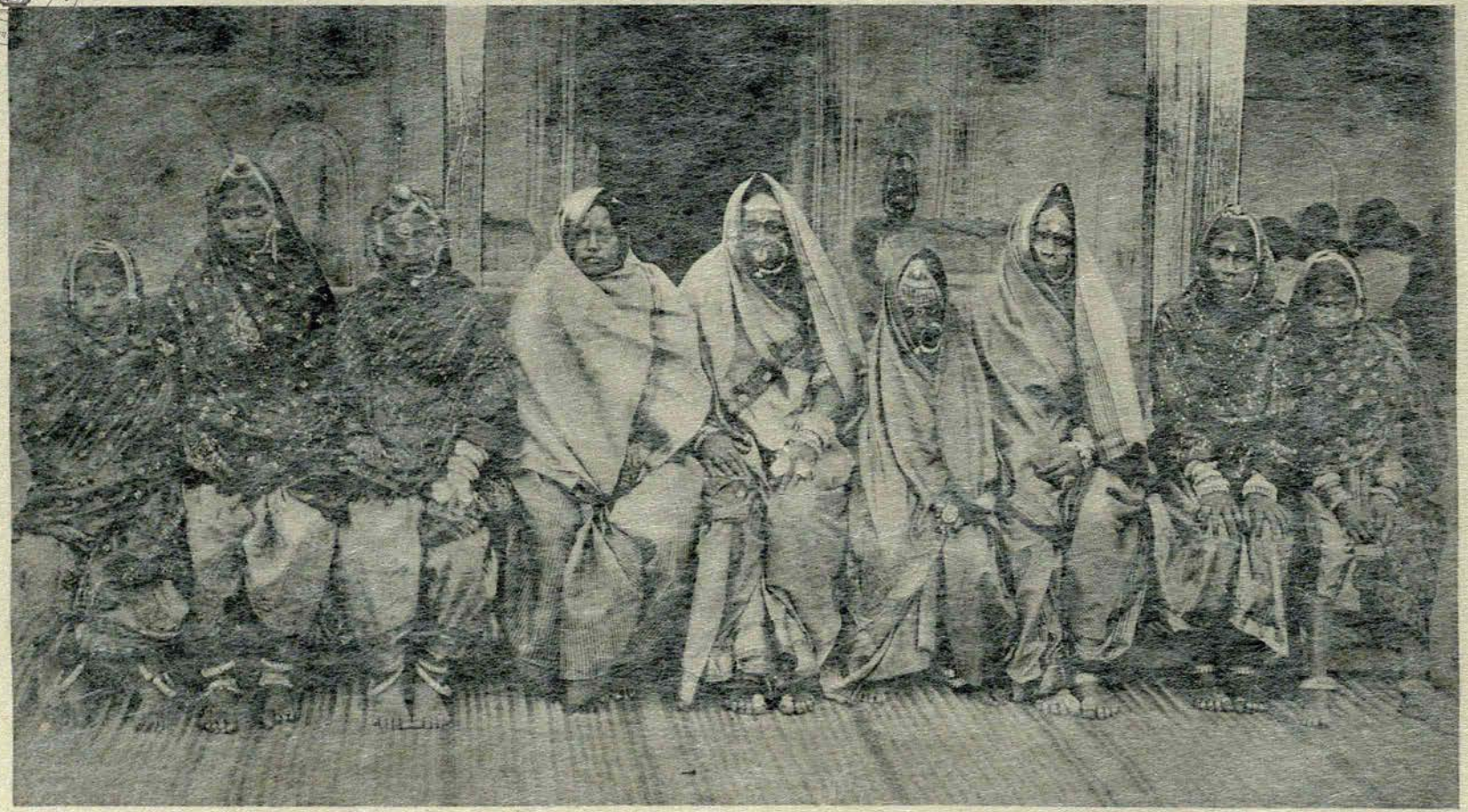
'What can the washerman do in a village where the people live naked?' is a Chhattīsgarhi proverb which aptly indicates that scantiness is the most prominent feature of the local apparel. Here a cloth round the loins, and this usually of meagre dimensions, constituted, until recently, the full dress of a cultivator. Those who have progressed a stage farther throw a cloth loosely over one shoulder, covering the chest, and assume an apology for a turban by wrapping another small rag carelessly round the head, leaving the crown generally bare, as if this part of the person required special sunning and ventilation. Hindus will not be seen out-of-doors with the head bare, though the Gonds and other tribes only begin to wear head-cloths when they are adopting Hinduism. The Gondi fashion was formerly prevalent in Chhattīsgarh. Some sanctity attaches to the turban, probably because it is the covering of the head. To knock off a man's turban is a great insult, and if it drops off or he lets it fall, it is a very bad omen.

38. Women's clothes.

Women in the northern Districts wear a skirt made of coarse cloth, usually red or blue, and a shoulder-cloth of the same material. Hand-woven cloth is still commonly used in the interior. The skirt is sometimes drawn up through the legs behind so as to give it a divided appearance; this is called *kachhota*. On the upper part of the body they wear an *angia* or breast-cloth, that is a short, tight, sleeveless jacket reaching only to below the breasts. The *angia* is tied behind, while the Marātha *choli*, which is the same thing, is buttoned or tied in front. High-caste women draw their shoulder-cloth right over the head so that the face cannot be seen. When a woman goes before a person of position she covers her head, as it is considered immodest to leave it bare. Women of respectable families wear a sheet of fine white, yellow, or red cloth drawn over the head and reaching to the ankles when they go on a journey, this being known as *pichhora*. In Chhattīsgarh all the requirements of fashion among women are satisfied by one cloth from 8 to 12 yards long and about a yard wide, which envelops the person in one fold from the waist to below the knee, hanging somewhat loosely. It is tied at the waist, and the remaining half is spread over the breast and drawn across the right shoulder,



Bemrose, Collo., Derby.

GROUP OF WOMEN IN HINDUSTĀNI DRESS.

the end covering the head like a sheet and falling over the left shoulder. The simplicity of this solitary garment displays a graceful figure to advantage, especially on festival days, when those who can afford it are arrayed in tasar silk. When a girl is married the bridegroom's family give her expensive clothes to wear at festivals and her own people give her ordinary clothes, but usually not more than will last a year. Whenever she goes back to her father's house after her marriage, he gives her one or two cloths if he can afford it. Women of the middle and lower classes wear ornaments of bell-metal, a mixture of copper and zinc, which are very popular. Some women wear brass and zinc ornaments, and well-to-do persons have them of silver or gold.

39. Bathing.

Hot water is not used for bathing in Saugor, except by invalids, but is customary in Betūl and other Districts. The bathing-place in the courtyard is usually a large square stone on which the bather sits ; he has a big circular brass vessel by him called *gangāl*,[1] and from this he takes water either in a cup or with his hands and throws it over himself, rubbing his body. Where there is a tank or stream people go to bathe in it, and if there is none the poorer classes sometimes bathe at the village well. Each man or woman has two body- or loin-cloths, and they change the cloth whenever they bathe—going into the water in the one which they have worn from the previous day, and changing into the other when they come out ; long practice enables them to do this in public without any undue exposure of the body. A good tank or a river is a great amenity to a village, especially if it has a *ghāt* or flight of stone steps. Many people will spend an hour or so here daily, disporting themselves in the water or on the bank, and wedding and funeral parties are held by it, owing to the facilities for ceremonial bathing.

40. Food.

People who do not cultivate with their own hands have only two daily meals, one at midday and the other at eight or nine in the evening. Agriculturists require a third meal in the early morning before going out to the fields. Wheat and the millets juāri and kodon are the staple foods of the cultivating classes in the northern Districts, and rice is kept for festivals. The millets are made into thick *chapātis* or

[1] From Ganga, or the Ganges, and *āla* a pot.

cakes, their flour not being sufficiently adhesive for thin ones, and are eaten with the pulses, lentils, arhar,[1] mung[2] and urad.[3] The pulses are split into half and boiled in water, and when they get soft, chillies, salt and turmeric are mixed with them. Pieces of *chapāti* are broken off and dipped into this mixture. Various vegetables are also eaten. When pulse is not available the *chapātis* are simply dipped into buttermilk. If *chapātis* cannot be afforded at both meals, *ghorna* or the flour of kodon or juār boiled into a paste with water is substituted for them, a smaller quantity of this being sufficient to allay hunger. Wheat-cakes are fried in *ghī* (clarified butter) as a luxury, and at other times in sesamum oil. Rice or ground gram boiled in buttermilk are other favourite foods.

In Chhattīsgarh rice is the common food: it is eaten with pulses at midday and with vegetables cooked in *ghī* in the evening. In the morning they drink a rice-gruel, called *bāsi*, which consists of the previous night's repast mixed with water and taken cold. On festivals rice is boiled in milk. Milk is often drunk at night, and there is a saying, " He who drinks water in the morning and milk at night and takes *harra* before he sleeps will never need a doctor." A little powdered *harra* or myrobalan acts as an aperient. The food of landowners and tenants is much the same, except that the former have more butter and vegetables, according to the saying, '*Rāja praja ka ekhi khāna*,' or 'The king and peasant eat the same food.' Those who eat flesh have an occasional change of food, but most Kurmis abstain from it. Farmservants eat the gruel of rice or kodon boiled in water when they can afford it, and if not they eat mahua flowers. These are sometimes boiled in water, and the juice is then strained off and mixed with half-ground flour, and they are also pounded and made into *chapātis* with flour and water. The leaves of the young gram-plants make a very favourite vegetable and are eaten raw, either moist or dried. In times of scarcity the poorer classes eat tamarind leaves, the pith of the banyan tree, the seeds of the bamboo, the bark of the *semar* tree,[4] the fruit of the *babūl*,[5] and other articles. A

[1] *Cajanus indicus.* [2] *Phaseolus mungo.* [3] *Phaseolus radiatus.*
[4] *Bombax malabaricum.* [5] *Acacia arabica.*

cultivator will eat 2 lbs. of grain a day if he can get it, or more in the case of rice. Their stomachs get distended owing to the large quantities of boiled rice eaten at one time. The leaves of the *chirota* or *chakora*, a little plant[1] which grows thickly at the commencement of the rains near inhabited sites, are also a favourite vegetable, and a resource in famine time. The people call it '*Gaon ka thākur*,' or 'lord of the village,' and have a saying:

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

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

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

41. Caste-feasts.

At the commencement of a marriage or other ceremonial feast the host must wash the feet of all the guests himself. If he does not do this they will be dissatisfied, and, though they will eat at his house, will consider they have not been properly welcomed. He takes a large brass plate and placing the feet of his guest on it, pours water over them and then rubs and dries them; the water is thrown away and fresh water poured out for the next guest unless they should be brothers. Little flat stools about three inches high are provided for the guests, and if there are not enough of them a carpet is spread; or *baithkis* or sitting-mats plaited from five or six large leaves are set out. These serve as a mark of attention, as it would be discourteous to make a man sit on the ground, and they also prevent the body-

[1] *Cassia tora.*

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

42. Hospitality.

The people still show great hospitality, and it is the custom of many mālguzārs, at least in Chhattīsgarh, to afford food and a night's rest to all travellers who may require it. When a Brāhman comes to the village such mālguzārs will give him one or two annas, and to a Pandit or learned man as much as a rupee. Formerly it is said that when any stranger came through the village he was at once offered a

cup of milk and told to drink it or throw it away. But this custom has died out in Chhattīsgarh, though one has met with it once or twice in Sambalpur. When District Officers go on tour, well-to-do landowners ask to be allowed to supply free provisions for the whole camp at least for a day, and it is difficult to refuse them gracefully. In Mandla, Banias and mālguzārs in villages near the Nerbudda sometimes undertake to give a pound of grain to every *parikramawāsi* or pilgrim perambulating the Nerbudda. And as the number of these steadily increases in consequence, they often become impoverished as a result of such indiscriminate charity.

43. Social customs. Tattooing.

The Kurmis employ Brāhmans for their ceremonies. They have *gurus* or spiritual preceptors who may be Brāhmans or Bairāgis; the *guru* is given from 8 annas to Rs. 5 when he initiates a neophyte, as well as his food and a new white cloth. The *guru* is occasionally consulted on some religious question, but otherwise he does nothing for his disciple except to pay him an occasional visit, when he is hospitably entertained. The Kurmis of the northern Districts do not as a rule eat meat and also abstain from alcohol, but in Chhattīsgarh they eat the flesh of clean animals and fish, and also of fowls, and drink country liquor. Old men often give up flesh and wine as a mark of piety, when they are known as Bhagat or holy. They will take food cooked with water only from Brāhmans, and that cooked without water from Rājpūts, Banias and Kāyasths as well. Brāhmans and Rājpūts will take water from Kurmis in the northern Districts though not in Chhattīsgarh. Here the Kurmis do not object to eating cooked food which has been carried from the house to the fields. This is called *rengai roti*, and castes which will eat it are considered inferior to those who always take their food in the *chauka* or purified place in the house. They say 'Rām, Rām' to each other in greeting, and the Raipur Kurmis swear by a dog or a pig. Generally they do not plough on the new or full moon days. Their women are tattooed after marriage with dots on the cheeks, marks of flies on the fingers, scorpions on the arms, and other devices on the legs.

44. Caste penalties.

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

45. The cultivating status.

The social status of the Kurmi appears to be that of the cultivator. He is above the menial and artisan castes of the village and the impure weaving and labouring castes; he is theoretically equal to the artisan castes of towns, but one or two of these, such as the Sunār or goldsmith and Kasār or brass-worker, have risen in the world owing to the prosperity or importance of their members, and now rank above the Kurmi. The Kurmi's status appears to be that of the cultivator and member of the village community, but a large proportion of the Kurmis are recruited from the non-Aryan tribes, who have obtained land and been admitted into the caste, and this tends to lower the status of the caste as a whole. In the Punjab Kurmis apparently do not hold land and are employed in grass-cutting, weaving, and tending horses, and are even said to keep pigs.[1] Here their status is necessarily very low as they follow the occupations of the impure castes. The reason why the

[1] *Punjab Census Report* (1881), p. 340.

Kurmi as cultivator ranks above the village handicraftsmen may perhaps be that industrial pursuits were despised in early times and left to the impure Sūdras and to the castes of mixed descent; while agriculture and trade were the occupations of the Vaishya. Further, the village artisans and menials were supported before the general use of current coin by contributions of grain from the cultivators and by presents of grain at seed-time and harvest; and among the Hindus it is considered very derogatory to accept a gift, a man who does so being held to admit his social inferiority to the giver. Some exception to this is made in the case of Brāhmans, though even with them the rule partly applies. Of these two reasons for the cultivator's superiority to the menial and artisan castes the former has to a large extent lost its force. The handicrafts are no longer considered despicable, and, as has been seen, some of the urban tradesmen, as the Sunār and Kasār, now rank above the Kurmi, or are at least equal to him. Perhaps even in ancient times these urban artificers were not despised like the village menials, as their skill was held in high repute. But the latter ground is still in full force and effect in the Central Provinces at least: the village artisans are still paid by contributions from the cultivator and receive presents from him at seed-time and harvest. The remuneration of the village menials, the blacksmith, carpenter, washerman, tanner, barber and waterman is paid at the rate of so much grain per plough of land according to the estimated value of the work done by them for the cultivators during the year. Other village tradesmen, as the potter, oilman and liquor-vendor, are no longer paid in grain, but since the introduction of currency sell their wares for cash; but there seems no reason to doubt that in former times when no money circulated in villages they were remunerated in the same manner. They still all receive presents, consisting of a sowing-basketful of grain at seed-time and one or two sheaves at harvest. The former are known as *Bījphuti*, or 'the breaking of the seed,' and the latter as *Khanvār*, or 'that which is left.' In Bilāspur the Kamias or village menials also receive as much grain as will fill a winnowing-fan when it has been threshed. When the

peasant has harvested his grain all come and beg from him. The Dhīmar brings waternut, the Kāchhi or market-gardener some chillies, the Teli oil and tobacco, the Kalār some liquor if he drinks it, the Bania some sugar, and all receive grain in excess of the value of their gifts. The village menials come for their customary dues, and the Brāhman, the Nat or acrobat, the Gosain or religious mendicant, and the Fakīr or Muhammadan beggar solicit alms. On that day the cultivator is like a little king in his fields, and it is said that sometimes a quarter of the crop may go in this way; but the reference must be only to the spring crop and not to the whole holding. In former times grain must have been the principal source of wealth, and this old custom gives us a reason for the status of the cultivator in Hindu society. There is also a saying:

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

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

46. Occupation.

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

APPENDIX

List of Exogamous Clans

Sections of the Chandnāhu subcaste:

Chānwar bambar	Fly fan.
Sandil	Name of a Rishi.

Gaind	Ball.
Sadāphal	A fruit.
Sondeha	Gold-bodied.
Sonkharchi	Spender of gold.
Kathail	*Kath*, wood, or *kaṭhtha*, catechu.
Kāshi	Benares. The Desha Kurmis are all of this *gotra*. It may also be a corruption of Kachhap, tortoise.
Dhorha	*Dhor*, cattle.
Sumer	A mountain.
Chatur Midalia	*Chatur*, clever.
Bhāradwāj	After the Rishi of that name; also a bird.
Kousil	Name of a Rishi.
Ishwar	God.
Samund Karkari	A particle in an ocean.
Akālchuwa	*Akāl*, famine.
Padel	Fallow.
Bāghmār	Tiger-slayer.
Hardūba	Green grass.
Kānsia	*Kāns*, a kind of grass.
Ghiu Sāgar	Ocean of *ghī*.
Dharam Dhurandar	Most charitable.
Singnāha	*Singh*, a lion.
Chimangarhia	Belonging to Chimangarh.
Khairagarhia	Belonging to Khairagarh.
Gotam	A Rishi.
Kāshyap	A Rishi.
Pandariha	From Pandaria, a village.
Paipakhār	One who washes feet.
Bānhpakhār	One who washes arms.
Chauria	Chaurai, a vegetable.
Sānd Sathi	*Sānd*, bullock.
Singhi	*Singh*, lion or horn.
Agra—Chandan	Sandalwood.
Tek Sanichar	Saturday.
Karaiya	Frying-pan.
Pukharia	Pond.
Dhubinha	Dhobi, a caste.
Pāwanbare	*Pāwan*, air.
Modganga	Ganges.

Sections of the Gabel subcaste:

Gangajal	Ganges water.
Bimba Lohir	Bearer of a *lāthi* (stick).
Sarang	Peacock.
Rāja Rāwat	Royal prince.
Singār	Beauty.
Bānh pagar	With a thread on the arm.
Samundha	Ocean.
Parasrām	Rishi.

Katārmal	*Katār*, dagger.
Chauhān	Sept of Rājpūts.
Pātan	Village.
Gajmani	Elephant.
Deori Sumer	Village.
Lahura Samudra	Small sea.
Hansbimbraon	*Hans*, goose.
Sunwāni	Purifier.

Sections of the Santora subcaste :

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

Sections of the Tirole subcaste :

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

Sections of the Gaur subcaste :

Bhandāri	Storekeeper.
Dudhua	*Dūdh*, milk.
Patele	A headman.
Lonia	Salt-maker.
Kumaria	A potter.
Sionia	Seoni town.
Chhaparia	Chhapāra, a town.
Bijoria	A tree.
Simra	A village.
Ketharia	*Keth*, a fruit.
Usargaiyan	Perhaps a village.
Bhadoria	Village.
Rurgaiyan	Village.
Musrele	*Mūsar*, a pestle.

Sections of the Usrete subcaste :

Shikāre	Hunter.
Nāhar	Tiger.

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

Sections of the Kanaujia subcaste :

Tidha.—From Tidha, a village. This section is subdivided into (*a*) *Ghureparke* (of the cow-dung hill) ; (*b*) *Dwārparke* (of the door) ; and (*c*) *Jangi* (warrior).

Chamania.—From Chamyani (village). This is also subdivided into :

(*a*) *Gomarhya.*

(*b*) *Mathuria* (Muttra town).

Chaudhri (caste headman). This is divided as follows :

(*a*) *Majhgawān* . .	A village.
(*b*) *Purva thok* . . .	Eastern group.
(*c*) *Pashchim thok* . .	Western group.
(*d*) *Bamurya* . . .	A village.
Rāwat . . .	Title.
Malha . . .	Perhaps sailor or wrestler.
Chiloliān . . .	Chiloli, a village.
Dhanuiyan . .	Dhanu Kheda, a village.

LAKHERA

LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. General notice.

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

traitorous conduct they were degraded and compelled eternally to work in lac or glass."

2. Social customs.

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

3. The lac industry.

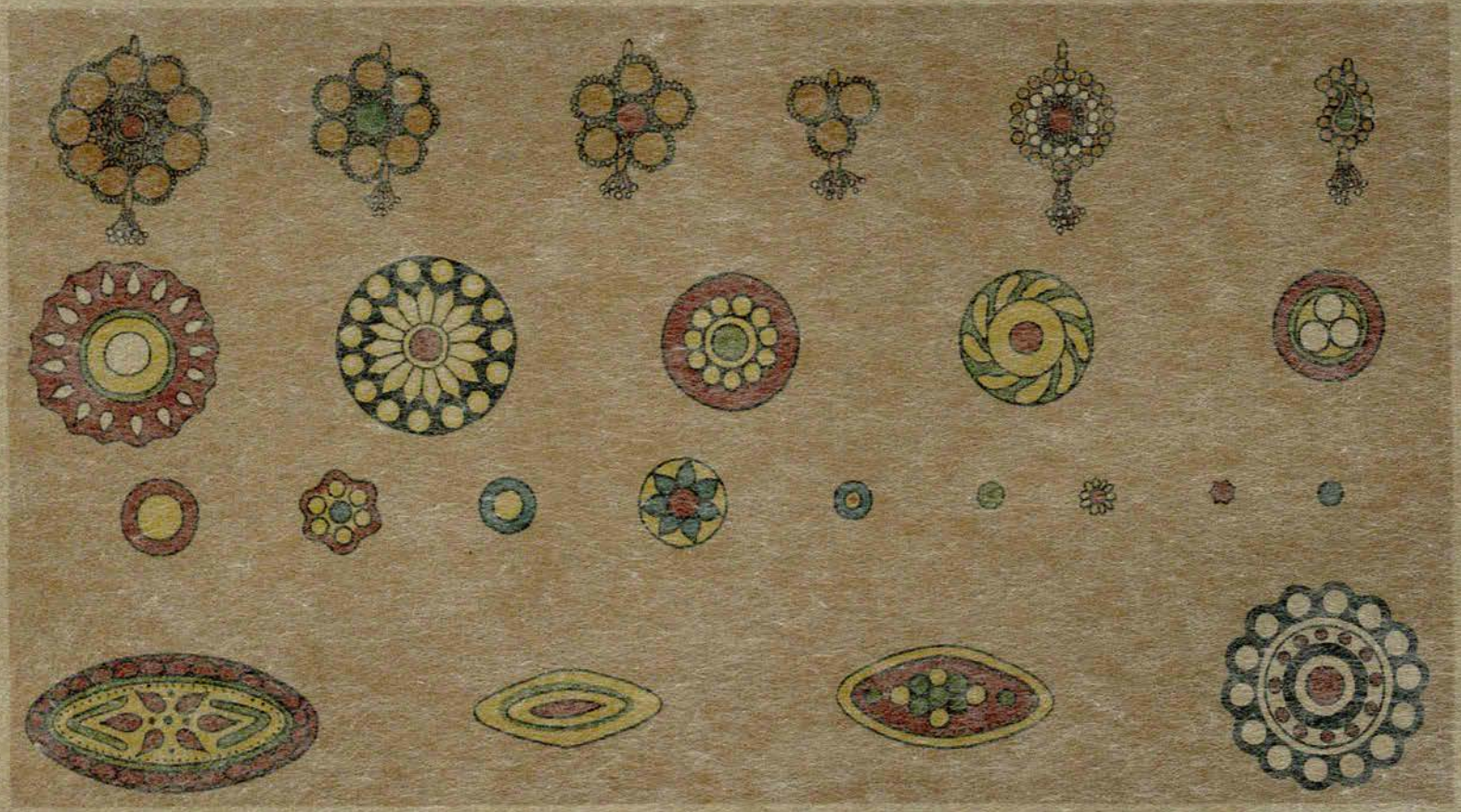
The traditional occupation of the Lakheras is to make and sell bangles and other articles of lac. Lac is regarded with a certain degree of superstitious repugnance by the Hindus because of its red colour, resembling blood. On this account and also because of the sin committed in killing them, no Hindu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

always by men, the insects being carried in a leaf-cup and placed on a branch of an uninfected tree, usually the *kusum*.[1] It is said that the work should be done at night and the man should be naked when he places the insects on the tree. The tree is fenced round and nobody is allowed to touch it, as it is considered that the crop would thus be spoiled. If a woman has lost her husband and has to sow lac, she takes her son in her arms and places the cup containing the insects on his head; on arriving at the tree she manages to apply the insects by means of a stick, not touching the cup with her own hands. All this ritual attaches simply to the infection of the first tree, and afterwards in January or February the insects are propagated on to other trees without ceremony. The juice of onions is dropped on to them to make them healthy. The stick-lac is collected by the Gonds and Korkus and sold to the Lakheras; they clear it of wood as far as possible and then place the incrusted twigs and bark in long cotton bags and heat them before a fire, squeezing out the gum, which is spread out on flat plates so as to congeal into the shape of a pancake. This is again heated and mixed with white clay and forms the material for the bangles. They are coloured with *chapra*, the pure gum prepared like sealing-wax, which is mixed with vermilion, or arsenic and turmeric for a yellow colour. In some localities at least only the Lakheras and Patwas and no higher caste will sell articles made of lac.

4. Lac bangles.

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

[1] *Schleichera trijuga.*



EXAMPLES OF SPANGLES WORN BY WOMEN ON THE FOREHEAD.

Hindus, while glass ones are a comparatively recent fashion introduced by the Muhammadans. In support of this it may be urged that glass bangles are largely made by the Muhammadan Turkāri or Sīsgar, and also that lac bangles must have been worn prior to glass ones, because if the latter had been known the clumsy and unornamental bracelet made of lac and clay could never have come into existence. The wearing of lac bangles on the above occasions would therefore be explained according to the common usage of adhering on religious and ceremonial occasions to the more ancient methods and accessories, which are sanctified by association and custom. Similarly the Holi pyre is often kindled with fire produced by the friction of wood, and temples are lighted with vegetable instead of mineral oil.

5. Red, a lucky colour.

It may be noted, however, that lac bangles are not always worn by the bride at a wedding, the custom being unknown in some localities. Moreover, it appears that glass was known to the Hindus at a period prior to the Muhammadan invasions, though bangles may not have been made from it. Another reason for the use of lac bangles on the occasions noticed is that lac, as already seen, represents blood. Though blood itself is now repugnant to the Hindus, yet red is pre-eminently their lucky colour, being worn at weddings and generally preferred. It is suggested in the *Bombay Gazetteer*[1] that blood was lucky as having been the first food of primitive man, who learnt to suck the blood of animals before he ate their flesh. But it does not seem necessary to go back quite so far as this. The earliest form of sacrifice, as shown by Professor Robertson Smith,[2] was that in which the community of kinsmen ate together the flesh of their divine or totem animal god and drank its blood. When the god became separated from the animal and was represented by a stone at the place of worship and the people had ceased to eat raw flesh and drink blood, the blood was poured out over the stone as an offering to the god. This practice still obtains among the lower castes of Hindus and the primitive tribes, the blood of animals offered to Devi and other village deities being allowed to drop on to the stones representing them. But the higher

[1] *Hindus of Gujarāt*, App., art. Vāghri, footnote. [2] *Religion of the Semites.*

castes of Hindus have abandoned animal sacrifices, and hence cannot make the blood-offering. In place of it they smear the stone with vermilion, which seems obviously a substitute for blood, since it is used to colour the stones representing the deities in exactly the same manner. Even vermilion, however, is not offered to the highest deities of Neo-Hinduism, Siva or Mahādeo and Vishnu, to whom animal sacrifices would be abhorrent. It is offered to Hanumān, whose image is covered with it, and to Devi and Bhairon and to the many local and village deities. In past times animal sacrifices were offered to Bhairon, as they still are to Devi, and though it is not known that they were made to Hanumān, this is highly probable, as he is the god of strength and a mighty warrior. The Mānbhao mendicants, who abhor all forms of bloodshed like the Jains, never pass one of these stones painted with vermilion if they can avoid doing so, and if they are aware that there is one on their road will make a circuit so as not to see it.[1] There seems, therefore, every reason to suppose that vermilion is a substitute for blood in offerings and hence probably on other occasions. As the places of the gods were thus always coloured red with blood, red would come to be the divine and therefore the propitious colour among the Hindus and other races.

6. Vermilion and spangles.

Among the constituents of the Sohāg or lucky *trousseau* without which no Hindu girl of good caste can be married are *sendur* or vermilion, *kunku* or red powder or a spangle (*tikli*), and *mahāwar* or red balls of cotton-wool. In Chhattīsgarh and Bengal the principal marriage rite is usually the smearing of vermilion by the bridegroom on the parting of the bride's hair, and elsewhere this is commonly done as a subsidiary ceremony. Here also there is little reason to doubt that vermilion is a substitute for blood; indeed, in some castes in Bengal, as noted by Sir H. Risley, the blood of the parties is actually mixed.[2] This marking of the bride with blood is a result of the sacrifice and communal feast of kinsmen already described; only those who could join in the sacrificial meal and eat the flesh of the sacred animal god

[1] Mackintosh, *Report on the Mānbhaos.*

[2] See articles on Khairwār and Kewat.

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

But before marriage it is optional and afterwards compulsory. A widow may not wear vermilion, *kunku*, or spangles.

7. Red dye on the feet.

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

8. Red threads.

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

9. Lac toys.

Toys of lac are especially made during the fast of Shrāwan (July). At this time for five years after her marriage a Hindu bride receives annually from her husband a

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

LODHI

LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. Origin and traditions.

Lodhi, Lodha.—An important agricultural caste residing principally in the Vindhyan Districts and Nerbudda valley, whence they have spread to the Wainganga valley and the Khairāgarh State of Chhattīsgarh. Their total strength in the Province is 300,000 persons. The Lodhis are immigrants from the United Provinces, in whose Gazetteers it is stated that they belonged originally to the Ludhiāna District and took their name from it. Their proper designation is Lodha, but it has become corrupted to Lodhi in the Central Provinces. A number of persons resident in the Harda tahsīl of Hoshangābād are called Lodha and say that they are distinct from the Lodhis. There is nothing to support their statement, however, and it is probable that they simply represent the separate wave of immigration which took place from Central India into the Hoshangābād and Betūl Districts in the fifteenth century. They spoke a different dialect of the group known as Rājasthāni, and hence perhaps the caste-name did not get corrupted. The Lodhis of the Jubbulpore Division probably came here at a later date from northern India. The Mandla Lodhis are said to have been brought to the District by Rāja Hirde Sāh of the Gond-Rājpūt dynasty of Garha-Mandla in the seventeenth

century, and they were given large grants of the waste land in the interior in order that they might clear it of forest.[1] The Lodhis are a good instance of a caste who have obtained a great rise in social status on migrating to a new area. In northern India Mr. Nesfield places them lowest among the agricultural castes and states that they are little better than a forest tribe. He derives the name from *lod*, a clod, according to which Lodhi would mean clodhopper.[2] Another suggestion is that the name is derived from the bark of the *lodh* tree,[3] which is collected by the Lodhas in northern India and sold for use as a dyeing agent. In Bulandshahr they are described as "Of short stature and uncouth appearance, and from this as well as from their want of a tradition of immigration from other parts they appear to be a mixed class proceeding from aboriginal and Aryan parents. In the Districts below Agra they are considered so low that no one drinks water touched by them; but this is not the case in the Districts above Agra."[4] In Hamīrpur they appear to have some connection with the Kurmis, and a story told of them in Saugor is that the first Lodhi was created by Mahādeo from a scarecrow in a Kurmi woman's field and given the vocation of a farmservant. But the Lodhis themselves claim Rājpūt ancestry and say that they are descended from Lava, the eldest of the two sons of Rāja Rāmchandra of Ajodhya.

2. Position in the Central Provinces.

In the Central Provinces they have become landholders and are addressed by the honorific title of Thākur, ranking with the higher cultivating castes. Several Lodhi landholders in Damoh and Saugor formerly held a quasi-independent position under the Muhammadans, and subsequently acknowledged the Rāja of Panna as their suzerain, who conferred on some families the titles of Rāja and Diwān. They kept up a certain amount of state and small contingents of soldiery, attended by whom they went to pay their respects to the representative of the ruling power. "It would be difficult," says Grant,[5] "to recognise the descendants of the

[1] Colonel Ward's *Mandla Settlement Report*, p. 29.

[2] *Brief View of the Caste System*, p. 14.

[3] *Symplocos racemosa*.

[4] Rāja Lachman Singh's *Bulandshahr Memo*, p. 182, quoted in Mr. Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Lodha.

[5] *Narsinghpur Settlement Report* (1866), p. 28.

peaceful cultivators of northern India in the strangely accoutred Rājas who support their style and title by a score of ragged matchlock-men and a ruined mud fort on a hill-side." Sir B. Fuller's *Damoh Settlement Report* says of them: "A considerable number of villages had been for long time past in the possession of certain important families, who held them by prescription or by a grant from the ruling power, on a right which approximated as nearly to the English idea of proprietorship as native custom permitted. The most prominent of these families were of the Lodhi caste. They have developed tastes for sport and freebooting and have become decidedly the most troublesome item in the population. During the Mutiny the Lodhis as a class were openly disaffected, and one of their proprietors, the Tālukdār of Hindoria, marched on the District headquarters and looted the treasury." Similarly the Rāmgarh family of Mandla took to arms and lost the large estates till then held by them. On the other hand the village of Imjhira in Narsinghpur belonging to a Lodhi mālguzār was gallantly defended against a band of marauding rebels from Saugor. Sir R. Craddock describes them as follows: "They are men of strong character, but their constant family feuds and love of faction militate against their prosperity. A cluster of Lodhi villages forms a hotbed of strife and the nearest relations are generally divided by bitter animosities. The Revenue Officer who visits them is beset by reckless charges and counter-charges and no communities are less amenable to conciliatory compromises. Agrarian outrages are only too common in some of the Lodhi villages."[1] The high status of the Lodhi caste in the Central Provinces as compared with their position in the country of their origin may be simply explained by the fact that they here became landholders and ruling chiefs.

3. Sub-divisions.

In the northern Districts the landholding Lodhis are divided into a number of exogamous clans who marry with each other in imitation of the Rājpūts. These are the Mahdele, Kerbania, Dongaria, Narwaria, Bhadoria and others. The name of the Kerbanias is derived from Kerbana, a village in Damoh, and the Bālākote family of that District are the

[1] *Nāgpur Settlement Report*, p. 24.

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

This division of the superior branch of a caste into large exogamous clans and the lower one into endogamous subcastes is only found, so far as is known, among the Rājpūts

and one or two landholding castes who have imitated them. Its origin is discussed in the Introduction.

4. Exogamous groups.

The subcastes are as usual divided into exogamous groups of the territorial, titular and totemistic classes. Among sections named after places may be mentioned the Chāndpuria from Chāndpur, the Kharpuria from Kharpur, and the Nāgpuriha, Raipuria, Dhamonia, Damauha and Shāhgariha from Nāgpur, Raipur, Dhamoni, Damoh and Shāhgarh. Two-thirds of the sections have the names of towns or villages. Among titular names are Saulākhia, owner of 100 lakhs, Bhainsmār, one who killed a buffalo, Kodonchor, one who stole kodon,[1] Kumharha perhaps from Kumhār a potter, and Rājbhar and Barhai (carpenter), names of castes. Among totemistic names are Baghela, tiger, also the name of a Rājpūt sept; Kutria, a dog; Khajūria, the date-palm tree; Mirchaunia, chillies; Andwār, from the castor-oil plant; Bhainsaiya, a buffalo; and Nāk, the nose.

5. Marriage customs.

A man must not marry in his own section nor in that of his mother. He may marry two sisters. The exchange of girls between families is only in force among the Bilāspur Lodhis, who say, 'Eat with those who have eaten with you and marry with those who have married with you.' Girls are usually wedded before puberty, but in the northern Districts the marriage is sometimes postponed from desire to marry into a good family or from want of funds to pay a bridegroom-price, and girls of twenty or more may be unmarried. A case is known of a man who had two daughters unmarried at twenty-two and twenty-three years old, because he had been waiting for good *partis*, with the result that one of them went and lived with a man and he then married off the other in the Singhast[2] year, which is forbidden among the Lodhis, and was put out of caste. The marriage and other ceremonies of the Lodhis resemble those of the Kurmis, except in Chhattīsgarh where the Marātha fashion is followed. Here, at the wedding, the bride and bridegroom hold between them a doll made of dough with 21 cowries inside, and as the priest repeats the marriage texts they pull it apart like a cracker and see how many cowries each has got. It is

[1] A small millet.

[2] Every twelfth year when the planet Jupiter is in conjunction with the constellation Sinh (Leo).

considered auspicious if the bridegroom has the larger number. The priest is on the roof of the house, and before the wedding he cries out:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. The Gauna ceremony. Fertility rites.

When the girl becomes mature the Gauna or going-away ceremony is performed. In Chhattīsgarh before leaving her home the bride goes out with her sister and worships a *palās* tree.[1] Her sister waves a lighted lamp seven times over it, and the bride goes seven times round it in imitation of the marriage ceremony. At her husband's house seven pictures of the family gods are drawn on a wall inside the house and the bride worships these, placing a little sugar and bread on the mouth of each and bowing before them. She is then seated before the family god while an old woman brings a stone rolling-pin[2] wrapped up in a piece of cloth, which is supposed to be a baby, and the old woman imitates a baby crying. She puts the roller in the bride's lap saying, 'Take this and give it milk.' The bride is abashed and throws it aside. The old woman picks it up and shows it to the assembled women saying, 'The bride has just had a baby,' amid loud laughter. Then she gives the stone to the bridegroom who also throws it aside. This ceremony is meant to induce fertility, and it is supposed that by making believe that the bride has had a baby she will quickly have one.

The higher clans of Lodhis in Damoh and Saugor pro-

[1] *Butea frondosa.* [2] This is known as *lodha.*

7. Widow-marriage and puberty rite.

hibit the remarriage of widows, but instances of it occur. It is said that a man who marries a widow is relegated to the Mahālodhi subcaste or the Lahuri Sen, an illegitimate group, and the Lodhis of his clan no longer acknowledge his family. But if a girl's husband dies before she has lived with him she may marry again. The other Lodhis freely permit widow-marriage and divorce. When a girl first becomes mature she is secluded, and though she may stay in the house cannot enter the cook-room. At the end of the period she is dressed in red cloth, and a present of cocoanuts stripped of their shells, sweetmeats, and a little money, is placed in her lap, while a few women are invited to a feast. This rite is also meant to induce fertility, the kernel of the cocoanut being held to resemble an unborn baby.

8. Mourning impurity.

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

9. Social customs.

The caste employ Brāhmans for weddings, but not necessarily for birth and death ceremonies. They eat flesh and fish, and the bulk of the caste eat fowls and drink liquor, but the landowning section abjures these practices. They will take food cooked with water from Brāhmans, and that cooked without water also from Rājpūts, Kāyasths and Sunārs. In Narsinghpur they also accept cooked food from such a low caste as Rājjahrs,[1] probably because the Rājjhars are commonly employed by them as farmservants, and hence have been accustomed to carry their master's food. A similar relation has been found to exist between the Panwār Rājpūts and their Gond farmservants. The higher class Lodhis make an inordinate show of hospitality at their

[1] The Rājjhars are a low caste of farmservants and labourers, probably an offshoot of the Bhar tribe.

weddings. The plates of the guests are piled up profusely with food, and these latter think it a point of honour never to refuse it or say enough. When melted butter is poured out into their cups the stream must never be broken as it passes from one guest to the other, or it is said that they will all get up and leave the feast. Apparently a lot of butter must be wasted on the ground. The higher clans seclude their women, and these when they go out must wear long clothes covering the head and reaching to the feet. The women are not allowed to wear ornaments of a cheaper metal than silver, except of course their glass bangles. The Mahālodhis will eat food cooked with water in the cook-room and carried to the fields, which the higher clans will not do. Their women wear the *sāri* drawn through the legs and knotted behind according to the Marātha fashion, but whenever they meet their husband's elder brother or any other elder of the family they must undo the knot and let the cloth hang down round their legs as a mark of respect. They wear no breast-cloth. Girls are tattooed before adolescence with dots on the chin and forehead, and marks on one hand. Before she is tattooed the girl is given sweets to eat, and during the process the operator sings songs in order that her attention may be diverted and she may not feel the pain. After she has finished the operator mutters a charm to prevent evil spirits from troubling the girl and causing her pain.

10. Greetings and method of address.

The caste have some strict taboos on names and on conversation between the sexes. A man will only address his wife, sister, daughter, paternal aunt or niece directly. If he has occasion to speak to some other woman he will take his daughter or other female relative with him and do his business through her. He will not speak even to his own women before a crowd. A woman will similarly only speak to her father, son or nephew, and father-, son- or younger brother-in-law. She will not speak to her elder brother-in-law, and she will not address her husband in the presence of his father, elder brother or any other relative whom he reveres. A wife will never call her husband by his name, but always address him as father of her son, and, if she has no son, will sometimes speak to him through his younger brother. Neither the father nor mother will call their eldest

son by his name, but will use some other name. Similarly a daughter-in-law is given a fresh name on coming into the house, and on her arrival her mother-in-law looks at her for the first time through a *guna* or ring of baked gram-flour. A man meeting his father or elder brother will touch his feet in silence. One meeting his sister's husband, sister's son or son-in-law, will touch his feet and say, '*Sāhib, salaam.*'

11. Sacred thread and social status.

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

1. Legends of the caste.

Lohār, Khāti, Ghantra, Ghisāri, Panchāl.—The occupational caste of blacksmiths. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *Lauha-kāra*, a worker in iron. In the Central Provinces the Lohār has in the past frequently combined the occupations of carpenter and blacksmith, and in such a capacity he is known as Khāti. The honorific designations applied to the caste are Karīgar, which means skilful, and

Mistri, a corruption of the English 'Master' or 'Mister.' In 1911 the Lohārs numbered about 180,000 persons in the Central Provinces and Berār. The Lohār is indispensable to the village economy, and the caste is found over the whole rural area of the Province.

"Practically all the Lohārs," Mr. Crooke writes,[1] "trace their origin to Visvakarma, who is the later representative of the Vedic Twashtri, the architect and handicraftsman of the gods, 'The fashioner of all ornaments, the most eminent of artisans, who formed the celestial chariots of the deities, on whose craft men subsist, and whom, a great and immortal god, they continually worship.' One[2] tradition tells that Visvakarma was a Brāhman and married the daughter of an Ahīr, who in her previous birth had been a dancing-girl of the gods. By her he had nine sons, who became the ancestors of various artisan castes, such as the Lohār, Barhai, Sunār, and Kasera."

The Lohārs of the Uriya country in the Central Provinces tell a similar story, according to which Kamar, the celestial architect, had twelve sons. The eldest son was accustomed to propitiate the family god with wine, and one day he drank some of the wine, thinking that it could not be sinful to do so as it was offered to the deity. But for this act his other brothers refused to live with him and left their home, adopting various professions; but the eldest brother became a worker in iron and laid a curse upon the others that they should not be able to practise their calling except with the implements which he had made. The second brother thus became a woodcutter (Barhai), the third a painter (Mahārana), the fourth learnt the science of vaccination and medicine and became a vaccinator (Suthiār), the fifth a goldsmith, the sixth a brass-smith, the seventh a coppersmith, and the eighth a carpenter, while the ninth brother was weak in the head and married his eldest sister, on account of which fact his descendants are known as Ghantra.[3] The Ghantras are an inferior class of blacksmiths,

[1] *Tribes and Castes of the N.W.P. and Oudh*, art. Lohār.

[2] Dowson, *Classical Dictionary*, *s.v.*

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

probably an offshoot from some of the forest tribes, who are looked down on by the others. It is said that even to the present day the Ghantra Lohārs have no objection to eating the leavings of food of their wives, whom they regard as their eldest sisters.

2. Social position of the Lohār.

The above story is noticeable as indicating that the social position of the Lohār is somewhat below that of the other artisan castes, or at least of those who work in metals. This fact has been recorded in other localities, and has been explained by some stigma arising from his occupation, as in the following passage: "His social position is low even for a menial, and he is classed as an impure caste, in so far that Jāts and others of similar standing will have no social communion with him, though not as an outcast like the scavenger. His impurity, like that of the barber, washerman and dyer, springs solely from the nature of his employment; perhaps because it is a dirty one, but more probably because black is a colour of evil omen. It is not improbable that the necessity under which he labours of using bellows made of cowhide may have something to do with his impurity."[1]

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

Ar, Dhār, Chuchkār.
In tinon se bachāwe Kartār.

Here *Ar* means an iron goad and signifies the Lohār; *Dhār* represents the sound of the oil falling from the press and means a Teli or oilman; *Chuchkār* is an imitation of the sound of clothes being beaten against a stone and denotes the Dhobi or washerman; and the phrase thus runs, 'My Friend, beware of the Lohār, Teli, and Dhobi, for they

[1] *Punjab Census Report* (1881), para. 624. (Ibbetson.)

are of evil omen.' It is not quite clear why this disrepute should attach to the Lohār, because iron itself is lucky, though its colour, black, may be of bad omen. But the low status of the Lohār may partly arise from the fact of his being a village menial and a servant of the cultivators; whereas the trades of the goldsmith, brass-smith and carpenter are of later origin than the blacksmith's, and are urban rather than rural industries; and thus these artisans do not commonly occupy the position of village menials. Another important consideration is that the iron industry is associated with the primitive tribes, who furnished the whole supply of the metal prior to its importation from Europe: and it is hence probable that the Lohār caste was originally constituted from these and would thus naturally be looked down upon by the Hindus. In Bengal, where few or no traces of the village community remain, the Lohār ranks as the equal of Koiris and Kurmis, and Brāhmans will take water from his hands;[1] and this somewhat favours the argument that his lower status elsewhere is not due to incidents of his occupation.

3. Caste sub-divisions.

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

4. Marriage and other customs.

Infant-marriage is the custom of the caste, and the ceremony is that prevalent among the agricultural castes of the locality. The remarriage of widows is permitted, and

[1] *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, art. Lohār.

they have the privilege of selecting their own husbands, or at least of refusing to accept any proposed suitor. A widow is always married from her father's house, and never from that of her deceased husband. The first husband's property is taken by his relatives, if there be any, and they also assume the custody of his children as soon as they are old enough to dispense with a mother's care. The dead are both buried and burnt, and in the eastern Districts some water and a tooth-stick are daily placed at a cross-road for the use of the departed spirit during the customary period of mourning, which extends to ten days. On the eleventh day the relatives go and bathe, and the chief mourner puts on a new loin-cloth. Some rice is taken and seven persons pass it from hand to hand. They then pound the rice, and making from it a figure to represent a human being, they place some grain in its mouth and say to it, 'Go and become incarnate in some human being,' and throw the image into the water. After this the impurity caused by the death is removed, and they go home and feast with their friends. In the evening they make cakes of rice, and place them seven times on the shoulder of each person who has carried the corpse to the cemetery or pyre, to remove the impurity contracted from touching it. It is also said that if this be not done the shoulder will feel the weight of the coffin for a period of six months. The caste endeavour to ascertain whether the spirit of the dead person returns to join in the funeral feast, and in what shape it will be born again. For this purpose rice-flour is spread on the floor of the cooking-room and covered with a brass plate. The women retire and sit in an adjoining room while the chief mourner with a few companions goes outside the village, and sprinkles some more rice-flour on the ground. They call to the deceased person by name, saying, 'Come, come,' and then wait patiently till some worm or insect crawls on to the floor. Some dough is then applied to this and it is carried home and let loose in the house. The flour under the brass plate is examined, and it is said that they usually see the footprints of a person or animal, indicating the corporeal entity in which the deceased soul has found a resting-place. During the period of mourning members of

the bereaved family do not follow their ordinary business, nor eat flesh, sweets or other delicate food. They may not make offerings to their deities nor touch any persons outside the family, nor wear head-cloths or shoes. In the eastern Districts the principal deities of the Lohārs are Dūlha Deo and Somlai or Devi, the former being represented by a knife set in the ground inside the house, and the latter by the painting of a woman on the wall. Both deities are kept in the cooking-room, and here the head of the family offers to them rice soaked in milk, with sandal-paste, flowers, vermilion and lamp-black. He burns some melted butter in an earthen lamp and places incense upon it. If a man has been affected by the evil eye an exorcist will place some salt on his hand and burn it, muttering spells, and the evil influence is removed. They believe that a spell can be cast on a man by giving him to eat the bones of an owl, when he will become an idiot.

5. Occupation.

In the rural area of the Province the Lohār is still a village menial, making and mending the iron implements of agriculture, such as the ploughshare, axe, sickle, goad and other articles. For doing this he is paid in Saugor a yearly contribution of twenty pounds of grain per plough of land[1] held by each cultivator, together with a handful of grain at sowing-time and a sheaf at harvest from both the autumn and spring crops. In Wardha he gets fifty pounds of grain per plough of four bullocks or forty acres. For making new implements the Lohār is sometimes paid separately and is always supplied with the iron and charcoal. The hand-smelting iron industry has practically died out in the Province and the imported metal is used for nearly all purposes. The village Lohārs are usually very poor, their income seldom exceeding that of an unskilled labourer. In the towns, owing to the rapid extension of milling and factory industries, blacksmiths readily find employment and some of them earn very high wages. In the manufacture of cutlery, nails and other articles the capital is often found by a Bhātia or Bohra merchant, who acts as the capitalist and employs the Lohārs as his workmen. The women help their husbands by blowing the bellows and dragging the hot iron

[1] About 15 acres.

from the furnace, while the men wield the hammer. The Panchāls of Berār are described as a wandering caste of smiths, living in grass mat-huts and using as fuel the roots of thorn bushes, which they batter out of the ground with the back of a short-handled axe peculiar to themselves. They move from place to place with buffaloes, donkeys and ponies to carry their kit.[1] Another class of wandering smiths, the Ghisāris, are described by Mr. Crooke as follows: "Occasional camps of these most interesting people are to be met with in the Districts of the Meerut Division. They wander about with small carts and pack-animals, and, being more expert than the ordinary village Lohār, their services are in demand for the making of tools for carpenters, weavers and other craftsmen. They are known in the Punjab as Gādiya or those who have carts (*gādi, gārī*). Sir D. Ibbetson[2] says that they come up from Rājputāna and the North-Western Provinces, but their real country is the Deccan. In the Punjab they travel about with their families and implements in carts from village to village, doing the finer kinds of iron-work, which are beyond the capacity of the village artisan. In the Deccan[3] this class of wandering blacksmiths are called Saiqalgar, or knife-grinders, or Ghisāra, or grinders (Hindi, *ghisāna*, 'to rub'). They wander about grinding knives and tools."

Lorha.[4]—A small caste of cultivators in the Hoshangābād and Nimār Districts, whose distinctive occupation is to grow *san*-hemp (*Crotalaria juncea*) and to make sacking and gunny-bags from the fibre. A very strong prejudice against this crop exists among the Hindus, and those who grow it are usually cut off from their parent caste and become a separate community. Thus we have the castes known as Kumrāwat, Patbīna and Dāngur in different parts of the Province, who are probably offshoots from the Kurmis and Kunbis, but now rank below them because they grow this crop; and in the Kurmi caste itself a subcaste of Santora (hemp-picking) Kurmis has grown up. In Bilāspur the

[1] *Berār Census Report*, 1881 (Kitts).

[2] *Punjāb Ethnography*, para. 624.

[3] *Bombay Gazetteer*, xvi. 82.

[4] This article is partly based on papers by Mr. P. B. Telang, Munsiff Seoni-Mālwa, and Mr. Wāman Rao Mandloi, nāib-tahsīldār, Harda.

Pathāria Kurmis will grow *san*-hemp and ret it, but will not spin or weave the fibre; while the Athāria Kurmis will not grow the crop, but will spin the fibre and make sacking. The Saugor Kewats grow this fibre, and here Brāhmans and other high castes will not take water from Kewats, though in the eastern Districts they will do so. The Narsinghpur Mallāhs, a branch of the Kewats, have also adopted the cultivation of *san*-hemp as a regular profession. The basis of the prejudice against the *san*-hemp plant is not altogether clear. The Lorhas themselves say that they are looked down upon because they use wheat-starch (*lapsi*) for smoothing the fibre, and that their name is somehow derived from this fact. But the explanation does not seem satisfactory. Many of the country people appear to think that there is something uncanny about the plant because it grows so quickly, and they say that on one occasion a cultivator went out to sow hemp in the morning, and his wife was very late in bringing his dinner to the field. He grew hungry and angry, and at last the shoots of the hemp-seeds which he had sown in the morning began to appear above the ground. At this he was so enraged that when his wife finally came he said she had kept him waiting so long that the crop had come up in the meantime, and murdered her. Since then the Hindus have been forbidden to grow *san*-hemp lest they should lose their tempers in the same manner. This story makes a somewhat excessive demand on the hearer's credulity. One probable cause of the taboo seems to be that the process of soaking and retting the stalks of the plant pollutes the water, and if carried on in a tank or in the pools of a stream might destroy the village supply of drinking-water. In former times it may have been thought that the desecration of their sacred element was an insult to the deities of rivers and streams, which would bring down retribution on the offender. It is also the case that the proper separation of the fibres requires a considerable degree of dexterity which can only be acquired by practice. Owing to the recent increase in the price of the fibre and the large profits which can now be obtained from hemp cultivation, the prejudice against it is gradually breaking down, and the Gonds, Korkus and lower Hindu castes have waived their religious scruples

and are glad to turn an honest penny by sowing hemp either on their own account or for hire. Other partially tabooed crops are turmeric and *āl* or Indian madder (*Morinda citrifolia*), while onions and garlic are generally eschewed by Hindu cultivators. For growing turmeric and *āl* special subcastes have been formed, as the Alia Kunbis and the Hardia Mālis and Kāchhis (from *haldi*, turmeric), just as in the case of *san*-hemp. The objection to these two crops is believed to lie in the fact that the roots which yield the commercial product have to be boiled, and by this process a number of insects contained in them are destroyed. But the preparation of the hemp-fibre does not seem to involve any such sacrifice of insect life. The Lorhas appear to be a mixed group, with a certain amount of Rājpūt blood in them, perhaps an offshoot of the Kirārs, with whose social customs their own are said to be identical. According to another account, they are a lower or illegitimate branch of the Lodha caste of cultivators, of whose name their own is said to be a corruption. The Nimār Gūjars have a subcaste named Lorha, and the Lorhas of Hoshangābād may be connected with these. They live in the Seoni and Harda tahsīls of Hoshangābād, the *san*-hemp crop being a favourite one in villages adjoining the forests, because it is not subject to the depredations of wild animals. Cultivators are often glad to sublet their fields for the purpose of having a crop of hemp grown upon them, because the stalks are left for manure and fertilise the ground. String and sacking are also made from the hemp-fibre by vagrant and criminal castes like the Banjāras and Bhāmtas, who formerly required the bags for carrying their goods and possessions about with them.

MAHĀR

LIST OF PARAGRAPHS

Mahār, Mehra, Dhed.—The impure caste of menials, labourers and village watchmen of the Marātha country, corresponding to the Chamārs and Koris of northern India. They numbered nearly 1,200,000 persons in the combined Province in 1911, and are most numerous in the Nāgpur, Bhandāra, Chānda and Wardha Districts of the Central Provinces, while considerable colonies are also found in Bālāghāt, Chhindwāra and Betūl. Their distribution thus follows largely that of the Marāthi language and the castes speaking it. Berār contained 400,000, distributed over the four Districts. In the whole Province this caste is third in point of numerical strength. In India the Mahārs number about three million persons, of whom a half belong to Bombay. I am not aware of any accepted derivation for the word Mahār, but the balance of opinion seems to be that the native name of Bombay, Mahārāshtra, is derived from that of the caste, as suggested by Wilson. Another derivation which holds it to be a corruption of Maha Rāstrakūta, and to be so called after the Rāshtrakūta Rājpūt dynasty of the eighth and ninth centuries, seems less probable because countries are very seldom named after ruling

1. General notice.

dynasties.[1] Whereas in support of Mahārāshtra as 'The country of the Mahārs,' we have Gujarāshtra or Gujarāt, the country of the Gūjars, and Saurāshtra or Surat, the country of the Sauras. According to Platts' Dictionary, however, Mahārāshtra means 'the great country,' and this is what the Marātha Brāhmans themselves say. Mehra appears to be a variant of the name current in the Hindustāni Districts, while Dheda, or Dhada, is said to be a corruption of Dharadas or hillmen.[2] In the Punjab it is said to be a general term of contempt meaning 'Any low fellow.'[3]

Wilson considers the Mahārs to be an aboriginal or pre-Aryan tribe, and all that is known of the caste seems to point to the correctness of this hypothesis. In the *Bombay Gazetteer* the writer of the interesting Gujarāt volume suggests that the Mahārs are fallen Rājpūts; but there seems little to support this opinion except their appearance and countenance, which is of the Hindu rather than the Dravidian type. In Gujarāt they have also some Rājpūt surnames, as Chauhān, Panwār, Rāthor, Solanki and so on, but these may have been adopted by imitation or may indicate a mixture of Rājpūt blood. Again, the Mahārs of Gujarāt are the farmservants and serfs of the Kunbis. "Each family is closely connected with the house of some landholder or *pattidār* (sharer). For his master he brings in loads from the fields and cleans out the stable, receiving in return daily allowances of buttermilk and the carcases of any cattle that die. This connection seems to show traces of a form of slavery. Rich *pattidārs* have always a certain number of Dheda families whom they speak of as ours (*hamāra*), and when a man dies he distributes along with his lands a certain number of Dheda families to each of his sons. An old tradition among Dhedas points to some relation between the Kunbis and Dhedas. Two brothers, Leva and Deva, were the ancestors, the former of the Kunbis, the latter of the Dhedas."[4] Such a relation as this

[1] This derivation is also negatived by the fact that the name Mahāratta was known in the third century B.C. or long before the Rāstrakūtas became prominent.

[2] *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarāt Hindus*, p. 338.

[3] Ibbetson, *Punjab Census Report* (1881).

[4] *Bombay Gazetteer*, *l.c.* text and footnote by R. v. J. S. Taylor.

in Hindu society would imply that many Mahār women held the position of concubines to their Kunbi masters, and would therefore account for the resemblance of the Mahār to Hindus rather than the forest tribes. But if this is to be regarded as evidence of Rājpūt descent, a similar claim would have to be allowed to many of the Chamārs and sweepers. Others of the lowest castes also have Rājpūt sept names, as the Pārdhis and Bhīls; but the fact can at most be taken, I venture to think, to indicate a connection of the 'Droit de Seigneur' type. On the other hand, the Mahārs occupy the debased and impure position which was the lot of those non-Aryan tribes who became subject to the Hindus and lived in their villages; they eat the flesh of dead cattle and this and other customs appear to point decisively to a non-Aryan origin.

2. Length of residence in the Central Provinces.

Several circumstances indicate that the Mahār is recognised as the oldest resident of the plain country of Berār and Nāgpur. In Berār he is a village servant and is the referee on village boundaries and customs, a position implying that his knowledge of them is the most ancient. At the Holi festival the fire of the Mahārs is kindled first and that of the Kunbis is set alight from it. The Kāmdār Mahār, who acts as village watchman, also has the right of bringing the *toran* or rope of leaves which is placed on the marriage-shed of the Kunbis; and for this he receives a present of three annas. In Bhandāra the Telis, Lohārs, Dhīmars and several other castes employ a Mahār *Mohturia* or wise man to fix the date of their weddings. And most curious of all, when the Panwār Rājpūts of this tract celebrate the festival of Nārāyan Deo, they call a Mahār to their house and make him the first partaker of the feast before beginning to eat themselves. Again in Berār[1] the Mahār officiates at the killing of the buffalo on Dasahra. On the day before the festival the chief Mahār of the village and his wife with their garments knotted together bring some earth from the jungle and fashioning two images set one on a clay elephant and the other on a clay bullock. The images are placed on a small platform outside the village site and worshipped; a young he-buffalo is bathed

[1] Kitts' *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 143.

and brought before the images as though for the same object. The Patel wounds the buffalo in the nose with a sword and it is then marched through the village. In the evening it is killed by the head Mahār, buried in the customary spot, and any evil that might happen during the coming year is thus deprecated and, it is hoped, averted. The claim to take the leading part in this ceremony is the occasion of many a quarrel and an occasional affray or riot. Such customs tend to show that the Mahārs were the earliest immigrants from Bombay into the Berār and Nāgpur plain, excluding of course the Gonds and other tribes, who have practically been ousted from this tract. And if it is supposed that the Panwārs came here in the tenth century, as seems not improbable,[1] the Mahārs, whom the Panwārs recognise as older residents than themselves, must have been earlier still, and were probably numbered among the subjects of the old Hindu kingdoms of Bhāndak and Nagardhan.

3. Legend of origin.

The Mahārs say they are descended from Mahāmuni, who was a foundling picked up by the goddess Pārvati on the banks of the Ganges. At this time beef had not become a forbidden food; and when the divine cow, Tripād Gayatri, died, the gods determined to cook and eat her body and Mahāmuni was set to watch the pot boiling. He was as inattentive as King Alfred, and a piece of flesh fell out of the pot. Not wishing to return the dirty piece to the pot Mahāmuni ate it; but the gods discovered the delinquency, and doomed him and his descendants to live on the flesh of dead cows.[2]

4. Sub-castes.

The caste have a number of subdivisions, generally of a local or territorial type, as Daharia, the residents of Dāhar or the Jubbulpore country, Baonia (52) of Berār, Nemādya or from Nimār, Khāndeshi from Khāndesh, and so on; the Katia group are probably derived from that caste, Katia meaning a spinner; the Bārkias are another group whose name is supposed to mean spinners of fine thread; while the Lonārias are salt-makers. The highest division are the Somvansis or children of the moon; these claim to have taken part with the Pāndavas against the Kauravas in the

[1] See article on Panwār Rājpūt.

[2] *Berār Census Report* (1881), p. 144.

war of the Mahābhārata, and subsequently to have settled in Mahārāshtra.[1] But the Somvansi Mahārs consent to groom horses, which the Baone and Kosaria subcastes will not do. Baone and Somvansi Mahārs will take food together, but will not intermarry. The Ladwān subcaste are supposed to be the offspring of kept women of the Somvansi Mahārs; and in Wardha the Dhārmik group are also the descendants of illicit unions and their name is satirical, meaning 'virtuous.' As has been seen, the caste have a subdivision named Katia, which is the name of a separate Hindustāni caste; and other subcastes have names belonging to northern India, as the Mahobia, from Mahoba in the United Provinces, the Kosaria or those from Chhattīsgarh, and the Kanaujia from Kanauj. This may perhaps be taken to indicate that bodies of the Kori and Katia weaving castes of northern India have been amalgamated with the Mahārs in Districts where they have come together along the Satpūra Hills and Nerbudda Valley.

5. Exogamous groups and marriage customs.

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

A man must not marry in his own sept, but may take a wife from his mother's or grandmother's. A sister's son may marry a brother's daughter, but not vice versa. A girl who is seduced before marriage by a man of her own caste or any higher one can be married as if she were a widow, but if she has a child she must first get some other family to take it off her hands. The custom of *Lamjhana* or serving for a wife is recognised, and the expectant bridegroom will live with his father-in-law and work for him for a period

[1] Kitts' *Berār Census Report*, p. 144.

varying from one to five years. The marriage ceremony follows the customary Hindustāni or Marātha ritual[1] as the case may be. In Wardha the right foot of the bridegroom and the left one of the bride are placed together in a new basket, while they stand one on each side of the threshold. They throw five handfuls of coloured rice over each other, and each time, as he throws, the bridegroom presses his toe on the bride's foot; at the end he catches the girl by the finger and the marriage is complete. In the Central Provinces the Mohtūria or caste priest officiates at weddings, but in Berār, Mr. Kitts states,[2] the caste employ the Brāhman Joshi or village priest. But as he will not come to their house they hold the wedding on the day that one takes place among the higher castes, and when the priest gives the signal the dividing cloth (Antarpat) between the couple is withdrawn, and the garments of the bride and bridegroom are knotted, while the bystanders clap their hands and pelt the couple with coloured grain. As the priest frequently takes up his position on the roof of the house for a wedding it is easy for the Mahārs to see him. In Mandla some of the lower class of Brāhmans will officiate at the weddings of Mahārs. In Chhindwāra the Mahārs seat the bride and bridegroom in the frame of a loom for the ceremony, and they worship the hide of a cow or bullock filled with water. They drink together ceremoniously, a pot of liquor being placed on a folded cloth and all the guests sitting round it in a circle. An elder man then lays a new piece of cloth on the pot and worships it. He takes a cup of the liquor himself and hands round a cupful to every person present.

In Mandla at a wedding the barber comes and cuts the bride's nails, and the cuttings are rolled up in dough and placed in a little earthen pot beside the marriage-post. The bridegroom's nails and hair are similarly cut in his own house and placed in another vessel. A month or two after the wedding the two little pots are taken out and thrown into the Nerbudda. A wedding costs the bridegroom's party about Rs. 40 or Rs. 50 and the bride's about Rs. 25.

[1] Described in the articles on Kurmi and Kunbi.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

They have no going-away ceremony, but the occasion of a girl's coming to maturity is known as Bolāwan. She is kept apart for six days and given new clothes, and the caste-people are invited to a meal. When a woman's husband dies the barber breaks her bangles, and her anklets are taken off and given to him as his perquisite. Her brother-in-law or other relative gives her a new white cloth, and she wears this at first, and afterwards white or coloured clothes at her pleasure. Her hair is not cut, and she may wear *patelas* or flat metal bangles on the forearm and armlets above the elbow, but not other ornaments. A widow is under no obligation to marry her first husband's younger brother; when she marries a stranger he usually pays a sum of about Rs. 30 to her parents. When the price has been paid the couple exchange a ring and a bangle respectively in token of the agreement. When the woman is proceeding to her second husband's house, her old clothes, necklace and bangles are thrown into a river or stream and she is given new ones to wear. This is done to lay the first husband's spirit, which may be supposed to hang about the clothes she wore as his wife, and when they are thrown away or buried the exorcist mutters spells over them in order to lay the spirit. No music is allowed at the marriage of a widow except the crooked trumpet called *singāra*. A bachelor who marries a widow must first go through a mock ceremony with a cotton-plant, a sword or a ring. Divorce must be effected before the caste *panchāyat* or committee, and if a divorced woman marries again, her first husband performs funeral and mourning ceremonies as if she were dead. In Gujarāt the practice is much more lax and "divorce can be obtained almost to an indefinite extent. Before they finally settle down to wedded life most couples have more than once changed their partners."[1] But here also, before the change takes place, there must be a formal divorce recognised by the caste.

6. Funeral rites.

The caste either burn or bury the dead and observe mourning for three days,[2] having their houses whitewashed and their faces shaved. On the tenth day they give a feast

[1] *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarāt Hindus, loc. cit.*

[2] In Berār for ten days—Kitts' *Berār Census Report, l.c.*

to the caste-fellows. On the Akshaya Tritia[1] and the 30th day of Kunwār (September) they offer rice and cakes to the crows in the names of their ancestors. In Berār Mr. Kitts writes:[2] "If a Mahār's child has died, he will on the third day place bread on the grave; if an infant, milk; if an adult, on the tenth day, with five pice in one hand and five betel-leaves in the other, he goes into the river, dips himself five times and throws these things away; he then places five lighted lamps on the tomb, and after these simple ceremonies gets himself shaved as though he were an orthodox Hindu."

7. Child-birth.

In Mandla the mother is secluded at childbirth in a separate house if one is available, and if not they fence in a part of the veranda for her use with bamboo screens. After the birth the mother must remain impure until the barber comes and colours her toe-nails and draws a line round her feet with red *mahur* powder. This is indispensable, and if the barber is not immediately available she must wait until his services can be obtained. When the navel-string drops it is buried in the place on which the mother sat while giving birth, and when this has been done the purification may be effected. The Dhobi is then called to wash the clothes of the household, and their earthen pots are thrown away. The head of the newborn child is shaved clean, as the birth-hair is considered to be impure, and the hair is wrapped up in dough and thrown into a river.

8. Names.

A child is named on the seventh or twelfth day after its birth, the name being chosen by the Mohtūria or caste headman. The ordinary Hindu names of deities for men and sacred rivers or pious and faithful wives for women are employed; instances of the latter being Ganga, Godāvari, Jamuna, Sīta, Laxmi and Rādha. Opprobrious names are sometimes given to avert ill-luck, as Damdya (purchased for eight cowries), Kauria (a cowrie), Bhikāria (a beggar), Ghusia (from *ghus*, a mallet for stamping earth), Harchatt (refuse), Akāli (born in famine-time), Langra (lame), Lula (having an arm useless); or the name of another low caste is given, as Bhangi (sweeper), Domari (Dom sweeper), Chamra (tanner), Basori (basket-maker). Not infrequently children are named

[1] 3rd Baisākh (April) Sudi, commencement of agricultural year.
[2] *Berār Census Report*, *l.c.*

after the month or day when they were born, as Pusau, born in Pus (December), Chaitu, born in Chait (March), Manglu (born on Tuesday), Buddhi (born on Wednesday), Sukka (born on Friday), Sanīchra (born on Saturday). One boy was called Mulua or 'Sold' (*mol-dena*). His mother had no other children, so sold him for one pice (farthing) to a Gond woman. After five or six months, as he did not get fat, his name was changed to Jhuma or 'lean,' probably as an additional means of averting ill-luck. Another boy was named Ghurka, from the noise he made when being suckled. A child born in the absence of its father is called Sonwa, or one born in an empty house.

9. Religion.

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

10. Adoption of foreign religions.

In Berār and Bombay the Mahārs have some curious forms of belief. "Of the confusion which obtains in the Mahār theogony the names of six of their gods will afford a striking example. While some Mahārs worship Vithoba, the god of Pandharpur, others revere Varuna's twin sons, Meghoni and Deghoni, and his four messengers, Gabriel, Azrael, Michael and Anādin, all of whom they say hail from Pandharpur."[1] The names of archangels thus mixed up with Hindu deities may most probably have been obtained from the Muhammadans, as they include Azrael;

[1] *Berār Census Report, l.c.*

but in Gujarāt their religion appears to have been borrowed from Christianity. "The Karia Dhedas have some rather remarkable beliefs. In the Satya Yug the Dhedas say they were called Satyas; in the Dvāpar Yug they were called Meghas; in the Treta Yug, Elias; and in the Kali Yug, Dhedas. The name Elias came, they say, from a prophet Elia, and of him their religious men have vague stories; some of them especially about a famine that lasted for three years and a half, easily fitting into the accounts of Elijah in the Jewish Scriptures. They have also prophecies of a high future in store for their tribe. The king or leader of the new era, Kuyām Rai by name, will marry a Dheda woman and will raise the caste to the position of Brāhmans. They hold religious meetings or *ochhavas*, and at these with great excitement sing songs full of hope of the good things in store for them. When a man wishes to hold an *ochhava* he invites the whole caste, and beginning about eight in the evening they often spend the night in singing. Except perhaps for a few sweetmeats there is no eating or drinking, and the excitement is altogether religious and musical. The singers are chiefly religious Dhedas or Bhagats, and the people join in a refrain '*Avore Kuyām Rai Rāja*, Oh! come Kuyām Rai, our king.'"[1] It seems that the attraction which outside faiths exercise on the Mahārs is the hope held out of ameliorating the social degradation under which they labour, itself an outcome of the Hindu theory of caste. Hence they turn to Islām, or to what is possibly a degraded version of the Christian story, because these religions do not recognise caste, and hold out a promise to the Mahār of equality with his co-religionists, and in the case of Christianity of a recompense in the world to come for the sufferings which he has to endure in this one. Similarly, the Mahārs are the warmest adherents of the Muhammadan saint Sheikh Farīd, and flock to the fairs held in his honour at Girar in Wardha and Partāpgarh in Bhandāra, where he is supposed to have slain a couple of giants.[2]

[1] *Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarāt Hindus.*

[2] It was formerly suggested that the fact of the Mahārs being the chief worshippers at the shrines of Sheikh Farīd indicated that the places themselves had been previously held sacred, and had been annexed by the Muhammadan priests; and the legend of the giant, who might represent the demonolatry of the aboriginal faith, being slain by the saint might be a parable, so to say, expressing this process. But in

In Berār[1] also they revere Muhammadan tombs. The remains of the Muhammadan fort and tank on Pimpardol hill in Jalgaon tāluk are now one of the sacred places of the Mahārs, though to the Muhammadans they have no religious associations. Even at present Mahārs are inclined to adopt Islām, and a case was recently reported when a body of twenty of them set out to do so, but turned back on being told that they would not be admitted to the mosque.[2] A large proportion of the Mahārs are also adherents of the Kabīrpanthi sect, one of the main tenets of whose founder was the abolition of caste. And it is from the same point of view that Christianity appeals to them, enabling European missionaries to draw a large number of converts from this caste. But even the Hindu attitude towards the Mahārs is not one of unmixed intolerance. Once in three or four years in the southern Districts, the Panwārs, Mahārs, Pankas and other castes celebrate the worship of Nārāyan Deo or Vishnu, the officiating priest being a Mahār. Members of all castes come to the Panwār's house at night for the ceremony, and a vessel of water is placed at the door in which they wash their feet and hands as they enter; and when inside they are all considered to be equal, and they sit in a line and eat the same food, and bind wreaths of flowers round their heads. After the cock crows the equality of status is ended, and no one who goes out of the house can enter again. At present also many educated Brāhmans recognise fully the social evils resulting from the degraded position of the Mahārs, and are doing their best to remove the caste prejudices against them.

11. Superstitions.

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

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view of the way in which the Mehtars worship Musalmān saints, it seems quite likely that the Mahārs might do so for the same reason, that is, because Islām partly frees them from the utter degradation imposed by Hinduism. Both views may have some truth. As regards the legends themselves, it is highly improbable that Sheikh Farīd, a well-known saint of northern India, can ever have been within several hundred miles of either of the places with which they connect him.

[1] From Mr. C. Brown's notes.

[2] *C.P. Police Gazette.*

writing their name on a piece of paper and tying it to a sweeper's broom that the threat to do this can be used with great effect by their creditors.[1] To drive out the evil eye they make a small human image of powdered turmeric and throw it into boiled water, mentioning as they do so the names of any persons whom they suspect of having cast the evil eye upon them. Then the pot of water is taken out at midnight of a Wednesday or a Sunday and placed upside down on some cross-roads with a shoe over it, and the sufferer should be cured. Their belief about the sun and moon is that an old woman had two sons who were invited by the gods to dinner. Before they left she said to them that as they were going out there would be no one to cook, so they must remember to bring back something for her. The elder brother forgot what his mother had said and took nothing away with him; but the younger remembered her and brought back something from the feast. So when they came back the old woman cursed the elder brother and said that as he had forgotten her he should be the sun and scorch and dry up all vegetation with his beams; but the younger brother should be the moon and make the world cool and pleasant at night. The story is so puerile that it is only worth reproduction as a specimen of the level of a Mahār's intelligence. The belief in evil spirits appears to be on the decline, as a result of education and accumulated experience. Mr. C. Brown states that in Malkāpur of Berār the Mahārs say that there are no wandering spirits in the hills by night of such a nature that people need fear them. There are only tiny *pari* or fairies, small creatures in human form, but with the power of changing their appearance, who do no harm to any one.

12. Social rules.

When an outsider is to be received into the community all the hair on his face is shaved, being wetted with the urine of a boy belonging to the group to which he seeks admission. Mahārs will eat all kinds of food including the flesh of crocodiles and rats, but some of them abstain from beef. There is nothing peculiar in their dress except that the men wear a black woollen thread round their necks.[2] The women may be recognised by their bold carriage, the

[1] Kitts, *l.c.* [2] *Ibidem.*

absence of nose-rings and the large irregular dabs of vermilion on the forehead. Mahār women do not, as a rule, wear the *choli* or breast-cloth. An unmarried girl does not put on vermilion nor draw her cloth over her head. Women must be tattooed with dots on the face, representations of scorpions, flowers and snakes on the arms and legs, and some dots to represent flies on the hands. It is the custom for a girl's father or mother or father-in-law to have her tattooed in one place on the hand or arm immediately on her marriage. Then when girls are sitting together they will show this mark and say, 'My mother or father-in-law had this done,' as the case may be. Afterwards if a woman so desires she gets herself tattooed on her other limbs. If an unmarried girl or widow becomes with child by a man of the Mahār caste or any higher one she is subjected after delivery to a semblance of the purification by fire known as Agnikāsht. She is taken to the bank of a river and there five stalks of juāri are placed round her and burnt. Having fasted all day, at night she gives a feast to the caste-men and eats with them. If she offends with a man of lower caste she is finally expelled. Temporary exclusion from caste is imposed for taking food or drink from the hands of a Māng or Chamār or for being imprisoned in jail, or on a Mahār man if he lives with a woman of any higher caste; the penalty being the shaving of a man's face or cutting off a lock of a woman's hair, together with a feast to the caste. In the last case it is said that the man is not readmitted until he has put the woman away. If a man touches a dead dog, cat, pony or donkey, he has to be shaved and give a feast to the caste. And if a dog or cat dies in his house, or a litter of puppies or kittens is born, the house is considered to be defiled; all the earthen pots must be thrown away, the whole house washed and cleaned and a caste feast given. The most solemn oath of a Mahār is by a cat or dog and in Yeotmāl by a black dog.[1] In Berār, the same paper states, the pig is the only animal regarded as unclean, and they must on no account touch it. This is probably owing to Muhammadan influence. The worst social sin which a Mahār can commit is to get vermin in a wound, which is

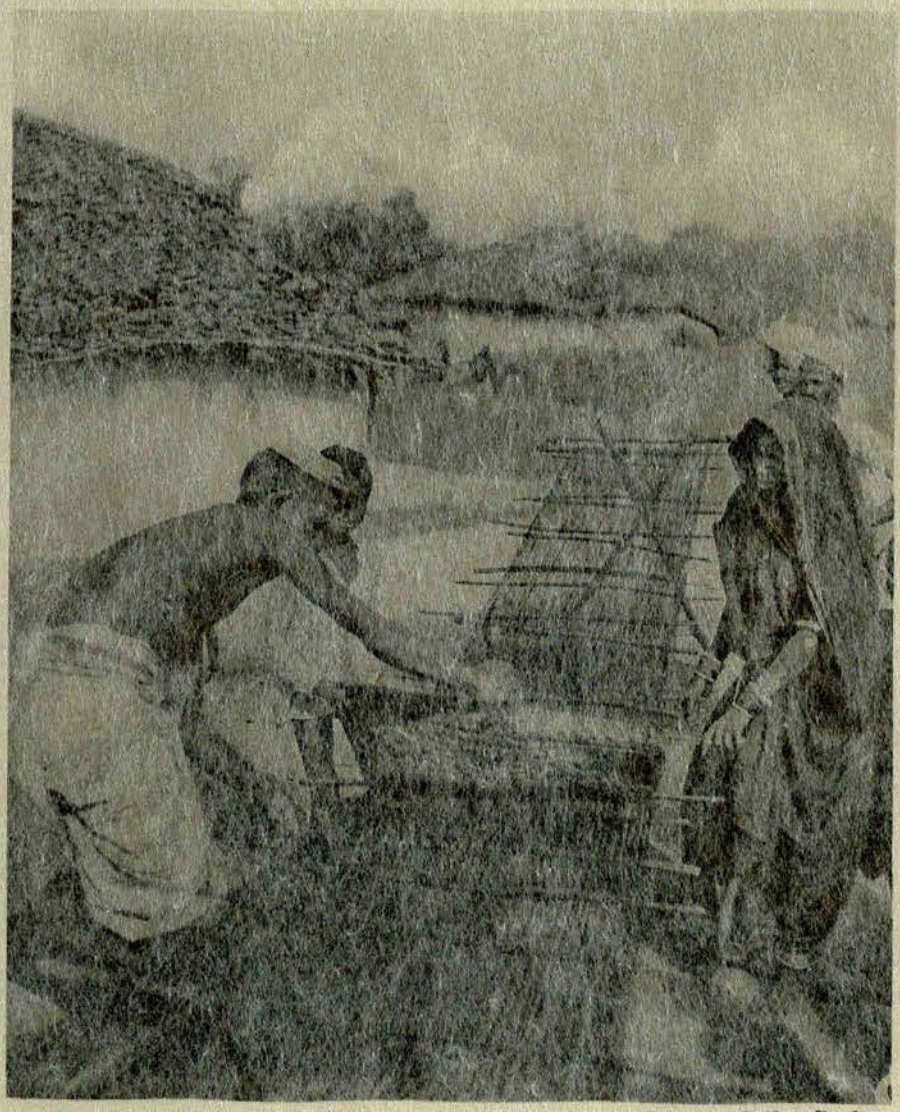
[1] Stated by Mr. C. Brown.

known as Deogan or being smitten by God. While the affliction continues he is quite ostracised, no one going to his house or giving him food or water; and when it is cured the Mahārs of ten or twelve surrounding villages assemble and he must give a feast to the whole community. The reason for this calamity being looked upon with such peculiar abhorrence is obscure, but the feeling about it is general among Hindus.

13. Social subjection.

The social position of the Mahārs is one of distressing degradation. Their touch is considered to defile and they live in a quarter by themselves outside the village. They usually have a separate well assigned to them from which to draw water, and if the village has only one well the Mahārs and Hindus take water from different sides of it. Mahār boys were not until recently allowed to attend school with Hindu boys, and when they could not be refused admission to Government schools, they were allotted a small corner of the veranda and separately taught. When Dher boys were first received into the Chānda High School a mutiny took place and the school was boycotted for some time. The people say, '*Mahār sarva jātīcha bāhar*,' or 'The Mahār is outside all castes.' Having a bad name, they are also given unwarrantably a bad character; and '*Māhar jātīchā*' is a phrase used for a man with no moral or kindly feelings. But in theory at least, as conforming to Hinduism, they were supposed to be better than Muhammadans and other unbelievers, as shown by the following story from the Rāsmāla:[1] A Muhammadan sovereign asked his Hindu minister which was the lowest caste. The minister begged for leisure to consider his reply and, having obtained it, went to where the Dhedas lived and said to them: "You have given offence to the Pādishāh. It is his intention to deprive you of caste and make you Muhammadans." The Dhedas, in the greatest terror, pushed off in a body to the sovereign's palace, and standing at a respectful distance shouted at the top of their lungs: "If we've offended your majesty, punish us in some other way than that. Beat us, fine us, hang us if you like, but don't make us Muhammadans." The Pādishāh smiled, and turning to his minister who sat by him affecting to hear

[1] Vol. ii. p. 237.



Bemrose, Colle., Derby.

WEAVING—SIZING THE WARP.

nothing, said, 'So the lowest caste is that to which I belong.' But of course this cannot be said to represent the general view of the position of Muhammadans in Hindu eyes; they, like the English, are regarded as distinguished foreigners, who, if they consented to be proselytised, would probably in time become Brāhmans or at least Rājpūts. A repartee of a Mahār to a Brāhman abusing him is: The Brāhman, '*Jāre Mahārya*' or 'Avaunt, ye Mahār'; the Mahār, '*Kona dīushi neīn tumchi goburya*' or 'Some day I shall carry cow-dung cakes for you (at his funeral)'; as in the Marātha Districts the Mahār is commonly engaged for carrying fuel to the funeral pyre. Under native rule the Mahār was subjected to painful degradations. He might not spit on the ground lest a Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to hang an earthen pot round his neck to hold his spittle.[1] He was made to drag a thorny branch with him to brush out his footsteps, and when a Brāhman came by had to lie at a distance on his face lest his shadow might fall on the Brāhman. In Gujarāt[2] they were not allowed to tuck up the loin-cloth but had to trail it along the ground. Even quite recently in Bombay a Mahār was not allowed to talk loudly in the street while a well-to-do Brāhman or his wife was dining in one of the houses. In the reign of Sidhrāj, the great Solanki Rāja of Gujarāt, the Dheras were for a time at any rate freed from such disabilities by the sacrifice of one of their number.[3] The great tank at Anhilvāda Pātan in Gujarāt had been built by the Ods (navvies), but Sidhrāj desired Jusma Odni, one of their wives, and sought to possess her. But the Ods fled with her and when he pursued her she plunged a dagger into her stomach, cursing Sidhrāj and saying that his tank should never hold water. The Rāja, returning to Anhilvāda, found the tank dry, and asked his minister what should be done that water might remain in the tank. The Pardhān, after consulting the astrologers, said that if a man's life were sacrificed the curse might be removed. At that time the Dhers or outcastes were compelled to live at a distance from

[1] *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xii. p. 175.

[2] Rev. A. Taylor in *Bombay Gazetteer*, *Gujarāt Hindus*, p. 341 f.

[3] The following passage is taken from Forbes, *Rāsmāla*, i. p. 112.