Jains the Oswāls perform their weddings by walking round the sacred fire and observe certain Hindu rites, including the worship of the god Ganpati.¹ They also revere other Hindu deities and the sun and moon. The dead are burnt, but they do not observe any impurity after a death nor clean the house. On the day after the death the mourning family, both men and women, visit Parasnāth's temple, and lay one seer (2 lbs.) of Indian millet before the god, bow to him and go home. They do not gather the ashes of the dead nor keep the yearly death-day. Their only observance is that on some day between the twelfth day after a death and the end of a year, the caste-people are treated to a dinner of sweetmeats and the dead 'are then forgotten.'² The Oswāls will take food cooked with water (*katchi*) only from Brāhmans, and that cooked without water (*pakki*) from Agarwāla and Maheshri Banias. In the Central Provinces the principal deity of the Oswāls is the Jain Tirthakār Parasnāth, and they spend large sums in the erection of splendid temples. The Oswāls are the most prominent trading caste in Rājputāna; and they have also frequently held high offices, such as Diwān or minister, and paymaster in Rājput States.³

Bania, Parwār.⁴—This Jain subcaste numbered nearly 29,000 persons in 1911. They belong almost entirely to the Jubbulpore and Nerbudda Divisions, and the great bulk are found in the Saugor, Damoh and Jubbulpore Districts. The origin of the Parwārs and of their name is not known, but there is some reason to suppose that they are from Rājputāna. Their women wear on the head the *biḥ*, a Rājputāna ornament, and use the *chāru*, a deep brass plate for drinking, which also belongs there. Their songs are said to be in the Rājasthāni dialect. It seems likely that the Parwārs may be identical with the Porawāl subcaste found in other Provinces, which, judging from the name, may belong to Rājputāna. In the northern Districts the Parwārs

i. Origin.

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xvii. p. 51.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Bhattachārya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 207.

⁴ This article is based on papers by Mr. Pancham Lāl, Naib-Tahsildār Sihora, and Munshi Kanhya Lāl, of the Gazetteer office.

speak Bundeli, but in the south their language is said to be Mār-wāri.

2. Sub-
 divisions.

Among the Parwārs the Samaiya or Channāgri form a separate sectarian Jain group. They do not worship the images of the Jain Tirthakārs, but enshrine the sacred books of the Jains in their temples, and worship these. The Parwārs will take daughters in marriage from the Channāgris, and sometimes give their daughters in consideration of a substantial bride-price. Among the Parwārs themselves there is a social division between the Ath Sāke and the Chao Sāke; the former will not permit the marriage of persons related more nearly than eight degrees, while the latter permit it after four degrees. The Ath Sāke have the higher position, and if one of them marries a Chao Sāke he is degraded to that group. Besides this the Parwārs have an inferior division called Benaikia, which consists of the offspring of irregular unions and of widows who have remarried. Persons who have committed a caste offence and cannot pay the fine imposed on them for it also go into this subcaste. The Benaikias¹ themselves are distributed into four groups of varying degrees of respectability, and families who live correctly and marry as well as they can tend to rise from one to the other until after several generations they may again be recognised as Parwārs proper.

3. Exo-
 gamy.

The Parwārs have twelve *gotras* or main sections, and each *gotra* has, or is supposed to have, twelve *mul*s or subsections. A Parwār must not marry in his own *gotra* nor in the *mul* of his mother, or any of his grandmothers or greatgrandmothers. This practically bars marriage within seven degrees of relationship. But a man's sister and daughter may be married in the same family, and even to two brothers, and a man can marry two sisters.

4. Mar-
 riage
 customs.

As a rule no bride-price is paid, but occasionally an old man desiring a wife will give something substantial to her father in secret. There are two forms of marriage, called Thinga and Dajanha; in the former, women do not accompany the wedding procession, and they have a separate marriage-shed at the bridegroom's house for their own celebrations; while in the latter, they accompany it

¹ See also notice of Benaikias in article on Vidūr.



and erect such a shed at the house in the bridegroom's village or town where they have their lodging. Before the wedding, the bridegroom, mounted on a horse, and the bride, carried in a litter, proceed together round the marriage-shed. The bridegroom then stands by the sacred post in the centre and the bride walks seven times round him. In the evening there was a custom of dressing the principal male relatives of the bridegroom in women's clothes and making them dance, but this is now being discarded. On the fifth day is held a rite called Palkachār. A new cot is provided by the bride's father, and on it is spread a red cloth. The couple are seated on this with their hands entwined, and their relations come and make them presents. If the bridegroom catches hold of the dress of his mother- or father-in-law, they are expected to make him a handsome present. In other respects the wedding follows the ordinary Hindu ritual. Widow-marriage and divorce are forbidden among the Parwārs proper, and those who practise them go into the lower Benaikia group.

The Parwārs are practically all Jains of the Digambari sect. They build costly and beautiful temples for their Tirthakārs, especially for their favourite Parasnāth. They have also many Hindu practices. They observe the Diwāli, Rakshabandhan and Holi festivals; they say that at the Diwāli the last Tirthakār Mahāvira attained beatitude and the gods rained down jewels; the little lamps now lighted at Diwāli are held to be symbolic of these jewels. They tie the threads round the wrist on Rakshabandhan to keep off evil spirits. They worship Sītala Devi, the Hindu goddess of smallpox, and employ Brāhmins to choose names for their children and fix the dates of their wedding and other ceremonies, though not at the ceremonies themselves.

5. Religion: Hindu observances.

The caste burn the dead, with the exception of the bodies of young children, which are buried. The corpse is sometimes placed sitting in a car to be taken to the cremation ground, but often laid on a bier in the ordinary manner. The sitting posture is that in which all the Tirthakārs attained paradise, and their images always represent them in this posture. The corpse is naked save for

6. Disposal of the dead.



a new piece of cloth round the waist, but it is covered with a sheet. The Jains do not shave their hair in token of mourning, nor do they offer sacrificial cakes to the dead. When the body is burnt they bathe in the nearest water and go home. Neither the bearers nor the mourners are held to be impure. Next day the mourning family, both men and women, visit Parasnāth's temple, lay two pounds of Indian millet before the god and go home.¹ But in the Central Provinces they whitewash their houses, get their clothes washed, throw away their earthen pots and give a feast to the caste.

7. Social
rules and
customs.

The Parwārs abstain from eating any kind of flesh and from drinking liquor. They have a *panchāyat* and impose penalties for offences against caste rules like the Hindus. Among the offences are the killing of any living thing, unchastity or adultery, theft or other bad conduct, taking cooked food or water from a caste from which the Parwārs do not take them, and violation of any rule of their religion. To get vermin in a wound, or to be beaten by a low-caste man or with a shoe, incidents which entail serious penalties among the Hindus, are not offences with the Parwārs. When an offender is put out of caste the ordinary deprivation is that he is not allowed to enter a Jain temple, and in serious cases he may also not eat nor drink with the caste. The Parwārs are generally engaged in the trade in grain, *ghī*, and other staples. Several of them are well-to-do and own villages.

Bania, Srimāli.—This subcaste takes its name from the town of Srimāl, which is now Bhinmāl in Mārwar. They numbered 600 persons in the Central Provinces in 1911, most of whom belonged to the Hoshangābād District. More than two-thirds were Hindus and the remainder Jains. Colonel Tod writes of Bhinmāl and an adjoining town, Sanchor: "These towns are on the high road to Cutch and Gujarāt, which has given them from the most remote times a commercial celebrity. Bhinmāl is said to contain about 1500 houses and Sanchor half that number. Very wealthy *mahājans* or merchants used to reside here, but insecurity

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xvii. p. 81.



both within and without has much injured these cities." From Bhinmāl the Srimālis appear to have gone to Gujarāt, where they are found in considerable numbers. Their legend of origin is that the goddess Lakshmi created from a flower-garland 90,000 families to act as servants to the 90,000 Srimāli Brāhmans, and these were the ancestors of the Srimāli Banias.¹ Both the Jain and Hindu sections of the Srimāli Banias employ Srimāli Brāhmans as priests. Like other classes of Banias, the Srimāli are divided into two sections, the Bīsa and Dasa, or twenty and ten, of which the Bīsa are considered to be of pure and the Dasa of somewhat mixed descent. In Gujarāt they also have a third territorial group, known as Lādva, from Lād, the old name of Gujarāt. All three subdivisions take food together but do not intermarry.² The two highest sections of the Oswāl Banias are called Śrī Srimāl and Srimāl, and it is possible that further investigation might show the Srimāls and Oswāls to have been originally of one stock.

Bania, Umre.—This Hindu subcaste belongs to Damoh and Jubbulpore. They are perhaps the same as the Ummar Banias of the United Provinces, who reside in the Meerut, Agra and Kumaon Divisions. The name Umre is found as a subdivision of several castes in the Central Provinces, as the Telis and others, and is probably derived from some town or tract of country in northern or central India, but no identification has been made. Mr. Bhīmhai Kirpārām states that in Gujarāt the Ummar Banias are also known as Bāgarīa from the Bāgar or wild country, comprised in the Dongarpur and Pertābgarh States of Rājputāna, where considerable numbers of them are still settled. Their headquarters is at Sāgwāra, near Dongarpur.³ In Damoh the Umre Banias formerly cultivated the *al* plant,⁴ which yielded a well-known dye, and hence they lost caste, as in soaking the roots of the plant to extract the dye the numerous insects in them are necessarily destroyed. The Dosar subcaste⁵ are a branch of the Umre, who allow widow-remarriage.

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer, Hindus of Gujarāt*, p. 99.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

⁴ *Merinda citrifolia*, see art. Alia.

⁵ See article.



BANJĀRA

LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. *Historical notice of the caste.*
2. *Banjāras derived from the Chāraus or Bhāts.*
3. *Chāran Banjāras employed with the Mughal armies.*
4. *Internal structure.*
5. *Minor subcastes.*
6. *Marriage: betrothal.*
7. *Marriage.*
8. *Widow-remarriage.*
9. *Birth and death.*
10. *Religion: Banjāri Devi.*
11. *Mithu Bhūkia.*
12. *Siva Bhaia.*
13. *Worship of cattle.*
14. *Connection with the Sikhs.*
15. *Witchcraft.*
16. *Human sacrifice.*
17. *Admission of outsiders: kidnapped children and slaves.*
18. *Dress.*
19. *Social customs.*
20. *The Nāik or headman. Banjāra dogs.*
21. *Criminal tendencies of the caste.*
22. *Their virtues.*

Banjāra, Wanjāri, Labhāna, Mukeri.¹—The caste of carriers and drivers of pack-bullocks. In 1911 the Banjāras numbered about 56,000 persons in the Central Provinces and 80,000 in Berār, the caste being in greater strength here than in any part of India except Hyderābād, where their total is 174,000. Bombay comes next with a figure approaching that of the Central Provinces and Berār, and the caste belongs therefore rather to the Deccan than to northern India. The name has been variously explained, but the most probable derivation is from the Sanskrit

¹ This article is based principally on a *Monograph on the Banjāra Clan*, by Mr. N. F. Cumberlege of the Berār Police, believed to have been first written in 1869 and reprinted in 1882; notes on the Banjāras written by Colonel Mackenzie and printed in the *Berār Census Report* (1881) and the *Pioneer* newspaper (communicated by

Mrs. Horsburgh); Major Gunthorpe's *Criminal Tribes*; papers by Mr. M. E. Khare, Extra-Assistant Commissioner, Chānda; Mr. Nārāyan Rao, Tahr., Betūl; Mr. Mukund Rao, Manager, Pachmarhi Estate; and information on the caste collected in Yeotmāl and Nimār.



banijya kara, a merchant. Sir H. M. Elliot held that the name Banjāra was of great antiquity, quoting a passage from the Dasa Kumara Charita of the eleventh or twelfth century. But it was subsequently shown by Professor Cowell that the name Banjāra did not occur in the original text of this work.¹ Banjāras are supposed to be the people mentioned by Arrian in the fourth century B.C., as leading a wandering life, dwelling in tents and letting out for hire their beasts of burden.² But this passage merely proves the existence of carriers and not of the Banjāra caste. Mr. Crooke states³ that the first mention of Banjāras in Muhammadan history is in Sikandar's attack on Dholpur in A.D. 1504.⁴ It seems improbable, therefore, that the Banjāras accompanied the different Muhammadan invaders of India, as might have been inferred from the fact that they came into the Deccan in the train of the forces of Aurāngzeb. The caste has indeed two Muhammadan sections, the Turkīa and Mukeri.⁵ But both of these have the same Rājput clan names as the Hindu branch of the caste, and it seems possible that they may have embraced Islām under the proselytising influence of Aurāngzeb, or simply owing to their having been employed with the Muhammadan troops. The great bulk of the caste in southern India are Hindus, and there seems no reason for assuming that its origin was Muhammadan.

It may be suggested that the Banjāras are derived from the Chāran or Bhāt caste of Rājputāna. Mr. Cumberlege, whose *Monograph* on the caste in Berār is one of the best authorities, states that of the four divisions existing there the Chārans are the most numerous and by far the most interesting class.⁶ In the article on Bhāt it has been explained how the Chārans or bards, owing to their readiness

2. Ban-jāras derived from the Chārans or Bhāts.

¹ Mr. Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Banjāra, para. 1.

² *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 150.

³ *Ibidem*, para. 2, quoting Dowson's Elliot, v. 100.

⁴ Khan Bahadur Fazalullah Lutfullah Faridi in the *Bombay Gazetteer* (*Muhammadans of Gujarat*, p. 86) quoting from General Briggs (*Trans-*

actions Bombay Literary Society, vol. i. 183) says that "as carriers of grain for Muhammadan armies the Banjāras have figured in history from the days of Muhammad Tughlak (A.D. 1340) to those of Aurāngzeb."

⁵ Sir H. M. Elliot's *Supplemental Glossary*.

⁶ *Monograph on the Banjāra Clan*, p. 8.



to kill themselves rather than give up the property entrusted to their care, became the best safe-conduct for the passage of goods in Rājputāna. The name Chāran is generally held to mean 'Wanderer,' and in their capacity of bards the Chārans were accustomed to travel from court to court of the different chiefs in quest of patronage. They were first protected by their sacred character and afterwards by their custom of *trāga* or *chāndī*, that is, of killing themselves when attacked and threatening their assailants with the dreaded fate of being haunted by their ghosts. Mr. Bhimbhai Kirparām¹ remarks: "After Parāsūrāma's dispersion of the Kshatris the Chārans accompanied them in their southward flight. In those troubled times the Chārans took charge of the supplies of the Kshatri forces and so fell to their present position of cattle-breeders and grain-carriers. . . ." Most of the Chārans are graziers, cattle-sellers and pack-carriers. Colonel Tod says:² "The Chārans and Bhāts or bards and genealogists are the chief carriers of these regions (Mārṅwār); their sacred character overawes the lawless Rājput chief, and even the savage Koli and Bhīl and the plundering Sahrai of the desert dread the anathema of these singular races, who conduct the caravans through the wildest and most desolate regions." In another passage Colonel Tod identifies the Chārans and Banjāras³ as follows: "Murlāh is an excellent township inhabited by a community of Chārans of the tribe Cucholia (Kacheli), who are Bunjārris (carriers) by profession, though poets by birth. The alliance is a curious one, and would appear incongruous were not gain the object generally in both cases. It was the sanctity of their office which converted our *bardais* (bards) into *bunjārris*, for their persons being sacred, the immunity extended likewise to their goods and saved them from all imposts; so that in process of time they became the free-traders of Rājputāna. I was highly gratified with the reception I received from the community, which collectively advanced to meet me at some distance from the town. The procession was headed by the village elders and all the fair Chāranis, who, as they approached, gracefully waved their

¹ *Hindus of Gujārāt*, p. 214 *et seq.*

² *Rājasthān*, i. 602.

³ *Ibidem*, ii. 570, 573.



scarfs over me until I was fairly made captive by the muses of Murlāh! It was a novel and interesting scene. The manly persons of the Chārans, clad in the flowing white robe with the high loose-folded turban inclined on one side, from which the *māla* or chaplet was gracefully suspended; and the *naiques* or leaders, with their massive necklaces of gold, with the image of the *pitriswar* (*manes*) depending therefrom, gave the whole an air of opulence and dignity. The females were uniformly attired in a skirt of dark-brown camlet, having a bodice of light-coloured stuff, with gold ornaments worked into their fine black hair; and all had the favourite *chūris* or rings of *hāthidānt* (elephant's tooth) covering the arm from the wrist to the elbow, and even above it." A little later, referring to the same Chāran community, Colonel Tod writes: "The *tānda* or caravan, consisting of four thousand bullocks, has been kept up amidst all the evils which have beset this land through Mughal and Marātha tyranny. The utility of these caravans as general carriers to conflicting armies and as regular tax-paying subjects has proved their safeguard, and they were too strong to be pillaged by any petty marauder, as any one who has seen a Banjāri encampment will be convinced. They encamp in a square, and their grain-bags piled over each other breast-high, with interstices left for their matchlocks, make no contemptible fortification. Even the ruthless Türk, Jamshīd Khān, set up a protecting tablet in favour of the Chārans of Murlāh, recording their exemption from *dānd* contributions, and that there should be no increase in duties, with threats to all who should injure the community. As usual, the sun and moon are appealed to as witnesses of good faith, and sculptured on the stone. Even the forest Bhil and mountain Mair have set up their signs of immunity and protection to the chosen of Hinglāz (tutelary deity); and the figures of a cow and its *kairi* (calf) carved in rude relief speak the agreement that they should not be slain or stolen within the limits of Murlāh."

In the above passage the community described by Colonel Tod were Chārans, but he identified them with Banjāras, using the name alternatively. He mentions their



large herds of pack-bullocks, for the management of which the Chārāns, who were graziers as well as bards, would naturally be adapted; the name given to the camp, *tānda*, is that generally used by the Banjāras; the women wore ivory bangles, which the Banjāra women wear.¹ In commenting on the way in which the women threw their scarves over him, making him a prisoner, Colonel Tod remarks: "This community had enjoyed for five hundred years the privilege of making prisoner any Rāna of Mewār who may pass through Murlāh, and keeping him in bondage until he gives them a *got* or entertainment. The patriarch (of the village) told me that I was in jeopardy as the Rāna's representative, but not knowing how I might have relished the joke had it been carried to its conclusion, they let me escape." Mr. Ball notes a similar custom of the Banjāra women far away in the Bastar State of the Central Provinces:² "To-day I passed through another Banjāra hamlet, from whence the women and girls all hurried out in pursuit, and a brazen-faced powerful-looking lass seized the bridle of my horse as he was being led by the *sais* in the rear. The *sais* and *chaprāsi* were both Muhammadans, and the forward conduct of these females perplexed them not a little, and the former was fast losing his temper at being thus assaulted by a woman." Colonel Mackenzie in his account of the Banjāra caste remarks:³ "It is certain that the Chārāns, whoever they were, first rose to the demand which the great armies of northern India, contending in exhausted countries far from their basis of supply, created, viz. the want of a fearless and reliable transport service. . . . The start which the Chārāns then acquired they retain among Banjāras to this day, though in very much diminished splendour and position. As they themselves relate, they were originally five brethren, Rāthor, Turi, Panwār, Chauhān and Jādon. But fortune particularly smiled on Bhika Rāthor, as his four sons, Mersi, Multāsi, Dheda and Khāmdār, great names among the

¹ This custom does not necessarily indicate a special connection between the Banjāras and Chārāns, as it is common to several castes in Rājputāna; but it indicates that the Banjāras came from Rājputāna. Banjāra men also

frequently wear the hair long, down to the neck, which is another custom of Rājputāna.

² *Jungle Life in India*, p. 517.

³ *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 152.



Chārans, rose immediately to eminence as commissariat transporters in the north. And not only under the Delhi Emperors, but under the Satāra, subsequently the Poona Rāj, and the Subāhship of the Nizām, did several of their descendants rise to consideration and power." It thus seems a reasonable hypothesis that the nucleus of the Banjāra caste was constituted by the Chārans or bards of Rājputāna. Mr. Bhimbhai Kirparām¹ also identifies the Chārans and Banjāras, but I have not been able to find the exact passage. The following notice² by Colonel Tone is of interest in this connection :

"The vast consumption that attends a Marātha army necessarily superinduces the idea of great supplies; yet, notwithstanding this, the native powers never concern themselves about providing for their forces, and have no idea of a grain and victualling department, which forms so great an object in a European campaign. The Banias or grain-sellers in an Indian army have always their servants ahead of the troops on the line of march, to purchase in the circumjacent country whatever necessaries are to be disposed of. Articles of consumption are never wanting in a native camp, though they are generally twenty-five per cent dearer than in the town bazārs; but independent of this mode of supply the Vanjāris or itinerant grain-merchants furnish large quantities, which they bring on bullocks from an immense distance. These are a very peculiar race, and appear a marked and discriminated people from any other I have seen in this country. Formerly they were considered so sacred that they passed in safety in the midst of contending armies; of late, however, this reverence for their character is much abated and they have been frequently plundered, particularly by Tipu."

The reference to the sacred character attaching to the Banjāras a century ago appears to be strong evidence in favour of their derivation from the Chārans. For it could scarcely have been obtained by any body of commissariat agents coming into India with the Muham-

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer, Hindus of Gujarāt.*

² *Letter on the Marāthas (1798), p. 67, India Office Tracts.*

madans. The fact that the example of disregarding it was first set by a Muhammadan prince points to the same conclusion.

Mr. Irvine notices the Banjāras with the Mughal armies in similar terms:¹ "It is by these people that the Indian armies in the field are fed, and they are never injured by either army. The grain is taken from them, but invariably paid for. They encamp for safety every evening in a regular square formed of the bags of grain of which they construct a breastwork. They and their families are in the centre, and the oxen are made fast outside. Guards with matchlocks and spears are placed at the corners, and their dogs do duty as advanced posts. I have seen them with droves of 5000 bullocks. They do not move above two miles an hour, as their cattle are allowed to graze as they proceed on the march."

One may suppose that the Chārans having acted as carriers for the Rājput chiefs and courts, both in time of peace and in their continuous intestinal feuds, were pressed into service when the Mughal armies entered Rājputāna and passed through it to Gujarāt and the Deccan. In adopting the profession of transport agents for the imperial troops they may have been amalgamated into a fresh caste with other Hindus and Muhammadans doing the same work, just as the camp language formed by the superposition of a Persian vocabulary on to a grammatical basis of Hindi became Urdu or Hindustāni. The readiness of the Chārans to commit suicide rather than give up property committed to their charge was not, however, copied by the Banjāras, and so far as I am aware there is no record of men of this caste taking their own lives, though they had little scruple with those of others.

3. Chāran
Banjāras
employed
with the
Mughal
armies.

The Chāran Banjāras, Mr. Cumberlege states,² first came to the Deccan with Asaf Khān in the campaign which closed with the annexation by the Emperor Shāh Jahān of Ahmadnagar and Berār about 1630. Their leaders or Nāiks were Bhangi and Jhangi of the Rāthor³ and

¹ *Army of the Indian Mughals*, p. 192.

² *Monograph*, p. 14, and *Berār Census Report* (1881) (Kitts), p. 151.

³ These are held to have been descendants of the Bhilka Rāthor referred to by Colonel Mackenzie above.



Bhagwān Dās of the Jādon clan. Bhangi and Jhangi had 180,000 pack-bullocks, and Bhagwān Dās 52,000. It was naturally an object with Asaf Khān to keep his commissariat well up with his force, and as Bhangi and Jhangi made difficulties about the supply of grass and water to their cattle, he gave them an order engraved on copper in letters of gold to the following effect :

*Ranjan kā pāni
Chhappar kā ghās
Din ke tin khūn muāf;
Aur jahān Asaf Jāh ke ghore
Wahān Bhangi Jhangi ke bail,*

which may be rendered as follows: "If you can find no water elsewhere you may even take it from the pots of my followers; grass you may take from the roofs of their huts; and I will pardon you up to three murders a day, provided that wherever I find my cavalry, Bhangi and Jhangi's bullocks shall be with them." This grant is still in the possession of Bhangi Nāik's descendant who lives at Musi, near Hingoli. He is recognised by the Hyderābād Court as the head Nāik of the Banjāra caste, and on his death his successor receives a *khillat* or dress-of-honour from His Highness the Nizām. After Asaf Khān's campaign and settlement in the Deccan, a quarrel broke out between the Rāthor clan, headed by Bhangi and Jhangi, and the Jādons under Bhagwān Dās, owing to the fact that Asaf Khān had refused to give Bhagwān Dās a grant like that quoted above. Both Bhangi and Bhagwān Dās were slain in the feud and the Jādons captured the standard, consisting of eight *thāns* (lengths) of cloth, which was annually presented by the Nizām to Bhangi's descendants. When Mr. Cumberlege wrote (1869), this standard was in the possession of Hatti Nāik, a descendant of Bhagwān Dās, who had an estate near Muchli Bunder, in the Madras Presidency. Colonel Mackenzie states¹ that the leaders of the Rāthor clan became so distinguished not only in their particular line but as men of war that the Emperors recognised their carrying distinctive standards, which were known as *dhal*

¹ See note 3, p. 168.



by the Rāthors themselves. Jhangi's family was also represented in the person of Rāmu Nāik, the *patel* or headman of the village of Yaoli in the Yeotmāl District. In 1791-92 the Banjāras were employed to supply grain to the British army under the Marquis of Cornwallis during the siege of Seringapatam,¹ and the Duke of Wellington in his Indian campaigns regularly engaged them as part of the commissariat staff of his army. On one occasion he said of them: "The Banjāras I look upon in the light of servants of the public, of whose grain I have a right to regulate the sale, always taking care that they have a proportionate advantage."²

internal
culture.

Mr. Cumberlege gives four main divisions of the caste in Berār, the Chārans, Mathurias, Labhānas and Dhāris. Of these the Chārans are by far the most numerous and important, and included all the famous leaders of the caste mentioned above. The Chārans are divided into the five clans, Rāthor, Panwār, Chauhān, Puri and Jādon or Burthia, all of these being the names of leading Rājput clans; and as the Chāran bards themselves were probably Rājputs, the Banjāras, who are descended from them, may claim the same lineage. Each clan or sept is divided into a number of subsepts; thus among the Rāthors the principal subsept is the Bhurkia, called after the Bhika Rāthor already mentioned; and this is again split into four groups, Mersi, Multāsi, Dheda and Khāmdār, named after his four sons. As a rule, members of the same clan, Panwār, Rāthor and so on, may not intermarry, but Mr. Cumberlege states that a man belonging to the Bānod or Bhurkia subsepts of the Rāthors must not take a wife from his own subsept, but may marry any other Rāthor girl. It seems probable that the same rulé may hold with the other subsepts, as it is most unlikely that intermarriage should still be prohibited among so large a body as the Rāthor Chārans have now become. It may be supposed therefore that the division into subsepts took place when it became too inconvenient to prohibit marriage

¹ General Briggs quoted by Mr. Faridi in *Bombay Gazetteer, Muhammadans of Gujārāt*, p. 86.

² A. Wellesley (1800), quoted in Mr. Crooke's edition of *Hobson-Jobson*, art. Brinjarry.



throughout the whole body of the sept, as has happened in other cases. The Mathuria Banjāras take their name from Mathura or Muttra and appear to be Brāhmans. "They wear the sacred thread,¹ know the *Gayatri Mantra*, and to the present day abstain from meat and liquor, subsisting entirely on grain and vegetables. They always had a sufficiency of Chārans and servants (*Jāngar*) in their villages to perform all necessary manual labour, and would not themselves work for a remuneration otherwise than by carrying grain, which was and still is their legitimate occupation; but it was not considered undignified to cut wood and grass for the household. Both Mathuria and Labhāna men are fairer than the Chārans; they wear better jewellery and their loin-cloths have a silk border, while those of the Chārans are of rough, common cloth." The Mathurias are sometimes known as Ahiwāsi, and may be connected with the Ahiwāsis of the Hindustāni Districts, who also drive pack-bullocks and call themselves Brāhmans. But it is naturally a sin for a Brāhman to load the sacred ox, and any one who does so is held to have derogated from the priestly order. The Mathurias are divided according to Mr. Cumberlege into four groups called Pānde, Dube, Tiwari and Chaube, all of which are common titles of Hindustāni Brāhmans and signify a man learned in one, two, three and four Vedas respectively. It is probable that these groups are exogamous, marrying with each other, but this is not stated. The third division, the Labhānas, may derive their name from *lavana*, salt, and probably devoted themselves more especially to the carriage of this staple. They are said to be Rājput, and to be descended from Mota and Mola, the cowherds of Krishna. The fourth subdivision are the Dhāris or bards of the caste, who rank below the others. According to their own story² their ancestor was a member of the Bhāt caste, who became a disciple of Nānak, the Sikh apostle, and with him attended a feast given by the Mughal Emperor Humayun. Here he ate the flesh of a cow or buffalo, and in consequence became a Muhammadan and was circumcised. He was employed as a musician at the Mughal court, and his sons

¹ Cumberlege, *loc. cit.*

² Cumberlege, pp. 28, 29.



joined the Chārāns and became the bards of the Banjāra caste. "The Dhāris," Mr. Cumberlege continues, "are both musicians and mendicants; they sing in praise of their own and the Chāran ancestors and of the old kings of Delhi; while at certain seasons of the year they visit Chāran hamlets, when each family gives them a young bullock or a few rupees. They are Muhammadans, but worship Sārasvati and at their marriages offer up a he-goat to Gāji and Gandha, the two sons of the original Bhāt, who became a Muhammadan. At burials a Fakīr is called to read the prayers."

5. Minor subcastes.

Besides the above four main divisions, there are a number of others, the caste being now of a very mixed character. Two principal Muhammadan groups are given by Sir H. Elliot, the Tūrkiā and Mukeri. The Tūrkiā have thirty-six septs, some with Rājput names and others territorial or titular. They seem to be a mixed group of Hindus who may have embraced Islam as the religion of their employers. The Mukeri Banjāras assert that they derive their name from Mecca (Makka), which one of their Nāiks, who had his camp in the vicinity, assisted Father Abraham in building.¹ Mr. Crooke thinks that the name may be a corruption of Makkeri and mean a seller of maize. Mr. Cumberlege says of them: "Multānis and Mukeris have been called Banjāras also, but have nothing in common with the caste; the Multānis are carriers of grain and the Mukeris of wood and timber, and hence the confusion may have arisen between them." But they are now held to be Banjāras by common usage; in Saugor the Mukeris also deal in cattle. From Chānda a different set of subcastes is reported called Bhūsarjin, Ladjin, Saojin and Kānhejin; the first may take their name from *bhūsa*, the chaff of wheat, while Lad is the term used for people coming from Gujarāt, and Sao means a banker. In Sambalpur again a class of Thuria Banjāras is found, divided into the Badesia, Atharadesia, Navadesia and Chhadesia, or the men of the 52 districts, the 18 districts, the 9 districts and the 6 districts respectively. The first and last two of these take food and marry with each other. Other groups are the Guār Banjāras, apparently from Guāra or Gwāla, a milkman, the

¹ Elliot's *Races*, quoted by Mr. Crooke, *ibidem*.



Gūgūria Banjāras, who may, Mr. Hira Lāl suggests, take their name from trading in *gūgar*, a kind of gum, and the Bahrūp Banjāras, who are Nats or acrobats. In Berār also a number of the caste have become respectable cultivators and now call themselves Wanjāri, disclaiming any connection with the Banjāras, probably on account of the bad reputation for crime attached to these latter. Many of the Wanjāris have been allowed to rank with the Kunbi caste, and call themselves Wanjāri Kunbis in order the better to dissociate themselves from their parent caste. The existing caste is therefore of a very mixed nature, and the original Brāhman and Chāran strains, though still perfectly recognisable, cannot have maintained their purity.

At a betrothal in Nimār the bridegroom and his friends come and stay in the next village to that of the bride. The two parties meet on the boundary of the village, and here the bride-price is fixed, which is often a very large sum, ranging from Rs. 200 to Rs. 1000. Until the price is paid the father will not let the bridegroom into his house. In Yeotmāl, when a betrothal is to be made, the parties go to a liquor-shop and there a betel-leaf and a large handful of sugar are distributed to everybody. Here the price to be paid for the bride amounts to Rs. 40 and four young bullocks. Prior to the wedding the bridegroom goes and stays for a month or so in the house of the bride's father, and during this time he must provide a supply of liquor daily for the bride's male relatives. The period was formerly longer, but now extends to a month at the most. While he resides at the bride's house the bridegroom wears a cloth over his head so that his face cannot be seen. Probably the prohibition against seeing him applies to the bride only, as the rule in Berār is that between the betrothal and marriage of a Chāran girl she may not eat or drink in the bridegroom's house, or show her face to him or any of his relatives. Mathuria girls must be wedded before they are seven years old, but the Chārans permit them to remain single until after adolescence.

6. Marriage: betrothal.

Banjāra marriages are frequently held in the rains, a season forbidden to other Hindus, but naturally the most convenient to them, because in the dry weather they are usually

7. Marriage.



travelling. For the marriage ceremony they pitch a tent in lieu of the marriage-shed, and on the ground they place two rice-pounding pestles, round which the bride and bridegroom make the seven turns. Others substitute for the pestles a pack-saddle with two bags of grain in order to symbolise their camp life. During the turns the girl's hand is held by the Joshi or village priest, or some other Brāhman, in case she should fall; such an occurrence being probably a very unlucky omen. Afterwards, the girl runs away and the Brāhman has to pursue and catch her. In Bhandāra the girl is clad only in a light skirt and breast-cloth, and her body is rubbed all over with oil in order to make his task more difficult. During this time the bride's party pelt the Brāhman with rice, turmeric and areca-nuts, and sometimes even with stones; and if he is forced to cry with the pain, it is considered lucky. But if he finally catches the girl, he is conducted to a dais and sits there holding a brass plate in front of him, into which the bridegroom's party drop presents. A case is mentioned of a Brāhman having obtained Rs. 70 in this manner. Among the Mathuria Banjāras of Berār the ceremony resembles the usual Hindu type.¹ Before the wedding the families bring the branches of eight or ten different kinds of trees, and perform the *hom* or fire sacrifice with them. A Brāhman knots the clothes of the couple together, and they walk round the fire. When the bride arrives at the bridegroom's hamlet after the wedding, two small brass vessels are given to her; she fetches water in these and returns them to the women of the boy's family, who mix this with other water previously drawn, and the girl, who up to this period was considered of no caste at all, becomes a Mathuria.² Food is cooked with this water, and the bride and bridegroom are formally received into the husband's *kuri* or hamlet. It is possible that the mixing of the water may be a survival of the blood covenant, whereby a girl was received into her husband's clan on her marriage by her blood being mixed with that of her husband.³ Or it may be simply symbolical of the union of the families. In some localities after the wedding the bride and bridegroom are made to

¹ Cumberlege, pp. 4, 5.

² Cumberlege, *l.c.*

³ This custom is noticed in the article on Khairwār.



stand on two bullocks, which are driven forward, and it is believed that whichever of them falls off first will be the first to die.

Owing to the scarcity of women in the caste a widow is seldom allowed to go out of the family, and when her husband dies she is taken either by his elder or younger brother; this is in opposition to the usual Hindu practice, which forbids the marriage of a woman to her deceased husband's elder brother, on the ground that as successor to the headship of the joint family he stands to her, at least potentially, in the light of a father. If the widow prefers another man and runs away to him, the first husband's relatives claim compensation, and threaten, in the event of its being refused, to abduct a girl from this man's family in exchange for the widow. But no case of abduction has occurred in recent years. In Berār the compensation claimed in the case of a woman marrying out of the family amounts to Rs. 75, with Rs. 5 for the Nāik or headman of the family. Should the widow elope without her brother-in-law's consent, he chooses ten or twelve of his friends to go and sit *dharna* (starving themselves) before the hut of the man who has taken her. He is then bound to supply these men with food and liquor until he has paid the customary sum, when he may marry the widow.¹ In the event of the second husband being too poor to pay monetary compensation, he gives a goat, which is cut into eighteen pieces and distributed to the community.²

8. Widow remarriage.

After the birth of a child the mother is unclean for five days, and lives apart in a separate hut, which is run up for her use in the *kuri* or hamlet. On the sixth day she washes the feet of all the children in the *kuri*, feeds them and then returns to her husband's hut. When a child is born in a moving *tānda* or camp, the same rule is observed, and for five days the mother walks alone after the camp during the daily march. The caste bury the bodies of unmarried

9. Birth and death.

¹ Camberlege, p. 18.

² Mr. Hira Lāl suggests that this custom may have something to do with the phrase *Athāra jāt ke gāyi*, or 'She has gone to the eighteen castes,' used of a woman who has been turned out of the community. This phrase

seems, however, to be a euphemism, eighteen castes being a term of indefinite multitude for any or no caste. The number eighteen may be selected from the same unknown association which causes the goat to be cut into eighteen pieces.



persons and those dying of smallpox and burn the others. Their rites of mourning are not strict, and are observed only for three days. The Banjāras have a saying: "Death in a foreign land is to be preferred, where there are no kinsfolk to mourn, and the corpse is a feast for birds and animals"; but this may perhaps be taken rather as an expression of philosophic resignation to the fate which must be in store for many of them, than a real preference, as with most people the desire to die at home almost amounts to an instinct.

10. Reli-
gion :
Banjāri
Devi.

One of the tutelary deities of the Banjāras is Banjāri Devi, whose shrine is usually located in the forest. It is often represented by a heap of stones, a large stone smeared with vermilion being placed on the top of the heap to represent the goddess. When a Banjāra passes the place he casts a stone upon the heap as a prayer to the goddess to protect him from the dangers of the forest. A similar practice of offering bells from the necks of cattle is recorded by Mr. Thurston:¹ "It is related by Moor that he passed a tree on which were hanging several hundred bells. This was a superstitious sacrifice of the Banjāras (Lambāris), who, passing this tree, are in the habit of hanging a bell or bells upon it, which they take from the necks of their sick cattle, expecting to leave behind them the complaint also. Our servants particularly cautioned us against touching these diabolical bells, but as a few of them were taken for our own cattle, several accidents which happened were imputed to the anger of the deity to whom these offerings were made; who, they say, inflicts the same disorder on the unhappy bullock who carries a bell from the tree, as that from which he relieved the donor." In their houses the Banjāri Devi is represented by a pack-saddle set on high in the room, and this is worshipped before the caravans set out on their annual tours.

11. Mithu
Bhūkia.

Another deity is Mithu Bhūkia, an old freebooter, who lived in the Central Provinces; he is venerated by the dacoits as the most clever dacoit known in the annals of the caste, and a hut was usually set apart for him in each

¹ *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, p. 344, quoting from Moor's *Narrative of Little's Detachment*.



hamlet, a staff carrying a white flag being planted before it. Before setting out for a dacoity, the men engaged would assemble at the hut of Mīthu Bhūkia, and, burning a lamp before him, ask for an omen; if the wick of the lamp drooped the omen was propitious, and the men present then set out at once on the raid without returning home. They might not speak to each other nor answer if challenged; for if any one spoke the charm would be broken and the protection of Mīthu Bhūkia removed; and they should either return to take the omens again or give up that particular dacoity altogether.¹ It has been recorded as a characteristic trait of Banjāras that they will, as a rule, not answer if spoken to when engaged on a robbery, and the custom probably arises from this observance; but the worship of Mīthu Bhūkia is now frequently neglected. After a successful dacoity a portion of the spoil would be set apart for Mīthu Bhūkia, and of the balance the Nāik or headman of the village received two shares if he participated in the crime; the man who struck the first blow or did most towards the common object also received two shares, and all the rest one share. With Mīthu Bhūkia's share a feast was given at which thanks were returned to him for the success of the enterprise, a burnt offering of incense being made in his tent and a libation of liquor poured over the flagstaff. A portion of the food was sent to the women and children, and the men sat down to the feast. Women were not allowed to share in the worship of Mīthu Bhūkia nor to enter his hut.

Another favourite deity is Siva Bhāia, whose story is given by Colonel Mackenzie² as follows: "The love borne by Māri Māta, the goddess of cholera, for the handsome Siva Rāthor, is an event of our own times (1874); she proposed to him, but his heart being pre-engaged he rejected her; and in consequence his earthly bride was smitten sick and died, and the hand of the goddess fell heavily on Siva himself, thwarting all his schemes and blighting his fortunes and possessions, until at last he gave himself up to her. She then possessed him and caused him to prosper exceedingly, gifting him with supernatural power until his fame was

12. Siva
Bhāia.

¹ Cumberlege, p. 35.

² *Berār Census Report*, 1881.



noised abroad, and he was venerated as the saintly Siva Bhāia or great brother to all women, being himself unable to marry. But in his old age the goddess capriciously wished him to marry and have issue, but he refused and was slain and buried at Pohur in Berār. A temple was erected over him and his kinsmen became priests of it, and hither large numbers are attracted by the supposed efficacy of vows made to Siva, the most sacred of all oaths being that taken in his name." If a Banjāra swears by Siva Bhāia, placing his right hand on the bare head of his son and heir, and grasping a cow's tail in his left, he will fear to perjure himself, lest by doing so he should bring injury on his son and a murrain on his cattle.¹

13. Wor-
ship of
cattle.

Naturally also the Banjāras worshipped their pack-cattle.² "When sickness occurs they lead the sick man to the feet of the bullock called Hātadiya.³ On this animal no burden is ever laid, but he is decorated with streamers of red-dyed silk, and tinkling bells with many brass chains and rings on neck and feet, and silken tassels hanging in all directions; he moves steadily at the head of the convoy, and at the place where he lies down when he is tired they pitch their camp for the day; at his feet they make their vows when difficulties overtake them, and in illness, whether of themselves or their cattle, they trust to his worship for a cure."

14. Con-
nection
with the
Sikhs.

Mr. Balfour also mentions in his paper that the Banjāras call themselves Sikhs, and it is noticeable that the Chāran subcaste say that their ancestors were three Rājput boys who followed Guru Nānak, the prophet of the Sikhs. The influence of Nānak appears to have been widely extended over northern India, and to have been felt by large bodies of the people other than those who actually embraced the Sikh religion. Cumberlege states⁴ that before starting to his marriage the bridegroom ties a rupee in his turban in honour of Guru Nānak, which is afterwards expended in sweetmeats.

¹ Cumberlege, p. 21.

² The following instance is taken from Mr. Balfour's article, 'Migratory Tribes of Central India,' in *J.A.S.B.*, new series, vol. xiii., quoted in Mr.

Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*.

³ From the Sanskrit Hātya-ādhyā, meaning 'That which it is most sinful to slay' (Balfour).

⁴ *Monograph*, p. 12.



But otherwise the modern Banjāras do not appear to retain any Sikh observances.

“The Banjāras,” Sir A. Lyall writes,¹ “are terribly vexed by witchcraft, to which their wandering and precarious existence especially exposes them in the shape of fever, rheumatism and dysentery. Solemn inquiries are still held in the wild jungles where these people camp out like gipsies, and many an unlucky hag has been strangled by sentence of their secret tribunals.” The business of magic and witchcraft was in the hands of two classes of Bhagats or magicians, one good and the other bad,² who may correspond to the European practitioners of black and white magic. The good Bhagat is called Nimbu-kātna or lemon-cutter, a lemon speared on a knife being a powerful averter of evil spirits. He is a total abstainer from meat and liquor, and fasts once a week on the day sacred to the deity whom he venerates, usually Mahādeo; he is highly respected and never panders to vice. But the Jānta, the ‘Wise or Cunning Man,’ is of a different type, and the following is an account of the devilry often enacted when a deputation visited him to inquire into the cause of a prolonged illness, a cattle murrain, a sudden death or other misfortune. A woman might often be called a Dākun or witch in spite, and when once this word had been used, the husband or nearest male relative would be regularly bullied into consulting the Jānta. Or if some woman had been ill for a week, an avaricious³ husband or brother would begin to whisper foul play. Witchcraft would be mentioned, and the wise man called in. He would give the sufferer a quid of betel, muttering an incantation, but this rarely effected a cure, as it was against the interest of all parties that it should do so. The sufferer’s relatives would then go to their Nāik, tell him that the sick person was bewitched, and ask him to send a deputation to the Jānta or witch-doctor. This would be at once despatched, consisting of one male adult from each house in the hamlet, with one of the sufferer’s relatives. On the road the party would bury a bone or other article to

15. Witchcraft.

¹ *Asiatic Studies*, i. p. 118 (ed. 1899).

² Cumberlege, p. 23 *et seq.* The description of witchcraft is wholly re-

produced from his *Monograph*.

³ His motive being the fine inflicted on the witch’s family.



test the wisdom of the witch-doctor. But he was not to be caught out, and on their arrival he would bid the deputation rest, and come to him for consultation on the following day. Meanwhile during the night the Jānta would be thoroughly coached by some accomplice in the party. Next morning, meeting the deputation, he would tell every man all particulars of his name and family; name the invalid, and tell the party to bring materials for consulting the spirits, such as oil, vermilion, sugar, dates, cocoanut, *chironji*,¹ and sesamum. In the evening, holding a lamp, the Jānta would be possessed by Māriai, the goddess of cholera; he would mention all particulars of the sick man's illness, and indignantly inquire why they had buried the bone on the road, naming it and describing the place. If this did not satisfy the deputation, a goat would be brought, and he would name its sex with any distinguishing marks on the body. The sick person's representative would then produce his *nazar* or fee, formerly Rs. 25, but lately the double of this or more. The Jānta would now begin a sort of chant, introducing the names of the families of the *kuri* other than that containing her who was to be proclaimed a witch, and heap on them all kinds of abuse. Finally, he would assume an ironic tone, extol the virtues of a certain family, become facetious, and praise its representative then present. This man would then question the Jānta on all points regarding his own family, his connections, worldly goods, and what gods he worshipped, ask who was the witch, who taught her sorcery, and how and why she practised it in this particular instance. But the witch-doctor, having taken care to be well coached, would answer everything correctly and fix the guilt on to the witch. A goat would be sacrificed and eaten with liquor, and the deputation would return. The punishment for being proclaimed a Dākun or witch was formerly death to the woman and a fine to be paid by her relatives to the bewitched person's family. The woman's husband or her sons would be directed to kill her, and if they refused, other men were deputed to murder her, and bury the body at once with all the clothing and ornaments then on her person, while a further fine would be exacted from the family for not doing away with her themselves.

¹ The fruit of *Buchanania latifolia*.



But murder for witchcraft has been almost entirely stopped, and nowadays the husband, after being fined a few head of cattle, which are given to the sick man, is turned out of the village with his wife. It is quite possible, however, that an obnoxious old hag would even now not escape death, especially if the money fine were not forthcoming, and an instance is known in recent times of a mother being murdered by her three sons. The whole village combined to screen these amiable young men, and eventually they made the Jānta the scapegoat, and he got seven years, while the murderers could not be touched. Colonel Mackenzie writes that, "Curious to relate, the Jāntas, known locally as Bhagats, in order to become possessed of their alleged powers of divination and prophecy, require to travel to Kazhe, beyond Surat, there to learn and be instructed by low-caste Koli impostors." This is interesting as an instance of the powers of witchcraft being attributed by the Hindus or higher race to the indigenous primitive tribes, a rule which Dr. Tylor and Dr. Jevons consider to hold good generally in the history of magic.

Several instances are known also of the Banjāras having practised human sacrifice. Mr. Thurston states:¹ "In former times the Lambādīs, before setting out on a journey, used to procure a little child and bury it in the ground up to the shoulders, and then drive their loaded bullocks over the unfortunate victim. In proportion to the bullocks thoroughly trampling the child to death, so their belief in a successful journey increased." The Abbé Dubois describes another form of sacrifice:²

16. Human sacrifice.

"The Lambādīs are accused of the still more atrocious crime of offering up human sacrifices. When they wish to perform this horrible act, it is said, they secretly carry off the first person they meet. Having conducted the victim to some lonely spot, they dig a hole in which they bury him up to the neck. While he is still alive they make a sort of lamp of dough made of flour, which they place on his head; this they fill with oil, and light four wicks in it. Having done this, the men and women join hands and, forming a

¹ *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, p. 507, quoting from the Rev. J. Cain, *Ind. Ant.* viii. (1879).

² *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 70.



circle, dance round their victim, singing and making a great noise until he expires." Mr. Cumberlege records¹ the following statement of a child kidnapped by a Banjāra caravan in 1871. After explaining how he was kidnapped and the tip of his tongue cut off to give him a defect in speech, the Kunbi lad, taken from Sāhungarhi, in the Bhandāra District, went on to say that, "The *tānda* (caravan) encamped for the night in the jungle. In the morning a woman named Gangi said that the devil was in her and that a sacrifice must be made. On this four men and three women took a boy to a place they had made for *pūja* (worship). They fed him with milk, rice and sugar, and then made him stand up, when Gangi drew a sword and approached the child, who tried to run away; caught and brought back to this place, Gangi, holding the sword with both hands and standing on the child's right side, cut off his head with one blow. Gangi collected the blood and sprinkled it on the idol; this idol is made of stone, is about 9 inches high, and has something sparkling in its forehead. The camp marched that day, and for four or five days consecutively, without another sacrifice; but on the fifth day a young woman came to the camp to sell curds, and having bought some, the Banjāras asked her to come in in the evening and eat with them. She did come, and after eating with the women slept in the camp. Early next morning she was sacrificed in the same way as the boy had been, but it took three blows to cut off her head; it was done by Gangi, and the blood was sprinkled on the stone idol. About a month ago Sītārām, a Gond lad, who had also been kidnapped and was in the camp, told me to run away as it had been decided to offer me up in sacrifice at the next Jiuti festival, so I ran away." The child having been brought to the police, a searching and protracted inquiry was held, which, however, determined nothing, though it did not disprove his story.

17. Admission of outsiders : kidnapped children and slaves.

The Banjāra caste is not closed to outsiders, but the general rule is to admit only women who have been married to Banjāra men. Women of the lowest and impure castes are excluded, and for some unknown reason the Patwas² and

¹ *Monograph*, p. 19.

thread and the Nuniās are masons and navvies.

² The Patwas are weavers of silk



Nunias are bracketed with these. In Nimār it is stated that formerly Gonds, Korkus and even Balāhis¹ might become Banjāras, but this does not happen now, because the caste has lost its occupation of carrying goods, and there is therefore no inducement to enter it. In former times they were much addicted to kidnapping children—these were whipped up or enticed away whenever an opportunity presented itself during their expeditions. The children were first put into the *gonis* or grain bags of the bullocks and so carried for a few days, being made over at each halt to the care of a woman, who would pop the child back into its bag if any stranger passed by the encampment. The tongues of boys were sometimes slit or branded with hot gold, this last being the ceremony of initiation into the caste still used in Nimār. Girls, if they were as old as seven, were sometimes disfigured for fear of recognition, and for this purpose the juice of the marking-nut² tree would be smeared on one side of the face, which burned into the skin and entirely altered the appearance. Such children were known as Jāngar. Girls would be used as concubines and servants of the married wife, and boys would also be employed as servants. Jāngar boys would be married to Jāngar girls, both remaining in their condition of servitude. But sometimes the more enterprising of them would abscond and settle down in a village. The rule was that for seven generations the children of Jāngars or slaves continued in that condition, after which they were recognised as proper Banjāras. The Jāngar could not draw in smoke through the stem of the huqqa when it was passed round in the assembly, but must take off the stem and inhale from the bowl. The Jāngar also could not eat off the bell-metal plates of his master, because these were liable to pollution, but must use brass plates. At one time the Banjāras conducted a regular traffic in female slaves between Gujarāt and Central India, selling in each country the girls whom they had kidnapped in the other.³

¹ An impure caste of weavers, ranking with the Mahārs.

² *Semecarpus Anacardium*.

³ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, ii. p. 296.



Up to twelve years of age a Chāran girl only wears a skirt with a shoulder-cloth tucked into the waist and carried over the left arm and the head. After this she may have anklets and bangles on the forearm and a breast-cloth. But until she is married she may not have the *wānkəri* or curved anklet, which marks that estate, nor wear bone or ivory bangles on the upper arm.¹ When she is ten years old a Labhāna girl is given two small bundles containing a nut, some cowries and rice, which are knotted to two corners of the *dupatta* or shoulder-cloth and hung over the shoulder, one in front and one behind. This denotes maidenhood. The bundles are considered sacred, are always knotted to the shoulder-cloth in wear, and are only removed to be tucked into the waist at the girl's marriage, where they are worn till death. These bundles alone distinguish the Labhāna from the Mathuria woman. Women often have their hair hanging down beside the face in front and woven behind with silver thread into a plait down the back. This is known as Anthi, and has a number of cowries at the end. They have large bell-shaped ornaments of silver tied over the head and hanging down behind the ears, the hollow part of the ornament being stuffed with sheep's wool dyed red; and to these are attached little bells, while the anklets on the feet are also hollow and contain little stones or balls, which tinkle as they move. They have skirts, and separate short cloths drawn across the shoulders according to the northern fashion, usually red or green in colour, and along the skirt-borders double lines of cowries are sewn. Their breast-cloths are profusely ornamented with needle-work embroidery and small pieces of glass sewn into them, and are tied behind with cords of many colours whose ends are decorated with cowries and beads. Strings of beads, ten to twenty thick, threaded on horse-hair, are worn round the neck. Their favourite ornaments are cowries,² and they

¹ Cumberlege, p. 16.

² Small double shells which are still used to a slight extent as a currency in backward tracts. This would seem an impossibly cumbrous method of carrying money about nowadays, but I have been informed by a comparatively young official that in his father's time,

change for a rupee could not be had in Chhattisgarh outside the two principal towns. As the cowries were a form of currency they were probably held sacred, and hence sewn on to clothes as a charm, just as gold and silver are used for ornaments.



Banjāra, Collo., Derby.

BANJĀRA WOMEN WITH THE *SINGH* OR HORN.



have these on their dress, in their houses and on the trappings of their bullocks. On the arms they have ten or twelve bangles of ivory, or in default of this lac, horn or cocoanut-shell. Mr. Ball states that he was "at once struck by the peculiar costumes and brilliant clothing of these Indian gipsies. They recalled to my mind the appearance of the gipsies of the Lower Danube and Wallachia."¹ The most distinctive ornament of a Banjāra married woman is, however, a small stick about 6 inches long made of the wood of the *khair* or catechu. In Nimār this is given to a woman by her husband at marriage, and she wears it afterwards placed upright on the top of the head, the hair being wound round it and the head-cloth draped over it in a graceful fashion. Widows leave it off, but on remarriage adopt it again. The stick is known as *chunda* by the Banjāras, but outsiders call it *singh* or horn. In Yeotmāl, instead of one, the women have two little sticks fixed upright in the hair. The rank of the woman is said to be shown by the angle at which she wears this horn.² The dress of the men presents no features of special interest. In Nimār they usually have a necklace of coral beads, and some of them carry, slung on a thread round the neck, a

¹ *Jungle Life in India*, p. 516.

² Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* contains the following notice of horns as an article of dress: "Mr. Buckingham says of a Tyrian lady, 'She wore on her head a hollow silver horn rearing itself up obliquely from the forehead. It was some four inches in diameter at the root and pointed at the extremity. This peculiarity reminded me forcibly of the expression of the Psalmist: "Lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck. All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted" (Ps. lxxv. 5, 10).' Bruce found in Abyssinia the silver horns of warriors and distinguished men. In the reign of Henry V. the horned headgear was introduced into England and from the effigy of Beatrice, Countess of Arundel, at Arundel Church, who is represented with the horns outspread to a great extent, we may infer that the length

of the head-horn, like the length of the shoe-point in the reign of Henry VI., etc., marked the degree of rank. To cut off such horns would be to degrade; and to exalt and extend such horns would be to add honour and dignity to the wearer." Webb (*Heritage of Dress*, p. 117) writes: "Mr. Elworthy in a paper to the British Association at Ipswich in 1865 considered the crown to be a development from horns of honour. He maintained that the symbols found in the head of the god Serapis were the elements from which were formed the composite head-dress called the crown into which horns entered to a very great extent." This seems a doubtful speculation, but still it may be quite possible that the idea of distinguishing by a crown the leader of the tribe was originally taken from the antlers of the leader of the herd. The helmets of the Vikings were also, I believe, decorated with horns.



tin tooth-pick and ear-scraper, while a small mirror and comb are kept in the head-cloth so that their toilet can be performed anywhere.

Mr. Cumberlege¹ notes that in former times all Chāran Banjāras when carrying grain for an army placed a twig of some tree, the sacred *nīm*² when available, in their turban to show that they were on the war-path; and that they would do the same now if they had occasion to fight to the death on any social matter or under any supposed grievance.

19. Social
customs.

The Banjāras eat all kinds of meat, including fowls and pork, and drink liquor. But the Mathurias abstain from both flesh and liquor. Major Gunthorpe states that the Banjāras are accustomed to drink before setting out for a dacoity or robbery and, as they smoke after drinking, the remains of leaf-pipes lying about the scene of action may indicate their handiwork. They rank below the cultivating castes, and Brāhmans will not take water to drink from them. When engaged in the carrying trade, they usually lived in *kuris* or hamlets attached to such regular villages as had considerable tracts of waste land belonging to them. When the *tānda* or caravan started on its long carrying trips, the young men and some of the women went with it with the working bullocks, while the old men and the remainder of the women and children remained to tend the breeding cattle in the hamlet. In Nimār they generally rented a little land in the village to give them a footing, and paid also a carrying fee on the number of cattle present. Their spare time was constantly occupied in the manufacture of hempen twine and sacking, which was much superior to that obtainable in towns. Even in Captain Forsyth's³ time (1866) the construction of railways and roads had seriously interfered with the Banjāras' calling, and they had perforce taken to agriculture. Many of them have settled in the new ryotwāri villages in Nimār as Government tenants. They still grow *tilli*⁴ in preference to other crops, because this oilseed can be raised without much labour or skill, and during their former nomadic life they were accustomed to

¹ *Monograph*, p. 40.

² *Melia indica*.

³ Author of the *Nimār Settlement Report*.

⁴ *Sesamum*.



sow it on any poor strip of land which they might rent for a season. Some of them also are accustomed to leave a part of their holding untilled in memory of their former and more prosperous life. In many villages they have not yet built proper houses, but continue to live in mud huts thatched with grass. They consider it unlucky to inhabit a house with a cement or tiled roof; this being no doubt a superstition arising from their camp life. Their houses must also be built so that the main beams do not cross, that is, the main beam of a house must never be in such a position that if projected it would cut another main beam; but the beams may be parallel. The same rule probably governed the arrangement of tents in their camps. In Nimār they prefer to live at some distance from water, probably that is of a tank or river; and this seems to be a survival of a usage mentioned by the Abbé Dubois:¹ "Among other curious customs of this odious caste is one that obliges them to drink no water which is not drawn from springs or wells. The water from rivers and tanks being thus forbidden, they are obliged in case of necessity to dig a little hole by the side of a tank or river and take the water filtering through, which, by this means, is supposed to become spring water." It is possible that this rule may have had its origin in a sanitary precaution. Colonel Sleeman notes² that the Banjāras on their carrying trips preferred by-paths through jungles to the high roads along cultivated plains, as grass, wood and water were more abundant along such paths; and when they could not avoid the high roads, they commonly encamped as far as they could from villages and towns, and upon the banks of rivers and streams, with the same object of obtaining a sufficient supply of grass, wood and water. Now it is well known that the decaying vegetation in these hill streams renders the water noxious and highly productive of malaria. And it seems possible that the perception of this fact led the Banjāras to dig shallow wells by the sides of the streams for their drinking-water, so that the supply thus obtained might be in some degree filtered by percolation through the

¹ *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 21.

² *Report on the Badhak or Bāgri Dacoits*, p. 310.

intervening soil and freed from its vegetable germs. And the custom may have grown into a taboo, its underlying reason being unknown to the bulk of them, and be still practised, though no longer necessary when they do not travel. If this explanation be correct it would be an interesting conclusion that the Banjāras anticipated so far as they were able the sanitary precaution by which our soldiers are supplied with portable filters when on the march.

20. The Nāik or headman. Banjāra dogs.

Each *kuri* (hamlet) or *tānda* (caravan) had a chief or leader with the designation of Nāik, a Telugu word meaning 'lord' or 'master.' The office of Nāik¹ was only partly hereditary, and the choice also depended on ability. The Nāik had authority to decide all disputes in the community, and the only appeal from him lay to the representatives of Bhangi and Jhangi Nāik's families at Narsi and Poona, and to Burthia Nāik's successors in the Telugu country. As already seen, the Nāik received two shares if he participated in a robbery or other crime, and a fee on the remarriage of a widow outside her family and on the discovery of a witch. Another matter in which he was specially interested was pig-sticking. The Banjāras have a particular breed of dogs, and with these they were accustomed to hunt wild pig on foot, carrying spears. When a pig was killed, the head was cut off and presented to the Nāik or headman, and if any man was injured or gored by the pig in the hunt, the Nāik kept and fed him without charge until he recovered.

The following notice of the Banjāras and their dogs may be reproduced:² "They are brave and have the reputation of great independence, which I am not disposed to allow to them. The Wanjāri indeed is insolent on the road, and will drive his bullocks up against a Sāhib or any one else; but at any disadvantage he is abject enough. I remember one who rather enjoyed seeing his dogs attack me, whom he supposed alone and unarmed, but the sight of a cocked pistol made him very quick in calling them off, and very humble in praying for their lives, which I spared,

¹ Colonel Mackenzie's notes.

² Mr. W. F. Sinclair, C.S., in *Ind. Ant.* iii. p. 184 (1874).



GROUP OF BANJĀRA WOMEN.

Bémrose, Collo., Derby.



less for his entreaties than because they were really noble animals. The Wanjāris are famous for their dogs, of which there are three breeds. The first is a large, smooth dog, generally black, sometimes fawn-coloured, with a square heavy head, most resembling the Danish boarhound. This is the true Wanjāri dog. The second is also a large, square-headed dog, but shaggy, more like a great underbred spaniel than anything else. The third is an almost tailless greyhound, of the type known all over India by the various names of Lāt, Polygar, Rāmpūri, etc. They all run both by sight and scent, and with their help the Wanjāris kill a good deal of game, chiefly pigs; but I think they usually keep clear of the old fighting boars. Besides sport and their legitimate occupations the Wanjāris seldom stickle at supplementing their resources by theft, especially of cattle; and they are more than suspected of infanticide."

The Banjāras are credited with great affection for their dogs, and the following legend is told about one of them: Once upon a time a Banjāra, who had a faithful dog, took a loan from a Bania (moneylender) and pledged his dog with him as security for payment. And some time afterwards, while the dog was with the moneylender, a theft was committed in his house, and the dog followed the thieves and saw them throw the property into a tank. When they went away the dog brought the Bania to the tank and he found his property. He was therefore very pleased with the dog and wrote a letter to his master, saying that the loan was repaid, and tied it round his neck and said to him, 'Now, go back to your master.' So the dog started back, but on his way he met his master, the Banjāra, coming to the Bania with the money for the repayment of the loan. And when the Banjāra saw the dog he was angry with him, not seeing the letter, and thinking he had run away, and said to him, 'Why did you come, betraying your trust?' and he killed the dog in a rage. And after killing him he found the letter and was very grieved, so he built a temple to the dog's memory, which is called the Kukurra Mandhi. And in the temple is the image of a dog. This temple is in the Drūg District, five miles from



Bālod. A similar story is told of the temple of Kukurra Math in Mandla.

21. Criminal tendencies of the caste.

The following notice of Banjāra criminals is abstracted from Major Gunthorpe's interesting account:¹ "In the palmy days of the tribe dacoities were undertaken on the most extensive scale. Gangs of fifty to a hundred and fifty well-armed men would go long distances from their *tāndas* or encampments for the purpose of attacking houses in villages, or treasure-parties or wealthy travellers on the high roads. The more intimate knowledge which the police have obtained concerning the habits of this race, and the detection and punishment of many criminals through approvers, have aided in stopping the heavy class of dacoities formerly prevalent, and their operations are now on a much smaller scale. In British territory arms are scarcely carried, but each man has a good stout stick (*gedī*), the bark of which is peeled off so as to make it look whitish and fresh. The attack is generally commenced by stone-throwing and then a rush is made, the sticks being freely used and the victims almost invariably struck about the head or face. While plundering, Hindustāni is sometimes spoken, but as a rule they never utter a word, but grunt signals to one another. Their loin-cloths are braced up, nothing is worn on the upper part of the body, and their faces are generally muffled. In house dacoities men are posted at different corners of streets, each with a supply of well-chosen round stones to keep off any people coming to the rescue. Banjāras are very expert cattle-lifters, sometimes taking as many as a hundred head or even more at a time. This kind of robbery is usually practised in hilly or forest country where the cattle are sent to graze. Secreting themselves they watch for the herdsman to have his usual midday doze and for the cattle to stray to a little distance. As many as possible are then driven off to a great distance and secreted in ravines and woods. If questioned they answer that the animals belong to landowners and have been given into their charge to graze, and as this is done every day the questioner thinks nothing more of it. After a time the cattle are

¹ *Notes on Criminal Tribes frequenting Bombay, Berār and the Central Provinces* (Bombay, 1882).



quietly sold to individual purchasers or taken to markets at a distance.

The Banjāras, however, are far from being wholly criminal, and the number who have adopted an honest mode of livelihood is continually on the increase. Some allowance must be made for their having been deprived of their former calling by the cessation of the continual wars which distracted India under native rule, and the extension of roads and railways which has rendered their mode of transport by pack-bullocks almost entirely obsolete. At one time practically all the grain exported from Chhattisgarh was carried by them. In 1881 Mr. Kitts noted that the number of Banjāras convicted in the Berār criminal courts was lower in proportion to the strength of the caste than that of Muhammadans, Brāhmans, Koshtis or Sunārs,¹ though the offences committed by them were usually more heinous. Colonel Mackenzie had quite a favourable opinion of them: "A Banjāra who can read and write is unknown. But their memories, from cultivation, are marvellous and very retentive. They carry in their heads, without slip or mistake, the most varied and complicated transactions and the share of each in such, striking a debtor and creditor account as accurately as the best-kept ledger, while their history and songs are all learnt by heart and transmitted orally from generation to generation. On the whole, and taken rightly in their clannish nature, their virtues preponderate over their vices. In the main they are truthful and very brave, be it in war or the chase, and once gained over are faithful and devoted adherents. With the pride of high descent and with the right that might gives in unsettled and troublous times, these Banjāras habitually lord it over and contemn the settled inhabitants of the plains. And now not having foreseen their own fate, or at least not timely having read the warnings given by a yearly diminishing occupation, which slowly has taken their bread away, it is a bitter pill for them to sink into the ryot class or, oftener still, under stern necessity to become the ryot's servant. But they are settling to their fate, and the time must come when

22. Their virtues.

¹ *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 151.



all their peculiar distinctive marks and traditions will be forgotten."

1. Origin
and
traditions.

Barai,¹ Tamboli, Pansāri.—The caste of growers and sellers of the betel-vine leaf. The three terms are used indifferently for the caste in the Central Provinces, although some shades of variation in the meaning can be detected even here—Barai signifying especially one who grows the betel-vine, and Tamboli the seller of the prepared leaf; while Pansāri, though its etymological meaning is also a dealer in *pān* or betel-vine leaves, is used rather in the general sense of a druggist or grocer, and is apparently applied to the Barai caste because its members commonly follow this occupation. In Bengal, however, Barai and Tamboli are distinct castes, the occupations of growing and selling the betel-leaf being there separately practised. And they have been shown as different castes in the India Census Tables of 1901, though it is perhaps doubtful whether the distinction holds good in northern India.² In the Central Provinces and Berār the Barais numbered nearly 60,000 persons in 1911. They reside principally in the Amraoti, Buldāna, Nāgpur, Wardha, Saugor and Jubbulpore Districts. The betel-vine is grown principally in the northern Districts of Saugor, Damoh and Jubbulpore and in those of Berār and the Nāgpur plain. It is noticeable also that the growers and sellers of the betel-vine numbered only 14,000 in 1911 out of 33,000 actual workers of the Barai caste; so that the majority of them are now employed in ordinary agriculture, field-labour and other avocations. No very probable derivation has been obtained for the word Barai, unless it comes from *bāri*, a hedge or enclosure, and simply means 'gardener.' Another derivation is from *barāna*, to avert hailstorms, a calling which they still practise in northern India. *Pān*, from the Sanskrit *parna* (leaf), is the leaf

¹ This notice is compiled principally from a good paper by Mr. M. C. Chatterji, retired Extra Assistant Commissioner, Jubbulpore, and from papers by Professor Sada Shiva Jai Rām, M.A., Government College, Jubbulpore, and Mr. Bhāskar Bāji Rao Desh-

mukh, Deputy Inspector of Schools, Nāgpur.

² Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, i. p. 330. Nesfield, *Brief View*, p. 15. *N.W.P. Census Report* (1891), p. 317.



par excellence. Owing to the fact that they produce what is perhaps the most esteemed luxury in the diet of the higher classes of native society, the Barais occupy a fairly good social position, and one legend gives them a Brāhman ancestry. This is to the effect that the first Barai was a Brāhman whom God detected in a flagrant case of lying to his brother. His sacred thread was confiscated and being planted in the ground grew up into the first betel-vine, which he was set to tend. Another story of the origin of the vine is given later in this article. In the Central Provinces its cultivation has probably only flourished to any appreciable extent for a period of about three centuries, and the Barai caste would appear to be mainly a functional one, made up of a number of immigrants from northern India and of recruits from different classes of the population, including a large proportion of the non-Aryan element.

The following endogamous divisions of the caste have been reported: Chaurāsia, so called from the Chaurāsi pargana of the Mirzāpur District; Panagaria from Panāgar in Jubbulpore; Mahobia from Mahoba in Hamīrpur; Jaiswār from the town of Jais in the Rai Bareli District of the United Provinces; Gangapāri, coming from the further side of the Ganges; and Pardeshi or Deshwāri, foreigners. The above divisions all have territorial names, and these show that a large proportion of the caste have come from northern India, the different batches of immigrants forming separate endogamous groups on their arrival here. Other subcastes are the Dūdh Barais, from *dūdh*, milk; the Kumān, said to be Kunbis who have adopted this occupation and become Barais; the Jharia and Kosaria, the oldest or jungly Barais, and those who live in Chhattīsgarh; the Purānia or old Barais; the Kumhārdhang, who are said to be the descendants of a potter on whose wheel a betel-vine grew; and the Lahuri Sen, who are a subcaste formed of the descendants of irregular unions. None of the other subcastes will take food from these last, and the name is locally derived from *lahuri*, lower, and *sen* or *shreni*, class. The caste is also divided into a large number of exogamous groups or septs which may be classified according to their names as territorial, titular and totemistic.

2. Caste sub-divisions.



Examples of territorial names are : Kanaujia of Kanauj, Burhānpuria of Burhānpur, Chitoria of Chitor in Rājputāna, Deobijha the name of a village in Chhattisgarh, and Kharondiha from Kharond or Kālāhandi State. These names must apparently have been adopted at random when a family either settled in one of these places or removed from it to another part of the country. Examples of titular names of groups are : Pandit (priest), Bhandāri (store-keeper), Patharha (hail-avorter), Batkāphor (pot-breaker), Bhulya (the forgetful one), Gūjar (a caste), Gahoi (a caste), and so on. While the following are totemistic groups : Katāra (dagger), Kulha (jackal), Bandrele (monkey), Chīkhalkār (from *chīkhal*, mud), Richharia (bear), and others. Where the group is named after another caste it probably indicates that a man of that caste became a Barai and founded a family ; while the fact that some groups are totemistic shows that a section of the caste is recruited from the indigenous tribes. The large variety of names discloses the diverse elements of which the caste is made up.

3. Marriage.

Marriage within the *gotra* or exogamous group and within three degrees of relationship between persons connected through females is prohibited. Girls are usually wedded before adolescence, but no stigma attaches to the family if they remain single beyond this period. If a girl is seduced by a man of the caste she is married to him by the *pāt*, a simple ceremony used for widows. In the southern Districts a barber cuts off a lock of her hair on the banks of a tank or river by way of penalty, and a fast is also imposed on her, while the caste-fellows exact a meal from her family. If she has an illegitimate child, it is given away to somebody else, if possible. A girl going wrong with an outsider is expelled from the caste.

Polygamy is permitted and no stigma attaches to the taking of a second wife, though it is rarely done except for special family reasons. Among the Marātha Barais the bride and bridegroom must walk five times round the marriage altar and then worship the stone slab and roller used for pounding spices. This seems to show that the trade of the Pansāri or druggist is recognised as being a proper avocation of the Barai. They subsequently have to worship the potter's



wheel. After the wedding the bride, if she is a child, goes as usual to her husband's house for a few days. In Chhattisgarh she is accompanied by a few relations, the party being known as Chauthia, and during her stay in her husband's house the bride is made to sleep on the ground. Widow marriage is permitted, and the ceremony is conducted according to the usage of the locality. In Betul the relatives of the widow take the second husband before Māroti's shrine, where he offers a nut and some betel-leaf. He is then taken to the mālguzār's house and presents to him Rs. 1-4-0, a cocoanut and some betel-vine leaf as the price of his assent to the marriage. If there is a Deshmukh¹ of the village, a cocoanut and betel-leaf are also given to him. The nut offered to Māroti represents the deceased husband's spirit, and is subsequently placed on a plank and kicked off by the new bridegroom in token of his usurping the other's place, and finally buried to lay the spirit. The property of the first husband descends to his children, and failing them his brother's children or collateral heirs take it before the widow. A bachelor espousing a widow must first go through the ceremony of marriage with a swallow-wort plant. When a widower marries a girl a silver impression representing the deceased first wife is made and worshipped daily with the family gods. Divorce is permitted on sufficient grounds at the instance of either party, being effected before the caste committee or *pañchāyat*. If a husband divorces his wife merely on account of bad temper, he must maintain her so long as she remains unmarried and continues to lead a moral life.

The Barais especially venerate the Nāg or cobra and observe the festival of Nāg-Panchmi (Cobra's fifth), in connection with which the following story is related. Formerly there was no betel-vine on the earth. But when the five Pāndava brothers celebrated the great horse sacrifice after their victory at Hastinapur, they wanted some, and so messengers were sent down below the earth to the residence of the queen of the serpents, in order to try and obtain it. Bāsuki, the queen of the serpents, obligingly cut off the top

4. Religion and social status.

¹ The name of a superior revenue officer under the Marāthas, now borne as a courtesy title by certain families.



joint of her little finger and gave it to the messengers. This was brought up and sown on the earth, and *pān* creepers grew out of the joint. For this reason the betel-vine has no blossoms or seeds, but the joints of the creepers are cut off and sown, when they sprout afresh; and the betel-vine is called Nāgbel or the serpent-creeper. On the day of Nāg-Panchmi the Barais go to the *bareja* with flowers, cocoanuts and other offerings, and worship a stone which is placed in it and which represents the Nāg or cobra. A goat or sheep is sacrificed and they return home, no leaf of the *pān* garden being touched on that day. A cup of milk is also left, in the belief that a cobra will come out of the *pān* garden and drink it. The Barais say that members of their caste are never bitten by cobras, though many of these snakes frequent the gardens on account of the moist coolness and shade which they afford. The Agarwāla Baniās, from whom the Barais will take food cooked without water, have also a legend of descent from a Nāga or snake princess. 'Our mother's house is of the race of the snake,' say the Agarwāls of Bihār.¹ The caste usually burn the dead, with the exception of children and persons dying of leprosy or snake-bite, whose bodies are buried. Mourning is observed for ten days in the case of adults and for three days for children. In Chhattisgarh if any portion of the corpse remains unburnt on the day following the cremation, the relatives are penalised to the extent of an extra feast to the caste-fellows. Children are named on the sixth or twelfth day after birth either by a Brāhman or by the women of the household. Two names are given, one for ceremonial and the other for ordinary use. When a Brāhman is engaged he gives seven names for a boy and five for a girl, and the parents select one out of these. The Barais do not admit outsiders into the caste, and employ Brāhmans for religious and ceremonial purposes. They are allowed to eat the flesh of clean animals, but very rarely do so, and they abstain from liquor. Brāhmans will take sweets and water from them, and they occupy a fairly good social position on account of the important nature of their occupation.

¹ *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Agarwāl.



"It has been mentioned," says Sir H. Risley,¹ "that the garden is regarded as almost sacred, and the superstitious practices in vogue resemble those of the silk-worm breeder. The Bārui will not enter it until he has bathed and washed his clothes. Animals found inside are driven out, while women ceremonially unclean dare not enter within the gate. A Brāhman never sets foot inside, and old men have a prejudice against entering it. It has, however, been known to be used for assignations." The betel-vine is the leaf of *Piper betel* L., the word being derived from the Malayalam *vettila*, 'a plain leaf,' and coming to us through the Portuguese *betre* and *betle*. The leaf is called *pān*, and is eaten with the nut of *Areca catechu*, called in Hindi *supāri*. The vine needs careful cultivation, the gardens having to be covered to keep off the heat of the sun, while liberal treatment with manure and irrigation is needed. The joints of the creepers are planted in February, and begin to supply leaves in about five months' time. When the first creepers are stripped after a period of nearly a year, they are cut off and fresh ones appear, the plants being exhausted within a period of about two years after the first sowing. A garden may cover from half an acre to an acre of land, and belongs to a number of growers, who act in partnership, each owning so many lines of vines. The plain leaves are sold at from 2 annas to 4 annas a hundred, or a higher rate when they are out of season. Damoh, Rāntek and Bilahri are three of the best-known centres of cultivation in the Central Provinces. The Bilahri leaf is described in the *Ain-i-Akbari* as follows: "The leaf called Bilahri is white and shining, and does not make the tongue harsh and hard. It tastes best of all kinds. After it has been taken away from the creeper, it turns white with some care after a month, or even after twenty days, when greater efforts are made."² For retail sale *bīdas* are prepared, consisting of a rolled betel-leaf containing areca-nut, catechu and lime, and fastened with a clove. Musk and cardamoms are sometimes added. Tobacco should be smoked after eating a *bīda* according to the saying,

¹ *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Bārui.

² 72, quoted in Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Tamboli.

² Blochmann, *Ain-i-Akbari*, i. p.



‘Service without a patron, a young man without a shield, and betel without tobacco are alike savourless.’ *Bīdaṣ* are sold at from two to four for a pice (farthing). Women of the caste often retail them, and as many are good-looking they secure more custom ; they are also said to have an indifferent reputation. Early in the morning, when they open their shops, they burn some incense before the bamboo basket in which the leaves are kept, to propitiate Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.



BARHAI

LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. <i>Strength and local distribution.</i> | 4. <i>Religion.</i> |
| 2. <i>Internal structure.</i> | 5. <i>Social position.</i> |
| 3. <i>Marriage customs.</i> | 6. <i>Occupation.</i> |

Barhai, Sutār, Kharādi, Mistri.—The occupational caste of carpenters. The Barhais numbered nearly 110,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār in 1911, or about 1 in 150 persons. The caste is most numerous in Districts with large towns, and few carpenters are to be found in villages except in the richer and more advanced Districts. Hitherto such woodwork as the villagers wanted for agriculture has been made by the Lohār or blacksmith, while the country cots, the only wooden article of furniture in their houses, could be fashioned by their own hands or by the Gond woodcutter. In the Mandla District the Barhai caste counts only 300 persons, and about the same in Bālāghāt, in Drūg only 47 persons, and in the fourteen Chhattisgarh Feudatory States, with a population of more than two millions, only some 800 persons. The name Barhai is said to be from the Sanskrit Vardhika and the root *vardh*, to cut. Sutār is a common name of the caste in the Marātha Districts, and is from Sūtra-kara, one who works by string, or a maker of string. The allusion may be to the Barhai's use of string in planing or measuring timber, or it may possibly indicate a transfer of occupation, the Sutārs having first been mainly string-makers and afterwards abandoned this calling for that of the carpenter. The first wooden implements and articles of furniture may have been held together by string before nails came into use. Kharādi is literally a turner, one who turns woodwork on

1. Strength and local distribution.



a lathe, from *kharāt*, a lathe. *Mistri*, a corruption of the English *Mister*, is an honorific title for master carpenters.

2. Internal structure.

The comparatively recent growth of the caste in these Provinces is shown by its subdivisions. The principal subcastes of the Hindustāni Districts are the *Pardeshi* or foreigners, immigrants from northern India, and the *Pūrbia* or eastern, coming from Oudh; other subcastes are the *Sri Gaur Mālas* or immigrants from Mālwa, the *Berādi* from Berār, and the *Māhure* from Hyderābād. We find also subcastes of *Jāt* and *Teli* Barhais, consisting of *Jāts* and *Telis* (oil-pressers) who have taken to carpentering. Two other caste-groups, the *Chamār* Barhais and *Gondi* Barhais, are returned, but these are not at present included in the Barhai caste, and consist merely of *Chamārs* and *Gonds* who work as carpenters but remain in their own castes. In the course of some generations, however, if the cohesive social force of the caste system continues unabated, these groups may probably find admission into the Barhai caste. Colonel Tod notes that the progeny of one *Makūr*, a prince of the *Jādon Rājput* house of Jaisalmer, became carpenters, and were known centuries after as *Makūr Sutārs*. They were apparently considered illegitimate, as he states: "Illegitimate children can never overcome this natural defect among the *Rājput*s. Thus we find among all classes of artisans in India some of royal but spurious descent."¹ The internal structure of the caste seems therefore to indicate that it is largely of foreign origin and to a certain degree of recent formation in these Provinces.

3. Marriage customs.

The caste are also divided into exogamous septs named after villages. In some localities it is said that they have no septs, but only surnames, and that people of the same surname cannot intermarry. Well-to-do persons marry their daughters before puberty and others when they can afford the expense of the ceremony. *Brāhman* priests are employed at weddings, though on other occasions their services are occasionally dispensed with. The wedding ceremony is of the type prevalent in the locality. When the wedding procession reaches the bride's village it halts near the temple of *Māroti* or *Hanumān*. Among the *Panchāl* Barhais the bridegroom does

¹ *Rājasthān*, ii, p. 210.



not wear a marriage crown but ties a bunch of flowers to his turban. The bridegroom's party is entertained for five days. Divorce and the remarriage of widows are permitted. In most localities it is said that a widow is forbidden to marry her first husband's younger as well as his elder brother. Among the Pardeshi Barhais of Betūl if a bachelor desires to marry a widow he must first go through the ceremony with a branch or twig of the *gūlar* tree.¹

The caste worship Viswakarma, the celestial architect, and venerate their trade implements on the Dasahra festival. They consider the sight of a mongoose and of a light-grey pigeon or dove as lucky omens. They burn the dead and throw the ashes into a river or tank, employing a Mahā-Brāhman to receive the gifts for the dead.

4. Religion.

In social status the Barhais rank with the higher artisan castes. Brāhmans take water from them in some localities, perhaps more especially in towns. In Betūl for instance Hindustāni Brāhmans do not accept water from the rural Barhais. In Damoh where both the Barhai and Lohār are village menials, their status is said to be the same, and Brāhmans do not take water from Lohārs. Mr. Nesfield says that the Barhai is a village servant and ranks with the Kurmi, with whom his interests are so closely allied. But there seems no special reason why the interests of the carpenter should be more closely allied with the cultivator than those of any other village menial, and it may be offered as a surmise that carpentering as a distinct trade is of comparatively late origin, and was adopted by Kurmis, to which fact the connection noticed by Mr. Nesfield might be attributed; hence the position of the Barhai among the castes from whom a Brāhman will take water. In some localities well-to-do members of the caste have begun to wear the sacred thread.

5. Social position.

In the northern Districts and the cotton tract the Barhai works as a village menial. He makes and mends the plough and harrow (*bakhar*) and other wooden implements of agriculture, and makes new ones when supplied with the wood. In Wardha he receives an annual contribution of 100 lbs. of grain from each cultivator. In Betūl he gets 67 lbs. of grain

6. Occupation.

¹ *Ficus glomerata*.



and other perquisites for each plough of four bullocks. For making carts and building or repairing houses he must be separately paid. At weddings the Barhai often supplies the sacred marriage-post and is given from four annas to a rupee. At the Diwāli festival he prepares a wooden peg about six inches long, and drives it into the cultivator's house inside the threshold, and receives half a pound to a pound of grain.

In cities the carpenters are rapidly acquiring an increased degree of skill as the demand for a better class of houses and furniture becomes continually greater and more extensive. The carpenters have been taught to make English furniture by such institutions as the Friends' Mission of Hoshangābād and other missionaries; and a Government technical school has now been opened at Nāgpur, in which boys from all over the Province are trained in the profession. Very little wood-carving with any pretensions to excellence has hitherto been done in the Central Provinces, but the Jain temples at Saugor and Khurai contain some fair wood-work. A good carpenter in towns can earn from 12 annas to Rs. 1-8 a day, and both his earnings and prospects have greatly improved within recent years. Sherring remarks of the Barhais: "As artisans they exhibit little or no inventive powers: but in imitating the workmanship of others they are perhaps unsurpassed in the whole world. They are equally clever in working from designs and models."¹

Bāri.—A caste of household servants and makers of leaf-plates, belonging to northern India. The Bāris numbered 1200 persons in the Central Provinces in 1911, residing mainly in Jubbulpore and Mandla. Sir H. Risley remarks of the caste:² "Mr. Nesfield regards the Bāri as merely an offshoot from a semi-savage tribe known as Banmānush and Musāhār. He is said still to associate with them at times, and if the demand for leaf-plates and cups, owing to some temporary cause, such as a local fair or an unusual multitude of marriages, happens to become larger than he can at once supply, he gets them secretly made by his ruder kinsfolk and retails them at a higher rate, passing

¹ *Hindu Castes*, i. p. 316.

² *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Bāri.



them off as his own production. The strictest Brāhmans, those at least who aspire to imitate the self-denying life of the ancient Indian hermit, never eat off any other plates than those made of leaves." "If the above view is correct," Sir H. Risley remarks, "the Bāris are a branch of a non-Aryan tribe who have been given a fairly respectable position in the social system in consequence of the demand for leaf-plates, which are largely used by the highest as well as the lowest castes. Instances of this sort, in which a non-Aryan or mixed group is promoted on grounds of necessity or convenience to a higher status than their antecedents would entitle them to claim, are not unknown in other castes, and must have occurred frequently in outlying parts of the country, where the Aryan settlements were scanty and imperfectly supplied with the social apparatus demanded by the theory of ceremonial purity." There is no reason why the origin of the Bāri from the Banmānush (wild man of the woods) or Musāhār (mouse-eater), a forest tribe, as suggested by Mr. Nesfield from his observation of their mutual connection, should be questioned. The making of leaf-plates is an avocation which may be considered naturally to pertain to the tribes frequenting jungles from which the leaves are gathered; and in the Central Provinces, though in the north the Nai or barber ostensibly supplies the leaf-plates, probably buying the leaves and getting them made up by Gonds and others, in the Marātha Districts the Gond himself does so, and many Gonds make their living by this trade. The people of the Marātha country are apparently less strict than those of northern India, and do not object to eat off plates avowedly the handiwork of Gonds. The fact that the Bāri has been raised to the position of a pure caste, so that Brāhmans will take water from his hands, is one among several instances of this elevation of the rank of the serving castes for purposes of convenience. The caste themselves have the following legend of their origin: Once upon a time Parmeshwar¹ was offering rice milk to the spirits of his ancestors. In the course of this ceremony the performer has to present a gift known as Vikraya Dān, which cannot be accepted by others without loss of position. Parmeshwar

¹ Vishnu.



offered the gift to various Brāhmans, but they all refused it. So he made a man of clay, and blew upon the image and gave it life, and the god then asked the man whom he had created to accept the gift which the Brāhmans had refused. This man, who was the first Bāri, agreed on condition that all men should drink with him and recognise his purity of caste. Parmeshwar then told him to bring water in a cup, and drank of it in the presence of all the castes. And in consequence of this all the Hindus will take water from the hands of a Bāri. They also say that their first ancestor was named Sundar on account of his personal beauty; but if so, he failed to bequeath this quality to his descendants. The proper avocation of the Bāris is, as already stated, the manufacture of the leaf-cups and plates used by all Hindus at festivals. In the Central Provinces these are made from the large leaves of the *māhul* creeper (*Bauhinia Vahlia*), or from the *palās* (*Butea frondosa*). The caste also act as personal servants, handing round water, lighting and carrying torches at marriages and other entertainments and on journeys, and performing other functions. Some of them have taken to agriculture. Their women act as maids to high-caste Hindu ladies, and as they are always about the zenāna, are liable to lose their virtue. A curious custom prevails in Mārṅwār on the birth of an heir to the throne. An impression of the child's foot is taken by a Bāri on cloth covered with saffron, and is exhibited to the native chiefs, who make him rich presents.¹ The Bāris have the reputation of great fidelity to their employers, and a saying about them is, 'The Bāri will die fighting for his master.'

Basdewa,² Wasudeo, Harbola, Kaparia, Jaga, Kapdi.—

A wandering beggar caste of mixed origin, who also call themselves Sanādhyā or Sanaurhā Brāhmans. The Basdewas trace their origin to Wasudeo, the father of Krishna, and the term Basdewa is a corruption of Wasudeo or Wasudeva. Kaparia is the name they bear in the

¹ Sherring, *Tribes and Castes*, i. pp. 403, 404.

² This article is compiled from

papers by Mr. W. N. Maw, Deputy Commissioner, Damoh, and Murlidhar, Munsiff of Khurai in Saugor.



Anterived or country between the Ganges and Jumna, whence they claim to have come. Kaparia has been derived from *kapra*, cloth, owing to the custom of the Basdewas of having several dresses, which they change rapidly like the Bahrūpia, making themselves up in different characters as a show. Harbola is an occupational term, applied to a class of Basdewas who climb trees in the early morning and thence vociferate praises of the deity in a loud voice. The name is derived from *Har*, God, and *bolna*, to speak. As the Harbolas wake people up in the morning they are also called Jaga or Awakener. The number of Basdewas in the Central Provinces and Berār in 1911 was 2500, and they are found principally in the northern Districts and in Chhattisgarh. They have several territorial subcastes, as Gangāputri or those who dwell on the banks of the Ganges; Khaltia or Deswāri, those who belong to the Central Provinces; Parauha, from *para*, a male buffalo calf, being the dealers in buffaloes; Harbola or those who climb trees and sing the praises of God; and Wasudeo, the dwellers in the Marātha Districts who marry only among themselves. The names of the exogamous divisions are very varied, some being taken from Brāhman *gotras* and Rājput septs, while others are the names of villages, or nicknames, or derived from animals and plants. It may be concluded from these names that the Basdewas are a mixed occupational group recruited from high and low castes, though they themselves say that they do not admit any outsiders except Brāhmins into the community. In Bombay¹ the Wasudevas have a special connection with Kumhārs or potters, whom they address by the term of *kāka* or paternal uncle, and at whose houses they lodge on their travels, presenting their host with the two halves of a cocoanut. The caste do not observe celibacy. A price of Rs. 25 has usually to be given for a bride, and a Brāhman is employed to perform the ceremony. At the conclusion of this the Brāhman invests the bridegroom with a sacred thread, which he thereafter continues to wear. Widow marriage is permitted, and widows are commonly married to widowers. Divorce is also permitted. When a man's wife dies he shaves his moustache and beard, if any,

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, xvii. p. 108.



in mourning and a father likewise for a daughter-in-law ; this is somewhat peculiar, as other Hindus do not shave the moustache for a wife or daughter-in-law. The Basdewas are wandering mendicants. In the Marātha Districts they wear a plume of peacock's feathers, which they say was given to them as a badge by Krishna. In Saugor and Damoh instead of this they carry during the period from Dasahra to the end of Māgh or from September to January a brass vessel called *matuk* bound on their heads. It is surmounted by a brass cone and adorned with mango-leaves, cowries and a piece of red cloth, and with figures of Rāma and Lakshman. Their stock-in-trade for begging consists of two *kartāls* or wooden clappers which are struck against each other ; *ghungrus* or jingling ornaments for the feet, worn when dancing ; and a *paijna* or kind of rattle, consisting of two semicircular iron wires bound at each end to a piece of wood with rings slung on to them ; this is simply shaken in the hand and gives out a sound from the movement of the rings against the wires. They worship all these implements as well as their beggar's wallet on the Janam-Ashtami or Krishna's birthday, the Dasahra, and the full moon of Māgh (January). They rise early and beg only in the morning from about four till eight, and sing songs in praise of Sarwan and Karan. Sarwan was a son renowned for his filial piety ; he maintained and did service to his old blind parents to the end of their lives, much against the will of his wife, and was proof against all her machinations to induce him to abandon them. Karan was a proverbially charitable king, and all his family had the same virtue. His wife gave away daily rice and pulse to those who required it, his daughter gave them clothes, his son distributed cows as alms and his daughter-in-law cocoanuts. The king himself gave only gold, and it is related of him that he was accustomed to expend a maund and a quarter¹ weight of gold in alms-giving before he washed himself and paid his morning devotions. Therefore the Basdewas sing that he who gives early in the morning acquires the merit of Karan ; and their presence at this time affords the requisite opportunity to anybody who may be desirous of emulating the

¹ About 100 lbs.



king. At the end of every couplet they cry 'Jai Ganga' or 'Har Ganga,' invoking the Ganges.

The Harbolas have each a beat of a certain number of villages which must not be infringed by the others. Their method is to ascertain the name of some well-to-do person in the village. This done, they climb a tree in the early morning before sunrise, and continue chanting his praises in a loud voice until he is sufficiently flattered by their eulogies or wearied by their importunity to throw down a present of a few pice under the tree, which the Harbola, descending, appropriates. The Basdewas of the northern Districts are now commonly engaged in the trade of buying and selling buffaloes. They take the young male calves from Saugor and Damoh to Chhattisgarh, and there retail them at a profit for rice cultivation, driving them in large herds along the road. For the capital which they have to borrow to make their purchases, they are charged very high rates of interest. The Basdewas have here a special veneration for the buffalo as the animal from which they make their livelihood, and they object strongly to the calves being taken to be tied out as baits for tiger, refusing, it is said, to accept payment if the calf should be killed. Their social status is not high, and none but the lowest castes will take food from their hands. They eat flesh and drink liquor, but abstain from pork, fowls and beef. Some of the caste have given up animal food.



BASOR

LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Numbers and distribution.</i> | 4. <i>Marriage.</i> |
| 2. <i>Caste traditions.</i> | 5. <i>Religion and social status.</i> |
| 3. <i>Subdivisions.</i> | 6. <i>Occupation.</i> |

1. Num-
bers and
distribu-
tion.

Basor,¹ Bansphor, Dhulia, Burud.—The occupational caste of bamboo-workers, the two first names being Hindi and the last the term used in the Marātha Districts. The cognate Uriya caste is called Kandra and the Telugu one Medara. The Basors numbered 53,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār in 1911. About half the total number reside in the Saugor, Damoh and Jubbulpore Districts. The word Basor is a corruption of Bānsphor, 'a breaker of bamboos.' Dhulia, from *dholi*, a drum, means a musician.

2. Caste
traditions.

The caste trace their origin from Raja Benu or Venu who ruled at Singorgarh in Damoh. It is related of him that he was so pious that he raised no taxes from his subjects, but earned his livelihood by making and selling bamboo fans. He could of course keep no army, but he knew magic, and when he broke his fan the army of the enemy broke up in unison. Venu is a Sanskrit word meaning bamboo. But a mythological Sanskrit king called Vena is mentioned in the Purānas, from whom for his sins was born the first Nishāda, the lowest of human beings, and Manu² states that the bamboo-worker is the issue of a

¹ Compiled from papers by Mr. Rām Lāl, B.A., Deputy Inspector of Schools, Saugor; Mr. Vishnu Gangādhār Gādgil, Tahsildār, Narsinghpur; Mr. Devi Dayal, Tahsildār, Hatta; Mr. Kanhya Lāl, B.A., Deputy Inspector of Schools,

Betūl; Mr. Keshava Rao, Headmaster, Middle School, Seoni; and Babu Gulāb Singh, Superintendent, Land Records, Betūl.

² Chapter x. 37, and Shūdra Kam-lākar, p. 284.