



halua or a mixture of melted butter and flour. The Shabrāt is the middle night of the month Shabān, and Muhammad declared that on this night God registers the actions which every man will perform during the following year, and all those who are fated to die and the children who are to be born. Like Hindu widows the Manihār women break their bangles when their husband's corpse is removed to the burial-ground. The Manihārs eat flesh, but not beef or pork; and they also abstain from alcoholic liquor. If a girl is seduced and made pregnant before marriage either by a man of the caste or an outsider, she remains in her father's house until her child has been born, and may then be married either to her paramour or any other man of the caste by the simple repetition of the Nikāh or marriage verses, omitting all other ceremonies. The Manihārs will admit into their community converted Hindus belonging even to the lowest castes.

Mannewār.¹—A small tribe belonging to the south or Telugu-speaking portion of the Chānda District, where they mustered about 1600 persons in 1911. The home of the tribe is the Hyderābād State, where it numbers 22,000 persons, and the Mannewārs are said to have once been dominant over a part of that territory. The name is derived from a Telugu word *mannem*, meaning forest, while *wār* is the plural termination in Telugu, Mannewār thus signifying 'the people of the forest.' The tribe appear to be the inferior branch of the Koya Gonds, and they are commonly called Mannewār Koyas as opposed to the Koya Doras or the superior branch, Dora meaning 'lord' or master. The Koya Doras thus correspond to the Raj-Gonds of the north of the Province and the Mannewār Koyas to the Dhur or 'dust' Gonds.² The tribe is divided into three exogamous groups: the Nalugu Velpulu worshipping four gods, the Ayidu Velpulu worshipping five, and the Anu Velpulu six. A man must marry a woman of one of the divisions worshipping a different number of gods from his

¹ This article is based on a note furnished by Mr. M. Aziz, Officiating Nāib-Tahsildār, Sironcha.

² From a glossary published by Mr. Gupta, Assistant Director of Ethnology for India.

own, but the Mannewārs do not appear to know the names of these gods, and consequently no veneration can be paid to them at present, and they survive solely for the purpose of regulating marriage. When a betrothal is made a day is fixed for taking an omen. In the early morning the boy who is to be married has his face washed and turmeric smeared on his feet, and is seated on a wooden seat inside the house. The elders of the village then proceed outside it towards the rising sun and watch for any omen given by an animal or bird crossing their path. If this is good the marriage is celebrated, and if bad the match is broken off. In the former case five of the elders take their food on returning from the search for the omen and immediately proceed to the bride's village. Here they are met by the Pesāmuda or village priest, and stay for three days, when the amount of the dowry is settled and a date fixed for the wedding. The marriage ceremony resembles that of the low Telugu castes. The couple are seated on a plough-yoke, and coloured rice is thrown on to their heads, and the bridegroom ties the *mangalya* or bead necklace, which is the sign of marriage, round the neck of the bride. If a girl is deformed, or has some other drawback which prevents her from being sought in marriage, she is given away with her sister to a first cousin¹ or some other near relative, the two sisters being married to him together. A widow may marry any man of the tribe except her first husband's brothers. If a man takes a widow to his house without marrying her he is fined three rupees, while for adultery with a married woman the penalty is twenty rupees. A divorce can always be obtained, but if the husband demands it he is mulcted of twenty rupees by the caste committee, while a wife who seeks a divorce must pay ten rupees. The Mannewārs make an offering of a fowl and some liquor to the ploughshare on the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi. After the picking of the flowers of the mahua² they worship that tree, offering to it some of the liquor distilled from the new flowers, with a fowl and a goat. This is known as the Burri festival. At the Holi feast the Mannewārs make two human figures to represent Kāmi and Rati, or the god of

¹ Generally the paternal aunt's son.

² *Bassia latifolia*.



love and his wife. The male figure is then thrown on to the Holi fire with a live chicken or an egg. This may be a reminiscence of a former human sacrifice, which was a common custom in many parts of the world at the spring festival. The caste usually bury the dead, but are beginning to adopt cremation. They do not employ Brāhmans for their ceremonies and eat all kinds of food, including the flesh of pigs, fowls and crocodiles, but in view of their having nominally adopted Hinduism, they abstain from beef.

MARĀTHA

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1. Numerical statistics.

Marātha, Mahrāṭṭa.—The military caste of southern India which manned the armies of Sivaji, and of the Peshwa and other princes of the Marātha confederacy. In the Central Provinces the Marāthas numbered 34,000 persons in 1911, of whom Nāgpur contained 9000 and Wardha 8000, while the remainder were distributed over Raipur, Hoshangābād and Nimār. In Berār their strength was 60,000 persons, the total for the combined province being thus 94,000. The caste is found in large numbers in Bombay and Hyderābād, and in 1901 the India Census tables show a total of not less than five million persons belonging to it.

2. Double meaning of the term Marātha.

It is difficult to avoid confusion in the use of the term Marātha, which signifies both an inhabitant of the area in which the Marāthi language is spoken, and a member of the caste to which the general name has in view of their historical importance been specifically applied. The native name for the Marāthi-speaking country is Mahārāshtra, which has been variously interpreted as 'The great country' or 'The country of the Mahārs.'¹ A third explanation of the name

¹ Sir H. Risley's *India Census Report* (1901), Ethnographic Appendices, p. 93.

is from the Rāshtrakūta dynasty which was dominant in this area for some centuries after A.D. 750. The name Rāshtrakūta was contracted into Rattha, and with the prefix of Mahā or Great might evolve into the term Marātha. The Rāshtrakūtas have been conjecturally identified with the Rāthor Rājput. The *Nāsik Gazetteer*¹ states that in 246 B.C. Mahāratta is mentioned as one of the places to which Asoka sent an embassy, and Mahārashtraka is recorded in a Chālukyan inscription of A.D. 580 as including three provinces and 99,000 villages. Several other references are given in Sir J. Campbell's erudite note, and the name is therefore without doubt ancient. But the Marāthas as a people do not seem to be mentioned before the thirteenth or fourteenth century.² The antiquity of the name would appear to militate against the derivation from the Rāshtrakūta dynasty, which did not become prominent till much later, and the most probable meaning of Mahārāshtra would therefore seem to be 'The country of the Mahārs.' Mahāratta and Marātha are presumably derivatives from Mahārāshtra.

The Marāthas are a caste formed from military service, and it seems probable that they sprang mainly from the peasant population of Kunbis, though at what period they were formed into a separate caste has not yet been determined. Grant-Duff mentions several of their leading families as holding offices under the Muhammadan rulers of Bijapur and Ahmadnagar in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as the Nimbhalkar, Ghārpure and Bhonsla;³ and presumably their clansmen served in the armies of those states. But whether or no the designation of Marātha had been previously used by them, it first became prominent during the period of Sivaji's guerilla warfare against Aurāngzeb. The Marāthas claim a Rājput origin, and several of their clans have the names of Rājput tribes, as Chauhān, Panwār, Solanki and Suryavansi. In 1836 Mr. Enthoven states,⁴ the Sesodia Rāna of Udaipur, the head of the purest Rājput house, was satisfied from inquiries conducted by an

3. Origin and position of the caste.

¹ P. 48, footnote.

² *Nāsik Gazetteer*, *ibidem*. Elphinstone's *History*, p. 246.

³ The proper spelling is Bhosle,

but Bhonsla is adopted in deference to established usage.

⁴ *Bombay Census Report* (1901), pp. 184-185.

agent that the Bhonslas and certain other families had a right to be recognised as Rājput̃s. Colonel Tod states that Sivaji was descended from a Rājput̃ prince Sujunsi, who was expelled from Mewār to avoid a dispute about the succession about A.D. 1300. Sivaji is shown as 13th in descent from Sujunsi. Similarly the Bhonslas of Nāgpur were said to derive their origin from one Bunbir, who was expelled from Udaipur about 1541, having attempted to usurp the kingdom.¹ As Rājput̃ dynasties ruled in the Deccan for some centuries before the Muhammadan conquest, it seems reasonable to suppose that a Rājput̃ aristocracy may have taken root there. This was Colonel Tod's opinion, who wrote: "These kingdoms of the south as well as the north were held by Rājput̃ sovereigns, whose offspring, blending with the original population, produced that mixed race of Marāthas inheriting with the names the warlike propensities of their ancestors, but who assume the names of their abodes as titles, as the Nimalkars, the Phalkias, the Patunkars, instead of their tribes of Jādon, Tūār, Pūār, etc."² This statement would, however, apply only to the leading houses and not to the bulk of the Marātha caste, who appear to be mainly derived from the Kunbis. In Sholāpur the Marāthas and Kunbis eat together, and the Kunbis are said to be bastard Marāthas.³ In Satāra the Kunbis have the same division into 96 clans as the Marāthas have, and many of the same surnames.⁴ The writer of the *Satāra Gazetteer* says:⁵ "The census of 1851 included the Marāthas with the Kunbis, from whom they do not form a separate caste. Some Marātha families may have a larger strain of northern or Rājput̃ blood than the Kunbis, but this is not always the case. The distinction between Kunbis and Marāthas is almost entirely social, the Marāthas as a rule being better off, and preferring even service as a constable or messenger to husbandry." Exactly the same state of affairs prevails in the Central Provinces and Berār, where the body of the caste are commonly known as Marātha Kunbis. In Bombay the Marāthas will take daughters from the Kunbis in marriage for their sons, though they will not give their daughters

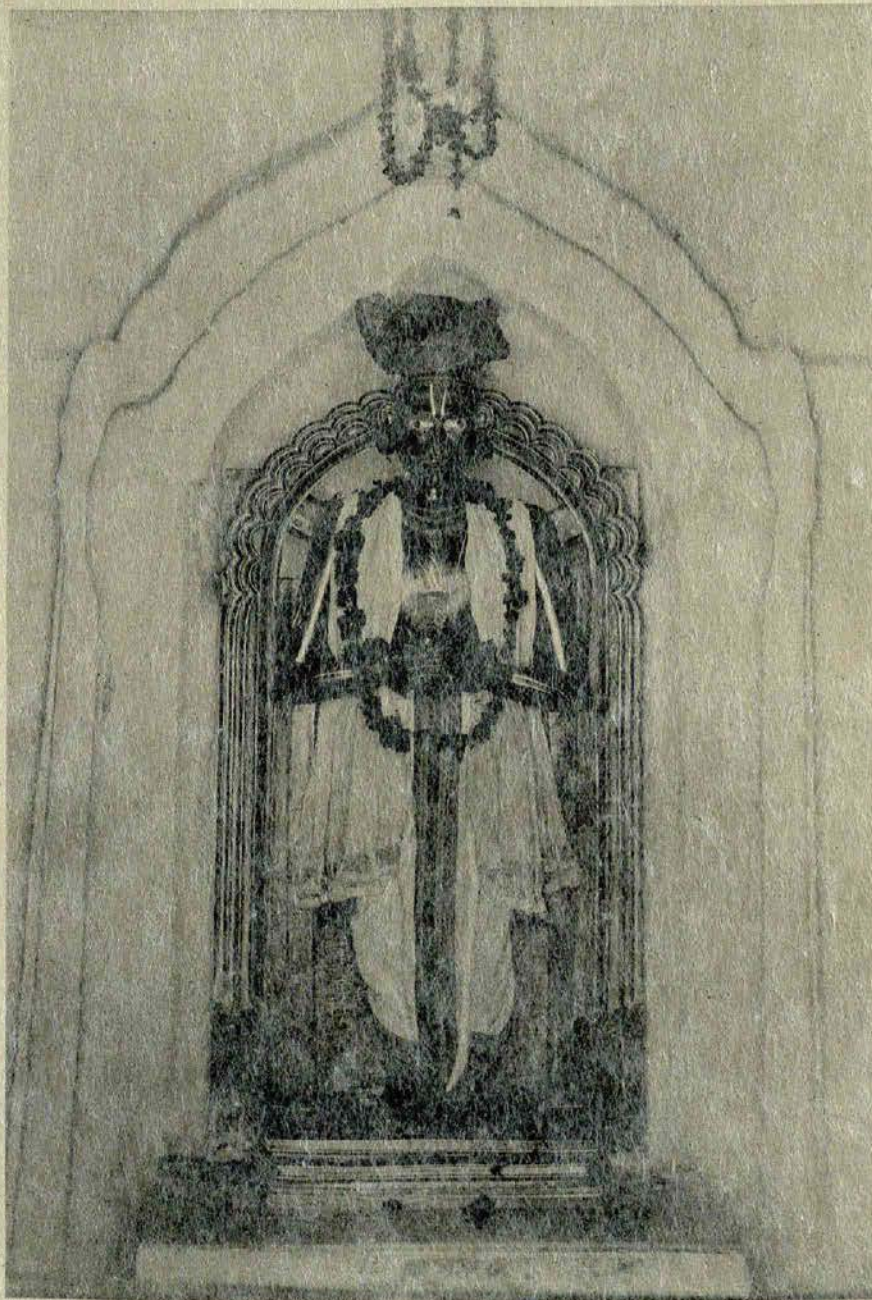
¹ *Rājasthān*, i. 269.

² *Ibidem*, ii. 420.

³ *Sholapur Gazetteer*, p. 87.

⁴ *Satāra Gazetteer*, p. 64.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 75.



Bentrose, Collo., Derby.

STATUE OF MARĀTHA LEADER, BĪMBĀJI
BHONSLA, IN ARMOUR.



in return. But a Kunbi who has got on in the world and become wealthy may by sufficient payment get his sons married into Marātha families, and even be adopted as a member of the caste.¹ In 1798 Colonel Tone, who commanded a regiment of the Peshwa's army, wrote² of the Marāthas: "The three great tribes which compose the Marātha caste are the Kunbi or farmer, the Dhangar or shepherd, and the Goāla or cowherd; to this original cause may perhaps be ascribed that great simplicity of manner which distinguishes the Marātha people."

It seems then most probable that, as already stated, the Marātha caste was of purely military origin, constituted from the various castes of Mahārāshtra who adopted military service, though some of the leading families may have had Rājput̃s for their ancestors. Sir D. Ibbetson thought that a similar relation existed in past times between the Rājput̃s and Jāts, the landed aristocracy of the Jāt caste being gradually admitted to Rājput̃ rank. The Khandaits or swordsmen of Orissa are a caste formed in the same manner from military service. In the *Imperial Gazetteer* Sir H. Risley suggests that the Marātha people were of Scythian origin:

"The physical type of the people of this region accords fairly well with this theory, while the arguments derived from language and religion do not seem to conflict with it. . . . On this view the wide-ranging forays of the Marāthas, their guerilla methods of warfare, their unscrupulous dealings with friend and foe, their genius for intrigue and their consequent failure to build up an enduring dominion, might well be regarded as inherited from their Scythian ancestors."

In the Central Provinces the Marāthas are divided into 96 exogamous clans, known as the Chhānava Kule, which marry with one another. During the period when the Bhonsla family were rulers of Nāgpur they constituted a sort of inner circle, consisting of seven of the leading clans, with whom alone they intermarried; these are known as the Sātghare or Seven Houses, and consist of the Bhonsla, Gūjar, Ahirrao, Mahādik, Sirke, Palke and Mohte clans.

4. Exogamous clans.

¹ *Bombay Census Report* (1907), *ibidem*.

² *Letter on the Marāthas* (India Office Tracts).

These houses at one time formed an endogamous group, marrying only among themselves, but recently the restriction has been relaxed, and they have arranged marriages with other Marātha families. It may be noted that the present representatives of the Bhonsla family are of the Gūjar clan to which the last Rāja of Nāgpur, Raghūji III., belonged prior to his adoption. Several of the clans, as already noted, have Rājput sept names; and some are considered to be derived from those of former ruling dynasties; as Chālke, from the Chālukya Rājput kings of the Deccan and Carnatic; More, who may represent a branch of the great Maurya dynasty of northern India; Sālunke, perhaps derived from the Solanki kings of Gujarāt; and Yādav, the name of the kings of Deogiri or Daulatābād.¹ Others appear to be named after animals or natural objects, as Sinde from *sindi* the date-palm tree, Ghorpade from *ghorpad* the iguana; or to be of a titular nature, as Kāle black, Pāndhre white, Bhāgore a renegade, Jagthāp renowned, and so on. The More, Nimbhālkar, Ghātge, Māne, Ghorpade, Dafle, Jādav and Bhonsla clans are the oldest, and held prominent positions in the old Muhammadan kingdoms of Bījapur and Ahmadnagar. The Nimbhālkar family were formerly Panwār Rājputs, and took the name of Nimbhālkar from their ancestral village Nimbālik. The Ghorpade family are an offshoot of the Bhonslas, and obtained their present name from the exploit of one of their ancestors, who scaled a fort in the Konkan, previously deemed impregnable, by passing a cord round the body of a *ghorpad* or iguana.² A noticeable trait of these Marātha houses is the fondness with which they clung to the small estates or villages in the Deccan in which they had originally held the office of a patel or village headman as a *watan* or hereditary right, even after they had carved out for themselves principalities and states in other parts of India. The present Bhonsla Rāja takes his title from the village of Deor in the Poona country. In former times we read of the Rāja of Satāra clinging to the *watans* he had inherited from Sivaji after he had lost his crown in all but the name; Sindhia was always termed

¹ *Satāra Gazetteer*, p. 75.

² Grant-Duff, 4th edition (1878), vol. i. pp. 70-72.



patel or village headman in the revenue accounts of the villages he acquired in Nimār; while it is said that Holkar and the Panwār of Dhār fought desperately after the British conquest to recover the *pateli* rights of Deccan villages which had belonged to their ancestors.¹

Besides the 96 clans there are now in the Central Provinces some local subcastes who occupy a lower position and do not intermarry with the Marāthas proper. Among these are the Deshkar or 'Residents of the country'; the Waindesha or those of Berār and Khāndesh; the Gangthade or those dwelling on the banks of the Godāvāri and Wain-ganga; and the Ghātmāthe or residents of the Mahādeo plateau in Berār. It is also stated that the Marāthas are divided into the *Khāsi* or 'pure' and the *Kharchi* or the descendants of handmaids. In Bombay the latter are known as the Akarmāshes or 11 *māshas*, meaning that as twelve *māshas* make a tola, a twelfth part of them is alloy.

A man must not marry in his own clan or that of his mother. A sister's son may be married to a brother's daughter, but not vice versa. Girls are commonly married between five and twelve years of age, and the ceremony resembles that of the Kunbis. The bridegroom goes to the bride's house riding on horseback and covered with a black blanket. When a girl first becomes mature, usually after marriage, the Marāthas perform the Shāntik ceremony. The girl is secluded for four days, after which she is bathed and puts on new clothes and dresses her hair and a feast is given to the caste-fellows. Sometimes the bridegroom comes and is asked whether he has visited his wife before she became mature, and if he confesses that he has done so a small fine is imposed on him. Such cases are, however, believed to be rare. The Marāthas proper forbid widow-marriage, but the lower groups allow it. If a maiden is seduced by one of the caste she may be married to him as if she were a widow, a fine being imposed on her family; but if she goes wrong with an outsider she is finally expelled. Divorce is not ostensibly allowed but may be concluded by agreement between the parties. A wife who commits adultery is cast off and expelled from the caste. The caste burn their

¹ Forsyth, *Nimār Settlement Report*.



dead when they can afford it and perform the *shrāddh* ceremony in the month of *Kunwār* (September), when oblations are offered to the dead and a feast is given to the caste-fellows. Sometimes a tomb is erected as a memorial to the dead, but without his name, and is surmounted usually by an image of Mahādeo. The caste eat the flesh of clean animals and of fowls and wild pig, and drink liquor. Their rules about food are liberal like those of the Rājput, a too great stringency being no doubt in both cases incompatible with the exigencies of military service. They make no difference between food cooked with or without water, and will accept either from a Brāhman, Rājput, Tirole Kunbi, Lingāyat Bania or Phūlmāli.

The Marāthas proper observe the *parda* system with regard to their women, and will go to the well and draw water themselves rather than permit their wives to do so. The women wear ornaments only of gold or glass and not of silver or any baser metal. They are not permitted to spin cotton as being an occupation of the lower classes. The women are tattooed in the centre of the forehead with a device resembling a trident. The men commonly wear a turban made of many folds of cloth twisted into a narrow rope and large gold rings with pearls in the upper part of the ear. Like the Rājput they often have their hair long and wear beards and whiskers. They assume the sacred thread and invest a boy with it when he is seven or eight years old or on his marriage. Till then they let the hair grow on the front of his head, and when the thread ceremony is performed they cut this off and let the *choti* or scalp-lock grow at the back. In appearance the men are often tall and well-built and of a light wheat-coloured complexion.

7. Religion.

The principal deity of the Marāthas is Khandoba, a warrior incarnation of Mahādeo. He is supposed to have been born in a field of millet near Poona and to have led the people against the Muhammadans in early times. He had a watch-dog who warned him of the approach of his enemies, and he is named after the *khanda* or sword which he always carried. In Bombay¹ he is represented on horseback with

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xviii. part i. pp. 413-414.



two women, one of the Bania caste, his wedded wife, in front of him, and another, a Dhangarin, his kept mistress, behind. He is considered the tutelary deity of the Marātha country, and his symbol is a bag of turmeric powder known as *bhandār*. The caste worship Khandoba on Sundays with rice, flowers and incense, and also on the 21st day of Māgh (January), which is called *Champa Sashthi* and is his special festival. On this day they will catch hold of any dog, and after adorning him with flowers and turmeric give him a good feed and let him go again. The Marāthas are generally kind to dogs and will not injure them. At the Dasahra festival the caste worship their horses and swords and go out into the field to see a blue-jay in memory of the fact that the Marātha marauding expeditions started on Dasahra. On coming back they distribute to each other leaves of the *shami* tree (*Bauhinia racemosa*) as a substitute for gold. It was formerly held to be fitting among the Hindus that the warrior should ride a horse (geldings being unknown) and the zamīndār or landowner a mare, as more suitable to a man of peace. The warriors celebrated their Dasahra, and worshipped their horses on the tenth day of the light fortnight of *Kumwār* (September), while the cultivators held their festival and worshipped their mares on the ninth day. It is recorded that the great Rāghuji Bhonsla, the first Rāja of Nāgpur, held his Dasahra on the ninth day, in order to proclaim the fact that he was by family an agriculturist and only incidentally a man of arms.¹

The Marāthas present the somewhat melancholy spectacle of an impoverished aristocratic class attempting to maintain some semblance of their former position, though they no longer have the means to do so. They flourished during two or three centuries of almost continuous war, and became a wealthy and powerful caste, but they find a difficulty in turning their hands to the arts of peace. Sir R. Craddock writes of them in Nāgpur :

"Among the Marāthas a large number represent connections of the Bhonsia family, related by marriage or by illegitimate descent to that house. A considerable proportion of the Government political pensioners are Marāthas.

8. Present position of the caste.

¹ Elliott, *Hoshangābād Settlement Report*.

Many of them own villages or hold tenant land, but as a rule they are extravagant in their living; and several of the old Marātha nobility have fallen very much in the world. Pensions diminish with each generation, but the expenditure shows no corresponding decrease. The sons are brought up to no employment and the daughters are married with lavish pomp and show. The native army does not much attract them, and but few are educated well enough for the dignified posts in the civil employ of Government. It is a question whether their pride of race will give way before the necessity of earning their livelihood soon enough for them to maintain or regain some of their former position. Otherwise those with the largest landed estates may be saved by the intervention of Government, but the rest must gradually deteriorate till the dignities of their class have become a mere memory. The humbler members of the caste find their employment as petty contractors or traders, private servants, Government peons, *sowārs*, and hangers-on in the retinue of the more important families.

"What¹ little display his means afford a Marātha still tries to maintain. Though he may be clad in rags at home, he has a spare dress which he himself washes and keeps with great care and puts on when he goes to pay a visit. He will hire a boy to attend him with a lantern at night, or to take care of his shoes when he goes to a friend's house and hold them before him when he comes out. Well-to-do Marāthas have usually in their service a Brāhman clerk known as *divānji* or minister, who often takes advantage of his master's want of education to defraud him. A Marātha seldom rises early or goes out in the morning. He will get up at seven or eight o'clock, a late hour for a Hindu, and attend to business if he has any or simply idle about chewing or smoking tobacco and talking till ten o'clock. He will then bathe and dress in a freshly-washed cloth and bow before the family gods which the priest has already worshipped. He will dine, chew betel and smoke tobacco and enjoy a short midday rest. Rising at three, he will play cards, dice or chess, and in the evening will go out walking or riding or

¹ The following description is taken from the Ethnographic Appendices to Sir H. H. Risley's *India Census Report* of 1901.



pay a visit to a friend. He will come back at eight or nine and go to bed at ten or eleven. But Marāthas who have estates to manage lead regular, fairly busy lives."

Sir D. Ibbetson drew attention to the fact that the rising of the Marāthas against the Muhammadans was almost the only instance in Indian history of what might correctly be called a really national movement. In other cases, as that of the Sikhs, though the essential motive was perhaps of the same nature, it was obscured by the fact that its ostensible tendency was religious. The *gurus* of the Sikhs did not call on their followers to fight for their country but for a new religion. This was only in accordance with the Hindu intellect, to which the idea of nationality has hitherto been foreign, while its protests against both alien and domestic tyrannies tend to take the shape of a religious revolt. A similar tendency is observable even in the case of the Marāthas, for the rising was from its inception largely engineered by the Marātha Brāhmans, who on its success hastened to annex for themselves a leading position in the new Poona state. And it has been recorded that in calling his countrymen to arms, Sivaji did not ask them to defend their hearths and homes or wives and children, but to rally for the protection of the sacred persons of Brāhmans and cows.

Although the Marāthas have now in imitation of the Rājputs and Muhammadans adopted the *parda* system, this is not a native custom, and women have played quite an important part in their history. The women of the household have also exercised a considerable influence and their opinions are treated with respect by the men. Several instances occur in which women of high rank have successfully acted as governors and administrators. In the Bhonsla family the Princess Bāka Bāi, widow of Raghūji II., is a conspicuous instance, while the famous or notorious Rāni of Jhānsi is another case of a Marātha lady who led her troops in person, and was called the best man on the native side in the Mutiny.

This article may conclude with one or two extracts to give an idea of the way in which the Marātha soldiery took the field. Grant Duff describes the troopers as follows :

9. Nature of the Marātha insurrection.

10. Marātha women in past times.

11. The Marātha horseman.



"The Marātha horsemen are commonly dressed in a pair of light breeches covering the knee, a turban which many of them fasten by passing a fold of it under the chin, a frock of quilted cotton, and a cloth round the waist, with which they generally gird on their swords in preference to securing them with their belts. The horseman is armed with a sword and shield; a proportion in each body carry matchlocks, but the great national weapon is the spear, in the use of which and the management of their horse they evince both grace and dexterity. The spearmen have generally a sword, and sometimes a shield; but the latter is unwieldy and only carried in case the spear should be broken. The trained spearmen may always be known by their riding very long, the ball of the toe touching the stirrup; some of the matchlockmen and most of the Brāhmans ride very short and ungracefully. The bridle consists of a single headstall of cotton-rope, with a small but very severe flexible bit."

12. Cavalry
in the
field.

The following account of the Marātha cavalry is given in General Hislop's *Summary of the Marātha and Pindāri Campaigns of 1817-1819*:

"The Marāthas possess extraordinary skill in horsemanship, and so intimate an acquaintance with their horses, that they can make their animals do anything, even in full speed, in halting, wheeling, etc.; they likewise use the spear with remarkable dexterity, sometimes in full gallop, grasping their spears short and quickly sticking the point in the ground; still holding the handles, they turn their horse suddenly round it, thus performing on the point of a spear as on a pivot the same circle round and round again. Their horses likewise never leave the particular class or body to which they belong; so that if the rider should be knocked off, away gallops the animal after its fellows, never separating itself from the main body. Every Marātha brings his own horse and his own arms with him to the field, and possibly in the interest they possess in this private equipment we shall find their usual shyness to expose themselves or even to make a bold vigorous attack. But if armies or troops could be frightened by appearances these horses of the Marāthas would dishearten the bravest, actually darkening the plains with their numbers and clouding the horizon with



dust for miles and miles around. A little fighting, however, goes a great way with them, as with most others of the native powers in India."

On this account the Marāthas were called *razāh-bazān* or lance-wielders. One Muhammadan historian says: "They so use the lance that no cavalry can cope with them. Some 20,000 or 30,000 lances are held up against their enemy so close together as not to leave a span between their heads. If horsemen try to ride them down the points of the spears are levelled at the assailants and they are unhorsed. While cavalry are charging them they strike their lances against each other and the noise so frightens the horses of the enemy that they turn round and bolt."¹ The battle-cries of the Marāthas were, 'Har, Har Mahādeo,' and 'Gopāl, Gopāl.'²

An interesting description of the internal administration of the Marātha cavalry is contained in the letter on the Marāthas by Colonel Tone already quoted. But his account must refer to a period of declining efficiency and cannot represent the military system at its best :

13.
Military
adminis-
tration.

"In the great scale of rank and eminence which is one peculiar feature of Hindu institutions the Marātha holds a very inferior situation, being just removed one degree above those castes which are considered absolutely unclean. He is happily free from the rigorous observances as regards food which fetter the actions of the higher castes. He can eat of all kinds of food with the exception of beef; can dress his meal at all times and seasons; can partake of all victuals dressed by any caste superior to his own; washing and praying are not indispensable in his order and may be practised or omitted at pleasure. The three great tribes which compose the Marātha caste are the Kunbi or farmer, the Dhangar or shepherd and the Goāla or cowherd; to this original cause may perhaps be ascribed that great simplicity of manner which distinguishes the Marātha people. Homer mentions princesses going in person to the fountain to wash their household linen. I can affirm having seen the daughters of a prince who was able to bring an army into the field much larger than the whole Greek con-

¹ Irvine's *Army of the Mughals*, p. 82.

² *Ibidem*, p. 232. Gopāl is a name of Krishna.

federacy, making bread with their own hands and otherwise employed in the ordinary business of domestic housewifery. I have seen one of the most powerful chiefs of the Empire, after a day of action, assisting in kindling a fire to keep himself warm during the night, and sitting on the ground on a spread saddle-cloth dictating to his secretaries.

"The chief military force of the Marāthas consists in their cavalry, which may be divided into four distinct classes: First the Khāsi Pagah or household forces of the prince; these are always a fine well-appointed body, the horses excellent, being the property of the Sirkār, who gives a monthly allowance to each trooper of the value of about eight rupees. The second class are the cavalry furnished by the Sillādār,¹ who contract to supply a certain number of horse on specified terms, generally about Rs. 35 a month, including the trooper's pay. The third and most numerous description are volunteers, who join the camp bringing with them their own horse and accoutrements; their pay is generally from Rs. 40 to Rs. 50 a month in proportion to the value of their horse. There is a fourth kind of native cavalry called Pindāris, who are mere marauders, serve without any pay and subsist but by plunder, a fourth part of which they give to the Sirkār; but these are so very licentious a body that they are not employed but in one or two of the Marātha services.

"The troops collected in this manner are under no discipline whatever and engage for no specific period, but quit the army whenever they please; with the exception of furnishing a picquet while in camp, they do no duty but in the day of battle.

"The Marātha cavalry is always irregularly and badly paid; the household troops scarcely ever receive money, but are furnished with a daily allowance of coarse flour and some other ingredients from the bazār which just enable them to exist. The Sillādār is very nearly as badly

¹ Lit. armour-bearers. Colonel Tone writes: "I apprehend from the meaning of this term that it was formerly the custom of this nation, as was the case in Europe, to appear in armour. I have frequently seen a

kind of coat-of-mail worn by the Marātha horsemen, known as a *benta*, which resembles our ancient hauberk; it is made of chain work, interlinked throughout, fits close to the body and adapts itself to all its motions."



situated. In his arrangements with the State he has allotted to him a certain proportion of jungle where he pastures his cattle; here he and his family reside, and his sole occupation when not on actual service is increasing his Pagah or troop by breeding out of his mares, of which the Marātha cavalry almost entirely consist. There are no people in the world who understand the method of rearing and multiplying the breed of cattle equal to the Marāthas. It is by no means uncommon for a Sillādār to enter a service with one mare and in a few years be able to muster a very respectable Pagah. They have many methods of rendering the animal prolific; they back their colts much earlier than we do and they are consequently more valuable as they come sooner on the effective strength.

“When called upon for actual service the Sillādār is obliged to give muster. Upon this occasion it is always necessary that the Brāhman who takes it should have a bribe; and indeed the Hāzri, as the muster is termed, is of such a nature that it could not pass by any fair or honourable means. Not only any despicable *tattus* are substituted in the place of horses but animals are borrowed to fill up the complement. Heel-ropes and grain-bags are produced as belonging to cattle supposed to be at grass; in short every mode is practised to impose on the Sirkār, which in turn reimburses itself by irregular and bad payments; for it is always considered if the Sillādārs receive six months’ arrears out of the year that they are exceedingly well paid. The Volunteers who join the camp are still worse situated, as they have no collective force, and money is very seldom given in a Marātha State without being extorted. In one word, the native cavalry are the worst-paid body of troops in the world. But there is another grand error in this mode of raising troops which is productive of the worst effects. Every man in a Marātha camp is totally independent; he is the proprietor of the horse he rides, which he is never inclined to risk, since without it he can get no service. This single circumstance destroys all enterprise and spirit in the soldier, whose sole business, instead of being desirous of distinguishing himself, is to keep out of the way of danger; for notwithstanding

every horseman on entering a service has a certain value put upon his horse, yet should he lose it even in action he never receives any compensation or at least none proportioned to his loss. If at any time a Sillādār is disgusted with the service he can go away without meeting any molestation even though in the face of an enemy. In fact the pay is in general so shamefully irregular that a man is justified in resorting to any measure, however apparently unbecoming, to attain it. It is also another very curious circumstance attending this service that many great Sillādārs have troops in the pay of two or three chiefs at the same time, who are frequently at open war with each other.

14. Sitting
Dharna.

"To recover an arrear of pay there is but one known mode which is universally adopted in all native services, the Mughal as well as the Marātha; this is called Dharna,¹ which consists in putting the debtor, be he who he will, into a state of restraint or imprisonment, until satisfaction be given or the money actually obtained. Any person in the Sirkār's service has a right to demand his pay of the Prince or his minister, and to sit in Dharna if it be not given; nor will he meet with the least hindrance in doing so; for none would obey an order that interfered with the Dharna, as it is a common cause; nor does the soldier incur the slightest charge of mutiny for his conduct, or suffer in the smallest manner in the opinion of his Chief, so universal is the custom. The Dharna is sometimes carried to very violent lengths and may either be executed on the Prince or his minister indifferently, with the same effect; as the Chief always makes it a point of honour not to eat or drink while his Diwān is in duress; sometimes the Dharna lasts for many days, during which time the party upon whom it is exercised is not suffered to eat or drink or wash or pray, or in short is not permitted to move from the spot where he sits, which is frequently bare-headed in the sun, until the money or security be given; so general is this mode of recovery that I suppose the Marātha Chiefs may be said to be nearly one-half of their time in a state of Dharna.

¹ In order to obtain redress by Dharna the creditor or injured person would sit starving himself outside his debtor's door, and if he died the latter

would be held to have committed a mortal sin and would be haunted by his ghost; see also article on Bhāt. The account here given must be exaggerated.



“In the various Marātha services there are very little more than a bare majority who are M rāthas by caste, and very few instances occur of their ever entering into the infantry at all. The sepoys in the pay of the different princes are recruited in Hindustān, and principally of the Rājput and Pūrbia caste; these are perhaps the finest race of men in the world for figure and appearance; of lofty stature, strong, graceful and athletic; of acute feelings, high military pride, quick, apprehensive, brave, prudent and economic; at the same time it must be confessed they are impatient of discipline, and naturally inclined to mutiny. They are mere soldiers of fortune and serve only for their pay. There are also a great number of Musalmāns who serve in the different Marātha armies, some of whom have very great commands.

15. The infantry.

“The Marātha cavalry at times make very long and rapid marches, in which they do not suffer themselves to be interrupted by the monsoon or any violence of weather. In very pressing exigencies it is incredible the fatigue a Marātha horseman will endure; frequently many days pass without his enjoying one regular meal, but he depends entirely for subsistence on the different corn-fields through which the army passes: a few heads of juāri, which he chafes in his hands while on horseback, will serve him for the day; his horse subsists on the same fare, and with the addition of opium, which the Marāthas frequently administer to their cattle, is enabled to perform incredible marches.”

16. Character of the Maratha armies.

The above analysis of the Marātha troops indicates that their real character was that of freebooting cavalry, largely of the same type as, though no doubt greatly superior in tone and discipline to the Pindāris. Like them they lived by plundering the country. “The Marāthas,” Elphinstone remarked, “are excellent foragers. Every morning at day-break long lines of men on small horses and ponies are seen issuing from their camps in all directions, who return before night loaded with fodder for the cattle, with firewood torn down from houses, and grain dug up from the pits where it had been concealed by the villagers; while other detachments go to a distance for some days and collect propor-

tionately larger supplies of the same kind.”¹ They could thus dispense with a commissariat, and being nearly all mounted were able to make extraordinarily long marches, and consequently to carry out effectively surprise attacks and when repulsed to escape injury in the retreat. Even at Pānīpat where their largest regular force took the field under Sadāsheo Rao Bhao, he had 70,000 regular and irregular cavalry and only 15,000 infantry, of whom 9000 were hired sepoys under a Muhammadan leader. The Marāthas were at their best in attacking the slow-moving and effeminate Mughal armies, while during their period of national ascendancy under the Peshwa there was no strong military power in India which could oppose their forays. When they were by the skill of their opponents at length brought to a set battle, their fighting qualities usually proved to be distinctly poor. At Pānīpat they lost the day by a sudden panic and flight after Ibrahīm Khān Gārdi had obtained for them a decided advantage; while at Argaoon and Assaye their performances were contemptible. After the recovery from Pānīpat and the rise of the independent Marātha states, the assistance of European officers was invoked to discipline and train the soldiery.²

¹ Elphinstone's *History*, 7th ed. p. 748.

² *Ibidem*, p. 753.

MEHTAR

[*Bibliography*: Mr. R. Greeven's *Knights of the Broom*, Benāres, 1894 (pamphlet); Mr. Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Bhangi; Sir H. Risley's *Tribes and Castes*, art. Hari; Sir E. Maclagan's *Punjab Census Report*, 1891 (Sweeper Sects); Sir D. Ibbetson's *Punjab Census Report*, 1881 (art. Chuhra); *Bombay Gazetteer*, *Hindus of Gujarāt*, Mr. Bhimbhai Kirparami.]

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Mehtar, Bhangi, Hāri,¹ Dom, Lālbegi.—The caste of sweepers and scavengers. In 1911 persons returning themselves as Mehtar, Bhangi and Dom were separately classified, and the total of all three was only 30,000. In this Province they generally confine themselves to their hereditary occupation of scavenging, and are rarely met with outside the towns and large villages. In most localities the supply of sweepers does not meet the demand. The case is quite different in northern India, where the sweeper castes—the Chuhra in the Punjab, the Bhangi in the United Provinces and the Dom in Bengal—are all of them of great numerical strength. With these castes only a small proportion are employed on scavengers' work and the rest are labourers

i. Introductory notice.

¹ Some information has been obtained from a paper by Mr. Harbans Puri, Clerk of Court, Damoh.

like the Chamārs and Mahārs of the Central Provinces. The present sweeper caste is made up of diverse elements, and the name Mehtar, generally applied to it, is a title meaning a prince or leader. Its application to the caste, the most abject and despised in the Hindu community, is perhaps partly ironical ; but all the low castes have honorific titles, which are used as a method of address either from ordinary politeness or by those requiring some service, on the principle, as the Hindus say, that you may call an ass your uncle if you want him to do something for you. The regular caste of sweepers in northern India are the Bhangis, whose name is derived by Mr. Crooke from the Sanskrit *bhanga*, hemp, in allusion to the drunken habits of the caste. In support of this derivation he advances the Beria custom of calling their leaders Bhangī or hemp-drinker as a title of honour.¹ In Mr. Greeven's account also, Lālbeg, the patron saint of the sweepers, is described as intoxicated with the hemp drug on two occasions.² Mr. Bhīmhai Kirpārām suggests³ that Bhangia means broken, and is applied to the sweepers because they split bamboos. In Kaira, he states, the regular trade of the Bhangias is the plaiting of baskets and other articles of split bamboo, and in that part of Gujarāt if a Koli is asked to split a bamboo he will say, 'Am I to do Bhangia's work?' The derivation from the hemp-plant is, however, the more probable. In the Punjab, sweepers are known as Chuhra, and this name has been derived from their business of collecting and sweeping up scraps (*chūra-jhārna*). Similarly, in Bombay they are known as Olganas or scrap-eaters. The Bengal name Hāri is supposed to come from *haddi*, a bone ; the Hāri is the bone-gatherer, and was familiar to early settlers of Calcutta under the quaint designation of the 'harry-wench.'⁴ In the Central Provinces sections of the Ghasia, Mahār and Dom castes will do sweepers' work, and are therefore amalgamated with the Mehtars. The caste is thus of mixed constitution, and also forms a refuge for persons expelled from their own societies for social offences. But though called by different names,

¹ Rājendrā Lāl Mitra, quoted in *op. cit.* on Beria.

² Greeven, *op. cit.* pp. 29, 33.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 334.

⁴ Greeven, p. 66, quoting from *Echoes of Old Calcutta*.



the sweeper community in most provinces appears to have the same stock of traditions and legends. The name of Mehtar is now generally employed, and has therefore been taken as the designation of the caste.

Mr. Greeven gives seven main subdivisions, of which the Lālbegis or the followers of Lālbeg, the patron saint of sweepers, are the most important. The Rāwats appear to be an aristocratic subdivision of the Lālbegis, their name being a corruption of the Sanskrit Rājputra, a prince. The Shaikh Mehtars are the only real Muhammadan branch, for though the Lālbegis worship a Musalmān saint they remain Hindus. The Hāris or bone-gatherers, as already stated, are the sweepers of Bengal. The Helas may either be those who carry baskets of sweepings, or may derive their name from *hela*, a cry; and in that case they are so called as performing the office of town-criers, a function which the Bhangi usually still discharges in northern India.¹ The other subcastes in his list are the Dhānuks or bowmen and the Bānsphors or cleavers of bamboos. In the Central Provinces the Shaikh Mehtars belong principally to Nāgpur, and another subcaste, the Makhia, is also found in the Marātha Districts and in Berār; those branches of the Ghasia and Dom castes who consent to do scavengers' work now form separate subcastes of Mehtars in the same locality, and another group are called Narnolia, being said to take their name from a place called Narnol in the Punjab. The Lālbegis are often considered here as Muhammadans rather than Hindus, and bury their dead. In Saugor the sweepers are said to be divided into Lālbegis or Muhammadans and Doms or Hindus. The Lālbegi, Dom or Dumar and the Hela are the principal subcastes of the north of the Province, and Chuhra Mehtars are found in Chhattisgarh. Each subcaste is divided into a number of exogamous sections named after plants and animals.

In Benāres each subdivision, Mr. Greeven states, has an elaborate and quasi-military organisation. Thus the Lālbegi sweepers have eight companies or *berhas*, consisting of the sweepers working in different localities; these are the Sadar, or those employed by private residents in canton-

¹ Crooke, *op. cit.*



ments; the Kālī Paltan, who serve the Bengal Infantry; the Lāl Kurti, or Red-coats, who are employed by the British Infantry; the Teshan (station), or those engaged at the three railway stations of the town; the Shahar, or those of the city; the Rāmnagar, taking their name from the residence of the Mahārāja of Benāres, whom they serve; the Kothiwāl, or Bungalow men, who belong to residents in the civil lines; and lastly the Genereli, who are the descendants of sweepers employed at the military headquarters when Benāres was commanded by a General of Division. This special organisation is obviously copied from that of the garrison and is not found in other localities, but deserves mention for its own interest. All the eight companies are commanded by a Brigadier, the local head of the caste, whose office is now almost hereditary; his principal duty is to give two dinners to the whole caste on election, with sweetmeats to the value of fourteen rupees. Each company has four officers—a Jamādār or president, a Munsif or spokesman, a Chaudhari or treasurer and a Nāib or summoner. These offices are also practically hereditary, if the candidate entitled by birth can afford to give a dinner to the whole subcaste and a turban to each President of a company. All the other members of the company are designated as Sipāhis or soldiers. A caste dispute is first considered by the inferior officers of each company, who report their view to the President; he confers with the other Presidents, and when an agreement has been reached the sentence is formally confirmed by the Brigadier. When any dispute arises, the aggrieved party, depositing a process-fee of a rupee and a quarter, addresses the officers of his company. Unless the question is so trivial that it can be settled without caste punishments, the President fixes a time and place, of which notice is given to the messengers of the other companies; each of these receives a fee of one and a quarter annas and informs all the Sipāhis in his company.

4. Caste
punish-
ments.

Only worthy members of the caste, Mr. Greeven continues, are allowed to sit on the tribal matting and smoke the tribal pipe (huqqa). The proceedings begin with the outspreading (usually symbolic) of a carpet and the smoking of



a water-pipe handed in turn to each clansman. For this purpose the members sit on the carpet in three lines, the officers in front and the private soldiers behind. The parties and their witnesses are heard and examined, and a decision is pronounced. The punishments imposed consist of fines, compulsory dinners and expulsion from the caste; expulsion being inflicted for failure to comply with an order of fine or entertainment. The formal method of outcasting consists in seating the culprit on the ground and drawing the tribal mat over his head, from which the turban is removed; after this the messengers of the eight companies inflict a few taps with slippers and birch brooms. It is alleged that unfaithful women were formerly tied naked to trees and flogged with birch brooms, but that owing to the fatal results that occasionally followed such punishment, as in the case of the five kicks among Chamārs (tanners) and the scourging with the clothes line which used to prevail among Dhobis (washermen), the caste has now found it expedient to abandon these practices. When an outcaste is readmitted on submission, whether by paying a fine or giving a dinner, he is seated apart from the tribal mat and does penance by holding his ears with his hands and confessing his offence. A new huqqa, which he supplies, is carried round by the messenger, and a few whiffs are taken by all the officers and Sipāhis in turn. The messenger repeats to the culprit the council's order, and informs him that should he again offend his punishment will be doubled. With this warning he hands him the water-pipe, and after smoking this the offender is admitted to the carpet and all is forgotten in a banquet at his expense.

The sweepers will freely admit outsiders into their community, and the caste forms a refuge for persons expelled from their own societies for sexual or moral offences. Various methods are employed for the initiation of a neophyte; in some places he, or more frequently she, is beaten with a broom made of wood taken from a bier, and has to give a feast to the caste; in others a slight wound is made in his body and the blood of another sweeper is allowed to flow on to it so that they mix; and a glass of sherbet and sugar, known as the cup of nectar, is prepared

g. Admis-
sion of
outsiders.



by the priest and all the members of the committee put their fingers into it, after which it is given to the candidate to drink; or he has to drink water mixed with cowdung into which the caste-people have dipped their little fingers, and a lock of his hair is cut off. Or he fasts all day at the shrine of Lālbeg and in the evening drinks sherbet after burning incense at the shrine; and gives three feasts, the first on the bank of a tank, the second in his courtyard and the third in his house, representing his gradual purification for membership; at this last he puts a little water into every man's cup and receives from him a piece of bread, and so becomes a fully qualified caste-man. Owing to this reinforcement from higher castes, and perhaps also to their flesh diet, the sweepers are not infrequently taller and stronger as well as lighter in colour than the average Hindu.

6. Marriage customs.

The marriage ceremony in the Central Provinces follows the ordinary Hindu ritual. The *lagan* or paper fixing the date of the wedding is written by a Brāhman, who seats himself at some distance from the sweeper's house and composes the letter. This paper must not be seen by the bride or bridegroom, nor may its contents be read to them, as it is believed that to do so would cause them to fall ill during the ceremony. Before the bridegroom starts for the wedding his mother waves a wooden pestle five times over his head, passing it between his legs and shoulders. After this the bridegroom breaks two lamp-saucers with his right foot, steps over the rice-pounder and departs for the bride's house without looking behind him. The *sawāsas* or relatives of the parties usually officiate at the ceremony, but the well-to-do sometimes engage a Brāhman, who sits at a distance from the house and calls out his instructions. When a man wishes to marry a widow he must pay six rupees to the caste committee and give a feast to the community. Divorce is permitted for incompatibility of temper, or immorality on the part of the wife, or if the husband suffers from leprosy or impotence. Among the Lālbegis, when a man wishes to get rid of his wife he assembles the brethren and in their presence says to her, 'You are as my sister,' and she answers, 'You are as my father and brother.'¹

¹ Crooke, *op. cit.* para. 52.



The dead are usually buried, but the well-to-do sometimes cremate them. In Benāres the face or hand of the corpse is scorched with fire to symbolise cremation and it is then buried. In the Punjab the ghosts of sweepers are considered to be malevolent and are much dreaded; and their bodies are therefore always buried or burnt face downwards to prevent the spirit escaping; and riots have taken place and the magistrates have been appealed to to prevent a Chuhra from being buried face upwards.¹ In Benāres as the body is lowered into the grave the sheet is withdrawn for a moment from the features of the departed to afford him one last glimpse of the heavens, while with Muhammadans the face is turned towards Mecca. Each clansman flings a handful of dust over the corpse, and after the earth is filled in crumbles a little bread and sugar-cake and sprinkles water upon the grave. A provision of bread, sweetmeats and water is also left upon it for the soul of the departed.² In the Central Provinces the body of a man is covered with a white winding-sheet and that of a woman with a red one. If the death occurs during the lunar conjunction known as Panchak, four human images of flour are made and buried with the dead man, as they think that if this is not done four more deaths will occur in the family.

7. Disposal
of the
dead.

If a woman greatly desires a child she will go to a shrine and lay a stone on it which she calls the *dharna* or deposit or pledge. Then she thinks that she has put the god under an obligation to give her a child. She vows that if she becomes pregnant within a certain period, six or nine months, she will make an offering of a certain value. If the pregnancy comes she goes to the temple, makes the offering and removes the stone. If the desired result does not happen, however, she considers that the god has broken his obligation and ceases to worship him. If a barren woman desires a child she should steal on a Sunday or a Wednesday a strip from the body-cloth of a fertile woman when it is hung out to dry; or she may steal a piece of rope from the bed in which a woman has been delivered of a child, or a piece of the baby's soiled swaddling clothes or a

8. Devices
for pro-
curing
children.

¹ Ibbetson, *op. cit.* para. 227.

² Greeven, *op. cit.* p. 21.



piece of cloth stained with the blood of a fertile woman. This last she will take and bury in a cemetery and the others wear round her waist; then she will become fertile and the fertile woman will become barren. Another device is to obtain from the midwife a piece of the navel-string of a newborn child and swallow it. For this reason the navel-string is always carefully guarded and its disposal seen to.

9. Divination of sex.

If a pregnant woman is thin and ailing they think a boy will be born; but if fat and well that it will be a girl. In order to divine the sex of a coming child they pour a little oil on the stomach of the woman; if the oil flows straight down it is thought that a boy will be born and if crooked a girl. Similarly if the hair on the front of her body grows straight they think the child will be a boy, but if crooked a girl; and if the swelling of pregnancy is more apparent on the right side a boy is portended, but if on the left side a girl. If delivery is retarded they go to a gunmaker and obtain from him a gun which has been discharged and the soiling of the barrel left uncleaned; some water is put into the barrel and shaken up and then poured into a vessel and given to the woman to drink, and it is thought that the quality of swift movement appertaining to the bullet which soiled the barrel will be communicated to the woman and cause the swift expulsion of the child from her womb.

10. Child-birth.

When a woman is in labour she squats down with her legs apart holding to the bed in front of her, while the midwife rubs her back. If delivery is retarded the midwife gets a broom and sitting behind the woman presses it on her stomach, at the same time drawing back the upper part of her body. By this means they think the child will be forced from the womb. Or the mother of the woman in labour will take a grinding-stone and stand holding it on her head so long as the child is not born. She says to her daughter, 'Take my name,' and the daughter repeats her mother's name aloud. Here the idea is apparently that the mother takes on herself some of the pain which has to be endured by the daughter, and the repetition of her name by the daughter will cause the goddess of childbirth to hasten the period of delivery in order to terminate the unjust sufferings of the mother for which the goddess has



become responsible. The mother's name exerts pressure or influence on the goddess who is at the time occupied with the daughter or perhaps sojourning in her body.

If a child is born in the morning they will give the mother a little sugar and cocoanut to eat in the evening, but if it is born in the evening they will give her nothing till next morning. Milk is given only sparingly as it is supposed to produce coughing. The main idea of treatment in childbirth is to prevent either the mother or child from taking cold or chill, this being the principal danger to which they are thought to be exposed. The door of the birth chamber is therefore kept shut and a fire is continually burning in it night and day. The woman is not bathed for several days, and the atmosphere and general insanitary conditions can better be imagined than described. With the same end of preventing cold they feed the mother on a hot liquid produced by cooking thirty-six ingredients together. Most of these are considered to have the quality of producing heat or warmth in the body, and the following are a few of them: Pepper, ginger, *azgan* (a condiment), turmeric, nutmeg, *ajwāin* (aniseed), dates, almonds, raisins, cocoanut, wild *singāra* or water-nut, cumin, *chironji*,¹ the gum of the *babūl*² or *khair*,³ asafoetida, borax, saffron, clarified butter and sugar. The mixture cannot be prepared for less than two rupees and the woman is fed on it for five days beginning from the second day after birth, if the family can afford the expense.

11. Treatment of the mother.

If the mother's milk runs dry, they use the dried bodies of the little fish caught in the shallow water of fields and tanks, and sometimes supposed to have fallen down with the rain. They are boiled in a little water and the fish and water are given to the woman to consume. Here the idea is apparently that as the fish has the quality of liquidness because it lives in water, so by eating it this will be communicated to the breasts and the milk will flow again. If a woman's children die, then the next time she is in labour they bring a goat all of one colour. When the birth of the child takes place and it falls from the womb on to the

12. Protecting the lives of children.

¹ The fruit of the *achār* (*Buchanania latifolia*).

² *Acacia arabica*.

³ *Acacia catechu*.

ground no one must touch it, but the goat, which should if possible be of the same sex as the child, is taken and passed over the child twenty-one times. Then they take the goat and the after-birth to a cemetery and here cut the goat's throat by the *halāl* rite and bury it with the after-birth. The idea is thus that the goat's life is a substitute for that of the child. By being passed over the child it takes the child's evil destiny upon itself, and the burial in a cemetery causes the goat to resemble a human being, while the after-birth communicates to it some part of the life of the child. If a mother is afraid her child will die, she sells it for a few cowries to another woman. Of course the sale is only nominal, but the woman who has purchased the child takes a special interest in it, and at the naming or other ceremony she will give it a jewel or such other present as she can afford. Thus she considers that the fictitious sale has had some effect and that she has acquired a certain interest in the child.

13. Infantile diseases.

If a baby, especially a girl, has much hair on its body, they make a cake of gram-flour and rub it with sesamum oil all over the body, and this is supposed to remove the hair.

If a child's skin dries up and it pines away, they think that an owl has taken away a cloth stained by the child when it was hung out to dry. The remedy is to obtain the liver of an owl and hang it round the child's neck.

For jaundice they get the flesh of a yellow snake which appears in the rains, and of the *rohu* fish which has yellowish scales, and hang them to its neck; or they get a verse of the Korān written out by a Maulvi or Muhammadan priest and use this as an amulet; or they catch a small frog alive, tie it up in a yellow cloth and hang it to the child's neck by a blue thread until it dies. For tetanus the jaws are branded outside and a little musk is placed on the mother's breast so that the child may drink it with the milk. When the child begins to cut its teeth they put honey on the gums and think that this will make the teeth slip out early as the honey is smooth and slippery. But as the child licks the gums when the honey is on them they fear that this may cause the teeth to grow broad and crooked like the tongue. Another device is to pass a piece of gold



round the child's gums. If they want the child to have pretty teeth its maternal uncle threads a number of grains of rice on a piece of string and hangs them round its neck, so that the teeth may grow like the rice. If the child's navel is swollen, the maternal uncle will go out for a walk and on his return place his turban over the navel. For averting the evil eye the liver of the Indian badger is worn in an amulet, this badger being supposed to haunt cemeteries and feed on corpses; some hairs of a bear also form a very favourite amulet, or a tiger's claws set in silver, or the tail of a lizard enclosed in lac and made into a ring.

The religion of the sweepers has been described at length by Mr. Greeven and Mr. Crooke. It centres round the worship of two saints, Lālbeg or Bale Shāh and Bālnēk or Bālmīk, who is really the huntsman Vālmīki, the reputed author of the Rāmāyana. Bālmīk was originally a low-caste hunter called Ratnakār, and when he could not get game he was accustomed to rob and kill travellers. But one day he met Brahma and wished to kill him; but he could not raise his club against Brahma, and the god spoke and convinced him of his sins, directing him to repeat the name of Rāma until he should be purified of them. But the hunter's heart was so evil that he could not pronounce the divine name, and instead he repeated '*Māra, Māra*' (*struck, struck*), but in the end by repetition this came to the same thing. Mr. Greeven's account continues: "As a small spark of fire burneth up a heap of cotton, so the word Rāma cleaneth a man of all his sins. So the words 'Rām, Rām,' were taught unto Ratnakār who ever repeated them for sixty thousand years at the self-same spot with a heart sincere. All his skin was eaten up by the white ants. Only the skeleton remained. Mud had been heaped over the body and grass had grown up, yet within the mound of mud the saint was still repeating the name of Rāma. After sixty thousand years Brahma returned. No man could he see, yet he heard the voice of Rām, Rām, rising from the mound of mud. Then Brahma bethought him that the saint was beneath. He besought Indra to pour down rain and to wash away the mud. Indra complied with his request and the rain washed away the mud. The saint came forth. Nought save

14. Religion.
Vālmiki.

bones remained. Brahma called aloud to the saint. When the saint beheld him he prostrated himself and spake: 'Thou hast taught me the words "Rām, Rām," which have cleansed away all my sins.' Then spake Brahma: 'Hitherto thou wast Ratnakār. From to-day thy name shall be Vālmīki (from *valmīk*, an ant-hill). Now do thou compose a Rāmāyana in seven parts, containing the deeds and exploits of Rāma.' Vālmīki had been or afterwards became a sweeper and was known as 'cooker of dog's food' (Swapach), a name applied to sweepers,¹ who have adopted him as their eponymous ancestor and patron saint.

15. Lālbeg.

Lālbeg, who is still more widely venerated, is considered to have been Ghāzi Miyān, the nephew of Sultān Muhammad of Ghazni, and a saint much worshipped in the Punjab. Many legends are told of Lālbeg, and his worship is described by Mr. Greeven as follows:² "The ritual of Lālbeg is conducted in the presence of the whole brotherhood, as a rule at the festival of the Diwāli and on other occasions when special business arises. The time for worship is after sunset and if possible at midnight. His shrine consists of a mud platform surrounded by steps, with four little turrets at the corners and a spire in the centre, in which is placed a lamp filled with clarified butter and containing a wick of twisted tow. Incense is thrown into the flame and offerings of cakes and sweetmeats are made. A lighted huqqa is placed before the altar and as soon as the smoke rises it is understood that a whiff has been drawn by the hero." A cock is offered to Lālbeg at the Dasahra festival. When a man is believed to have been affected by the evil eye they wave a broom in front of the sufferer muttering the name of the saint. In the Damoh District the *guru* or priest who is the successor of Lālbeg comes from the Punjab every year or two. He is richly clad and is followed by a sweeper carrying an umbrella. Other Hindus say that his teaching is that no one who is not a Lālbegi can go to heaven, but those on whom the dust raised by a Lālbegi sweeping settles acquire some modicum of virtue. Similarly Mr. Greeven

¹ Some writers consider that Bālmīk, the sweeper-saint, and Vālmīki, the author of the Rāmāyana, are not identical.

² Page 38.



remarks:¹ "Sweepers by no means endorse the humble opinion entertained with respect to them; for they allude to castes such as Kunbis and Chamārs as petty (*chhota*), while a common anecdote is related to the effect that a Lālbegi, when asked whether Muhammadans could obtain salvation, replied: 'I never heard of it, but perhaps they might slip in behind Lālbeg.'"

On the whole the religion of the Lālbegis appears to be monotheistic and of a sufficiently elevated character, resembling that of the Kabīrpanthis and other reforming sects. Its claim to the exclusive possession of the way of salvation is a method of revolt against the menial and debased position of the caste. Similarly many sweepers have become Muhammadans and Sikhs with the same end in view, as stated by Mr. Greeven:² "As may be readily imagined, the scavengers are merely in name the disciples of Nānak Shāh, professing in fact to be his followers just as they are prepared at a moment's notice to become Christians or Muhammadans. Their object is, of course, merely to acquire a status which may elevate them above the utter degradation of their caste. The acquaintance of most of them with the doctrines of Nānak Shāh is at zero. They know little and care less about his rules of life, habitually disregarding, for instance, the prohibitions against smoking and hair-cutting. In fact, a scavenger at Benāres no more becomes a Sikh by taking Nānak Shāh's motto than he becomes a Christian by wearing a round hat and a pair of trousers." It was probably with a similar leaning towards the more liberal religion that the Lālbegis, though themselves Hindus, adopted a Muhammadan for their tutelary saint. In the Punjab Muhammadan sweepers who have given up eating carrion and refuse to remove night-soil rank higher than the others, and are known as Musalli.³ And in Saugor the Muhammadans allow the sweepers to come into a mosque and to stand at the back, whereas, of course, they cannot approach a Hindu temple. Again in Bengal it is stated, "The Dom is regarded with both disgust and fear by all classes of Hindus, not only on

16. Adoption of foreign religions.

¹ Page 8.

² Page 54.

³ *Punjab Census Report* (1881), para. 599.



account of his habits being abhorrent and abominable, but also because he is believed to have no humane or kindly feelings"; and further, "It is universally believed that Doms do not bury or burn their dead, but dismember the corpse at night like the inhabitants of Thibet, placing the fragments in a pot and sinking them in the nearest river or reservoir. This horrid idea probably originated from the old Hindu law, which compelled the Doms to bury their dead at night."¹ It is not astonishing that the sweepers prefer a religion whose followers will treat them somewhat more kindly. Another Muhammadan saint revered by the sweepers of Saugor is one Zāhir Pīr. At the fasts in Chait and Kunwār (March and September) they tie cocoanuts wrapped in cloth to the top of a long bamboo, and marching to the tomb of Zāhir Pīr make offerings of cakes and sweetmeats. Before starting for his day's work the sweeper does obeisance to his basket and broom.

17. Social
status.

The sweeper stands at the very bottom of the social ladder of Hinduism. He is considered to be the representative of the Chandāla of Manu,² who was said to be descended of a Sūdra father and a Brāhman woman. "It was ordained that the Chandāla should live without the town; his sole wealth should be dogs and asses; his clothes should consist of the cerecloths of the dead; his dishes should be broken pots and his ornaments rusty iron. No one who regarded his duties should hold intercourse with the Chandālas and they should marry only among themselves. By day they might roam about for the purposes of work, but should be distinguished by the badges of the Rāja, and should carry out the corpse of any one who died without kindred. They should always be employed to slay those who by the law were sentenced to be put to death, and they might take the clothes of the slain, their beds and their ornaments." Elsewhere the Chandāla is said to rank in impurity with the town boar, the dog, a woman during her monthly illness and a eunuch, none of whom must a Brāhman allow to see him when eating.³ Like the Chandāla, the sweeper cannot be touched, and he

¹ Sir H. Risley, *I.c.*, art. Dom.

² *Institutes*, x. 12-29-30.

³ *Ibidem*, iv. 239, quoted by Mr. Crooke, art. Dom.



himself acquiesces in this and walks apart. In large towns he sometimes carries a kite's wing in his turban to show his caste, or goes aloof saying *pois*, which is equivalent to a warning. When the sweeper is in company he will efface himself as far as possible behind other people. He is known by his basket and broom, and men of other castes will not carry these articles lest they should be mistaken for a sweeper. The sweeper's broom is made of bamboo, whereas the ordinary house-broom is made of date-palm leaves. The house-broom is considered sacred as the implement of Lakshmi used in cleaning the house. No one should tread upon or touch it with his foot. The sweeper's broom is a powerful agent for curing the evil eye, and mothers get him to come and wave it up and down in front of a sick child for this purpose. Nevertheless it is lucky to see a sweeper in the morning, especially if he has his basket with him. In Gujarāt Mr. Bhīmhai Kirpārām writes of him: "Though he is held to be lower and more unclean, the Bhangia is viewed with kindlier feelings than the Dhed (Mahār). To meet the basket-bearing Bhangia is lucky, and the Bhangia's blessing is valued. Even now if a Government officer goes into a Bhangia hamlet the men with hands raised in blessing say: 'May your rule last for ever.'" A sweeper will eat the leavings of other people, but he will not eat in their houses; he will take the food away to his own house. It is related that on one occasion a sweeper accompanied a marriage party of Lodhis (cultivators), and the Lodhi who was the host was anxious that all should share his hospitality and asked the sweeper to eat in his house;¹ but he repeatedly refused, until finally the Lodhi gave him a she-buffalo to induce him to eat, so that it might not be said that any one had declined to share in his feast. No other caste, of course, will accept food or water from a sweeper, and only a Chamār (tanner) will take a *chilam* or clay pipe-bowl from his hand. The sweeper will eat carrion and the flesh of almost all animals, including snakes, lizards, crocodiles and tigers, and also the leavings of food of almost any caste. Mr. Greeven remarks:² "Only

¹ Probably not within the house but in the veranda or courtyard.

² *Ibidem*.

Lālbegis and Rāwats eat food left by Europeans, but all eat food left either by Hindus or Muhammadans ; the Sheikh Mehtars as Muhammadans alone are circumcised and reject pig's flesh. Each subcaste eats uncooked food with all the others, but cooked food alone." From Betūl it is reported that the Mehtars there will not accept food, water or tobacco from a Kāyasth, and will not allow one to enter their houses.

18. Occupation.

Sweeping and scavenging in the streets and in private houses are the traditional occupations of the caste, but they have others. In Bombay they serve as night watchmen, town-criers, drummers, trumpeters and hangmen. Formerly the office of hangman was confined to sweepers, but now many low-caste prisoners are willing to undertake it for the sake of the privilege of smoking tobacco in jail which it confers. In Mīrzāpur when a Dom hangman is tying a rope round the neck of a criminal he shouts out, '*Dohai Mahārāni, Dohai Sarkār, Dohai Judge Sāhib*,' or 'Hail Great Queen ! Hail Government ! Hail Judge Sahib !' in order to shelter himself under their authority and escape any guilt attaching to the death.¹ In the Central Provinces the hangman was accompanied by four or five other sweepers of the caste *pañchāyat*, the idea being perhaps that his act should be condoned by their presence and approval and he should escape guilt. In order to free the executioner from blame the prisoner would also say : "*Dohai Sarkar ke, Dohai Kampani ke ; jaisa maine khūn kiya waisa apne khūn ko pahunchha*," or "Hail to the Government and the Company ; since I caused the death of another, now I am come to my own death" ; and all the *Panches* said, '*Rām, Rām*.' The hangman received ten rupees as his fee, and of this five rupees were given to the caste for a feast and an offering to Lālbeg to expiate his sin. In Bundelkhand sweepers are employed as grooms by the Lodhis, and may put everything on to the horse except a saddle-cloth. They are also the village musicians, and some of them play on the rustic flute called *shahnai* at weddings, and receive their food all the time that the ceremony lasts. Sweepers are, as a rule, to be found only in large villages, as in small ones

¹ Crooke, *Tribes and Castes*, art. Dom, para. 34.



there is no work for them. The caste is none too numerous in the Central Provinces, and in villages the sweeper is often not available when wanted for cleaning the streets. The Chamārs of Bundelkhand will not remove the corpses of a cat or a dog or a squirrel, and a sweeper must be obtained for the purpose. These three animals are in a manner holy, and it is considered a sin to kill any one of them. But their corpses are unclean. A Chamār also refuses to touch the corpse of a donkey, but a Kumhār (potter) will sometimes do this; if he declines a sweeper must be fetched. When a sweeper has to enter a house in order to take out the body of an animal, it is cleaned and whitewashed after he has been in. In Hoshangābād an objection appears to be felt to the entry of a sweeper by the door, as it is stated that a ladder is placed for him, so that he presumably climbs through a window. Or where there are no windows it is possible that the ladder may protect the sacred threshold from contact with his feet. The sweeper also attends at funerals and assists to prepare the pyre; he receives the winding-sheet when this is not burnt or buried with the corpse, and the copper coins which are left on the ground as purchase-money for the site of the grave. In Bombay in rich families the winding-sheet is often a worked shawl costing from fifty to a hundred rupees.¹ When a Hindu widow breaks her bangles after her husband's death, she gives them, including one or two whole ones, to a Bhangia woman.² A letter announcing a death is always carried by a sweeper.³ In Bengal a funeral could not be held without the presence of a Dom, whose functions are described by Mr. Sherring⁴ as follows: "On the arrival of the dead body at the place of cremation, which in Benāres is at the basis of one of the steep stairs or *ghāts*, called the Burning-Ghāt, leading down from the streets above to the bed of the river Ganges, the Dom supplies five logs of wood, which he lays in order upon the ground, the rest of the wood being given by the family of the deceased. When the pile is ready for burning a handful of lighted straw is brought by

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer, l.c.*

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Punjab Census Report (1881), and*

Bombay Gazetteer, l.c.

⁴ *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, quoted by Sir H. Risley, art. Dom.



the Dom, and is taken from him and applied by one of the chief members of the family to the wood. The Dom is the only person who can furnish the light for the purpose; and if for any reason no Dom is available, great delay and inconvenience are apt to arise. The Dom exacts his fee for three things, namely, first for the five logs, secondly for the bunch of straw, and thirdly for the light."

19. Occu-
pation
(con-
tinued).

During an eclipse the sweepers reap a good harvest; for it is believed that Rāhu, the demon who devours the sun and moon and thus causes an eclipse, was either a sweeper or the deity of the sweepers, and alms given to them at this time will appease him and cause him to let the luminaries go. Or, according to another account, the sun and moon are in Rāhu's debt, and he comes and duns them, and this is the eclipse; and the alms given to sweepers are a means of paying the debt. In Gujarāt as soon as the darkening sets in the Bhangis go about shouting, '*Garhandān, Vastradān, Rupādān,*' or 'Gifts for the eclipse, gifts of clothes, gifts of silver.'¹ The sweepers are no doubt derived from the primitive or Dravidian tribes, and, as has been seen, they also practise the art of making bamboo mats and baskets, being known as Bānsphor in Bombay on this account. In the Punjab the Chuhra are a very numerous caste, being exceeded only by the Jāts, Rājputs and Brāhmans. Only a small proportion of them naturally find employment as scavengers, and the remainder are agricultural labourers, and together with the vagrants and gipsies are the hereditary workers in grass and reeds.² They are closely connected with the Dhānuks, a caste of hunters, fowlers and village watchmen, being of nearly the same status.³ And Dhānuks, again, is in some localities a complimentary term for a Basor or bamboo-worker. It has been seen that Vālmiki, the patron saint of the sweepers, was a low-caste hunter, and this gives some reason for the supposition that the primary occupations of the Chūhras and Bhangis were hunting and working in grass and bamboo. In one of the legends of the sweeper saint Bālmik or Vālmiki given by Mr. Greeven,⁴ Bālmik was the youngest of the five Pāndava brothers, and

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer, l.c.*

² Ibbetson, *l.c.* para. 596.

³ *Ibidem*, para. 601.

⁴ *L.c.* pp. 25, 26.



was persuaded by the others to remove the body of a calf which had died in their courtyard. But after he had done so they refused to touch him, so he went into the wilderness with the body; and when he did not know how to feed himself the carcase started into life and gave him milk until he was full grown, when it died again of its own accord. Bālmik burst into tears, not knowing how he was to live henceforward, but a voice cried from heaven saying, "Of the sinews (of the calf's body) do thou tie winnows (*sūp*), and of the caul do thou plait sieves (*chalni*)." Bālmik obeyed, and by his handiwork gained the name of Sūpaj or the maker of winnowing-fans. These are natural occupations of the non-Aryan forest tribes, and are now practised by the Gonds.

Meo, Mewāti.—The Muhammadan branch of the Mīna tribe belonging to the country of Mewāt in Rājputāna which is comprised in the Alwar, Bharatpur and Jaipur States and the British District of Gurgaon. A few Meos were returned from the Hoshangābād and Nimār Districts in 1911, but it is doubtful whether any are settled here, as they may be wandering criminals. The origin of the Meo is discussed in the article on the Mīna tribe, but some interesting remarks on them by Mr. Channing and Major Powlett in the *Rājputāna Gazetteer* may be reproduced here. Mr. Channing writes:¹

"The tribe, which has been known in Hindustān according to the Kutub Tawārikh for 850 years, was originally Hindu and became Muhammadan. Their origin is obscure. They themselves claim descent from the Rājput races of Jādon, Kachhwāha and Tuar, and they may possibly have some Rājput blood in their veins; but they are probably, like many other similar tribes, a combination from ruling and other various stocks and sources, and there is reason to believe them very nearly allied with the Mīnas, who are certainly a tribe of the same structure and species. The Meos have twelve clans or *pāls*, the first six of which are identical in name and claim the same descent as the first six clans of the Mīnas. Intermarriage between them both was

¹ *Rājputāna Gazetteer*, vol. i. p. 165.

the rule until the time of Akbar, when owing to an affray at the marriage of a Meo with a Mīna the custom was discontinued. Finally, their mode of life is or was similar, as both tribes were once notoriously predatory. It is probable that the original Meos were supplemented by converts to Islām from other castes. It is said that the tribe were conquered and converted in the eleventh century by Māsūd, son of Amīr Sālār and grandson of Sultān Mahmūd Subaktagin on the mother's side, the general of the forces of Mahmūd of Ghazni. Māsūd is still venerated by the Meos, and they swear by his name. They have a mixture of Hindu and Muhammadan customs. They practise circumcision, *nikāh*,¹ and the burial of the dead. They make pilgrimages to the tomb of Māsūd in Bahraich in Oudh, and consider the oath taken on his banner the most binding. They also make pilgrimages to Muhammadan shrines in India, but never perform the *Haj*. Of Hindu customs they observe the Holi or Diwālī; their marriages are never arranged in the same *got* or sept; and they permit daughters to inherit. They call their children indiscriminately by both Muhammadan and Hindu names. They are almost entirely uneducated, but have bards and musicians to whom they make large presents. These sing songs known as Rātwai, which are commonly on pastoral and agricultural subjects. The Meos are given to the use of intoxicating drinks, and are very superstitious and have great faith in omens. The dress of the men and women resembles that of the Hindus. Infanticide was formerly common among them, but it is said to have entirely died out. They were also formerly robbers by avocation; and though they have improved they are still noted cattle-lifters."

In another description of them by Major Powlett it is stated that, besides worshipping Hindu gods and keeping Hindu festivals, they employ a Brāhman to write the Pīlī Chhitthi or yellow note fixing the date of a marriage. They call themselves by Hindu names with the exception of Rām; and Singh is a frequent affix, though not so common as Khān. On the Amāwas or monthly conjunction of the sun and moon, Meos, in common with Hindu Ahīrs and Gūjars, cease from labour; and when they make a well the first proceeding

¹ A Muhammadan form of marriage.



is to erect a *chabūtra* (platform) to Bhaironji or Hanumān. However, when plunder was to be obtained they have often shown little respect for Hindu shrines and temples; and when the sanctity of a threatened place has been urged, the retort has been, '*Tum to Deo, Ham Meo,*' or 'You may be a Deo (God), but I am a Meo.'

Meos do not marry in their *pāl* or clan, but they are lax about forming connections with women of other castes, whose children they receive into the community. As already stated, Brāhmans take part in the formalities preceding a marriage, but the ceremony itself is performed by a Kāzi. As agriculturists Meos are inferior to their Hindu neighbours. The point in which they chiefly fail is in working their wells, for which they lack patience. Their women, whom they do not confine, will, it is said, do more field-work than the men; indeed, one often finds women at work in the crops when the men are lying down. Like the women of low Hindu castes they tattoo their bodies, a practice disapproved by Musalmāns in general. Abul Fazl writes that the Meos were in his time famous runners, and one thousand of them were employed by Akbar as carriers of the post.

Mīna, Deswālī, Maina.—A well-known caste of Rājputāna which is found in the Central Provinces in the Hōshangābād, Nīmār and Saugor Districts. About 8000 persons of the caste were returned in 1911. The proper name for them is Mīna, but here they are generally known as Deswālī, a term which they probably prefer, as that of Mīna is too notorious. A large part of the population of the northern Districts is recruited from Bundelkhand and Mārwar, and these tracts are therefore often known among them as 'Desh' or native country. The term Deswālī is applied to groups of many castes coming from Bundelkhand, and has apparently been specially appropriated as an *alias* by the Mīnas. The caste are sometimes known in Hoshangābād as Maina, which Colonel Tod states to be the name of the highest division of the Mīnas. The designation of Pardeshi or 'foreigner' is also given to them in some localities. The Deswālīs came to Harda about A.D. 1750, being invited by the Marāṭha Amīl or governor, who gave one family a grant of three

1. The Mīnas locally termed Deswālīs.

villages. They thus gained a position of some dignity, and this reaching the ears of their brothers in Jaipur they also came and settled all over the District.¹ In view of the history and character of the Mīnas, of which some account will be given, it should be first stated that under the *régime* of British law and order most of the Deswālīs of Hoshangābād have settled down into steady and honest agriculturists.

The Mīnas were a famous robber tribe of the country of Mewāt in Rājputāna, comprised in the Alwar and Bharatpur States and the British District of Gurgaon.² They are also found in large numbers in Jaipur State, which was formerly held by them. The Meos and Mīnas are now considered to be branches of one tribe, the former being at least nominally Muhammadans by religion and the latter Hindus. A favourite story for recitation at their feasts is that of Darya Khān Meo and Sasibādani Mīni, a pair of lovers whose marriage led to a quarrel between the tribes to which they belonged, in the time of Akbar. This dispute caused the cessation of the practice of intermarriage between Meos and Mīnas which had formerly obtained. Both the Meos and Mīnas are divided into twelve large clans called *pāl*, the word *pāl* meaning, according to Colonel Tod, 'a defile in a valley suitable for cultivation or defence.' In a sandy desert like Rājputāna the valleys of streams might be expected to be the only favourable tracts for settlement, and the name perhaps therefore is a record of the process by which the colonies of Mīnas in these isolated patches of culturable land developed into exogamous clans marrying with each other. The Meos have similarly twelve *pāls*, and the names of six of these are identical with those of the Mīnas.³ The names of the *pāls* are taken from those of Rājput clans,⁴ but the recorded lists differ, and there are now many other *gots* or *septs* outside the *pāls*. The Mīnas seem originally to have been an aboriginal or pre-Aryan tribe of Rājputāna, where they

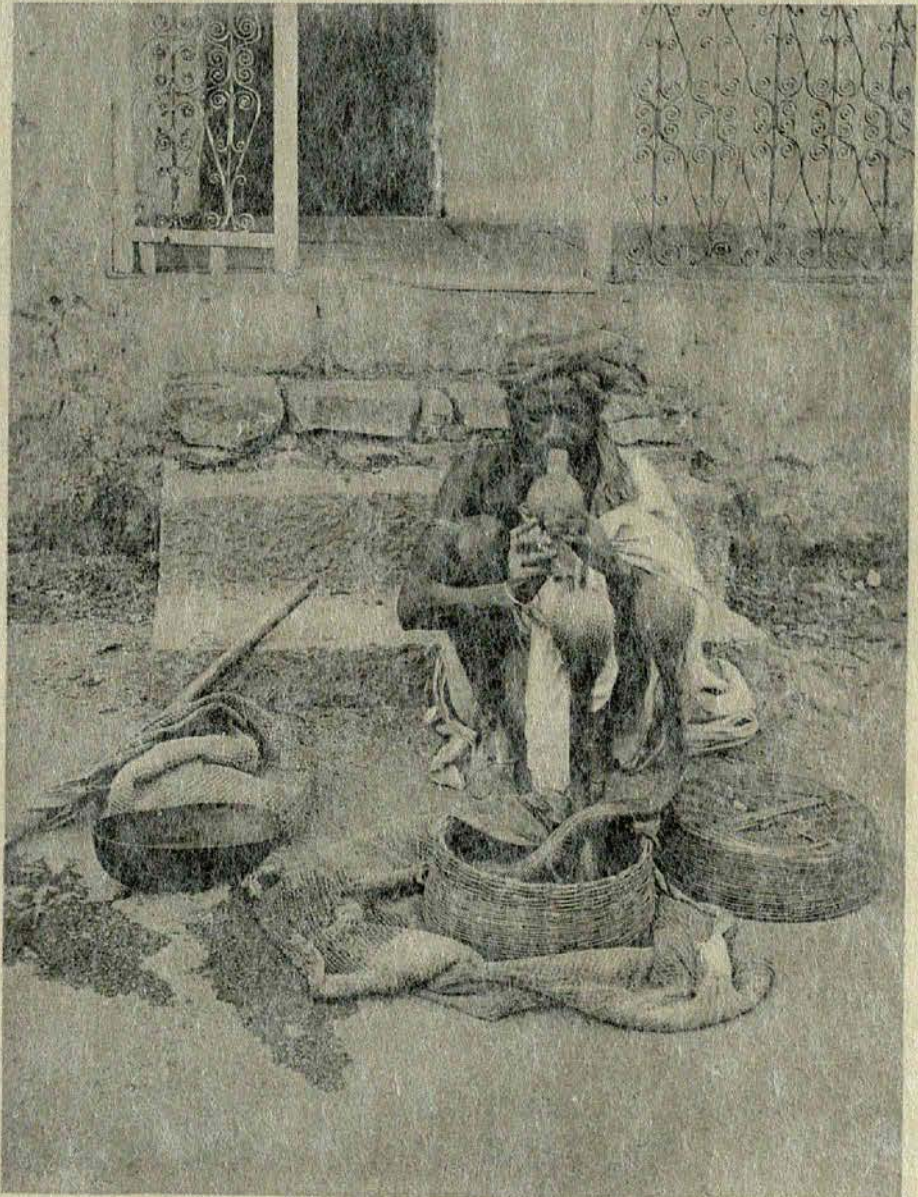
¹ Elliott's *Hoshangābād Settlement Report*, p. 63.

² Cunningham's *Archaeological Survey Reports*, xx. p. 24.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ General Cunningham's enumeration of the *pāls* is as follows: Five Jādon

clans—Chhirkīla, Dalāt, Dermot, Nai, Pundelot; five Tuar clans—Balot, Darwār, Kalesa, Lundāvat, Rattāwat; one Kachhwāha clan—Dingāl; one Bargjūar clan—Singāl. Besides these there is one miscellaneous or half-blood clan, Palakra, making up the common total of 12½ clans.



Bemrose, Collo., Derby.

SNAKE-CHARMER WITH COBRAS.



are still found in considerable numbers. The Rāja of Jaipur was formerly marked on the forehead with blood taken from the great toe of a Mīna on the occasion of his installation. Colonel Tod records that the Amber or Jaipur State was founded by one Dholesai in A.D. 967 after he had slaughtered large numbers of the Mīnas by treachery. And in his time the Mīnas still possessed large immunities and privileges in the Jaipur State. When the Rājput̃s settled in force in Rājputāna, reducing the Mīnas to subjection, illicit connections would naturally arise on a large scale between the invaders and the women of the conquered country. For even when the Rājput̃s only came as small isolated parties of adventurers, as into the Central Provinces, we find traces of such connections in the survival of castes or subcastes of mixed descent from them and the indigenous tribes. It follows therefore that where they occupied the country and settled on the soil the process would be still more common. Accordingly it is generally recognised that the Mīnas are a caste of the most mixed and impure descent, and it has sometimes been supposed that they were themselves a branch of the Rājput̃s. In the Punjab when one woman accuses another of illicit intercourse she is said '*Mīna dena*,' or to designate her as a Mīna.¹ Further it is stated² that "The Mīnas are of two classes, the Zamīndārī or agricultural and the Chaukīdārī or watchmen. These Chaukīdārī Mīnas are the famous marauders." The office of village watchman was commonly held by members of the aboriginal tribes, and these too furnished the criminal classes. Another piece of evidence of the Dravidian origin of the tribe is the fact that there exists even now a group of Dhediā or impure Mīnas who do not refuse to eat cow's flesh. The Chaukīdārī Mīnas, dispossessed of their land, resorted to the hills, and here they developed into a community of thieves and bandits recruited from all the outcastes of society. Sir A. Lyall wrote³ of the caste as "a Cave of Adullam which has stood open for centuries. With them a captured woman is solemnly admitted by a form of adoption

¹ Ibbetson's *Punjab Census Report*, para. 582. Sir D. Ibbetson considered it doubtful, however, whether the ex-

pression referred to the Mīna caste.

² Major Powlett, *Gazetteer of Alwar*.

³ *Asiatic Studies*, vol. i. p. 162.

into one circle of affinity, in order that she may be lawfully married into another." With the conquest of northern India by the Muhammadans, many of the Mīnas, being bound by no ties to Hinduism, might be expected to embrace the new and actively proselytising religion, while their robber bands would receive fugitive Muhammadans as recruits as well as Hindus. Thus probably arose a Musalmān branch of the community, who afterwards became separately designated as the Meos. As already seen, the Meos and Mīnas intermarried for a time, but subsequently ceased to do so. As might be expected, the form of Islām professed by the Meos is of a very bastard order, and Major Powlett's account of it is reproduced in a short separate notice of that tribe.

3. Their robberies.

The crimes and daring of the Mīnas have obtained for them a considerable place in history. A Muhammadan historian, Zia-ud-dīn Bāmi, wrote of the tribe:¹ "At night they were accustomed to come prowling into the city of Delhi, giving all kinds of trouble and depriving people of their rest, and they plundered the country houses in the neighbourhood of the city. Their daring was carried to such an extent that the western gates of the city were shut at afternoon prayer and no one dared to leave it after that hour, whether he travelled as a pilgrim or with the display of a king. At afternoon prayer they would often come to the Sarhouy, and assaulting the water-carriers and girls who were fetching water they would strip them and carry off their clothes. In turn they were treated by the Muhammadan rulers with the most merciless cruelty. Some were thrown under the feet of elephants, others were cut in halves with knives, and others again were flayed alive from head to foot." Regular campaigns against them were undertaken by the Muhammadans,² as in later times British forces had to be despatched to subdue the Pindāris. Bābar on his arrival at Agra described the Mewāti leader Rāja Hasan Khān as 'the chief agitator in all these confusions and insurrections'; and Firishta mentions two terrible slaughters of Mewātis in

¹ Quoted in Dowson's *Elliott's History of India*, iii. p. 103. 283, quoted in Crooke's *Tribes and Castes*.

² Dowson's *Elliott*, iv. pp. 60, 75,



A.D. 1259 and 1265. In 1857 Major Powlett records that in Alwar they assembled and burnt the State ricks and carried off cattle, though they did not succeed in plundering any towns or villages there. In British territory they sacked Firozpur and other villages, and when a British force came to restore order many were hanged. Sir D. Ibbetson wrote of them in the Punjab:¹

"The Mīnas are the boldest of our criminal classes. Their headquarters so far as the Punjab is concerned are in the village of Shāhjahānpur, attached to the Gurgaon District but surrounded on all sides by Rājputāna territory. There they until lately defied our police and even resisted them with armed force. Their enterprises are on a large scale, and they are always prepared to use violence if necessary. In Mārṇār they are armed with small bows which do considerable execution. They travel great distances in gangs of from twelve to twenty men, practising robbery and dacoity even as far as the Deccan. The gangs usually start off immediately after the Dīwālī feast and often remain absent the whole year. They have agents in all the large cities of Rājputāna and the Deccan who give them information, and they are in league with the carrying castes of Mārṇār. After a successful foray they offer one-tenth of the proceeds at the shrine of Kālī Devī."

Like other criminals they were very superstitious, and Colonel Tod records that the partridge and the *maloli* or wagtail were their chief birds of omen. A partridge clamouring on the left when he commenced a foray was a certain presage of success to a Mīna. Similarly, Mr. Kennedy notes that the finding of a dried goatskin, either whole or in pieces, among the effects of a suspected criminal is said to be an infallible indication of his identity as a Mīna, the flesh of the goat's tongue being indispensable in connection with the taking of omens. In Jaipur the Minas were employed as guards, as a method of protection against their fellows, for whose misdeeds they were held responsible. Rent-free lands were given to them, and they were always employed to escort treasure. Here they became the most faithful and trusted of the Rāja's servants. It is related

¹ *Census Report* (1881), para. 582.

that on one occasion a Mīna sentinel at the palace had received charge of a basket of oranges. A friend of the same tribe came to him and asked to be shown the palace, which he had never seen. The sentinel agreed and took him over the palace, but when his back was turned the friend stole one orange from the basket. Subsequently the sentinel counted the oranges and found one short; on this he ran after his friend and taxed him with the theft, which being admitted, the Mīna said that he had been made to betray his trust and had become dishonoured, and drawing his sword cut off his friend's head. The ancient treasure of Jaipur or Amber was, according to tradition, kept in a secret cave in the hills under a body of Mīna guards who alone knew the hiding-place, and would only permit any part of it to be withdrawn for a great emergency. Nor would they accept the orders of the Rāja alone, but required the consent of the heads of the twelve principal noble families of Amber, branches of the royal house, before they would give up any part of the treasure. The criminal Mīnas are said to inhabit a tract of country about sixty-five miles long and forty broad, stretching from Shāhpur forty miles north of Jaipur to Guraora in Gurgaon on the Rohtak border. The popular idea of the Mīna, Mr. Crooke remarks,¹ is quite in accordance with his historical character; his niggardliness is shown in the saying, 'The Meo will not give his daughter in marriage till he gets a mortar full of silver'; his pugnacity is expressed in, 'The Meo's son begins to avenge his feuds when he is twelve years old'; and his toughness in, 'Never be sure that a Meo is dead till you see the third-day funeral ceremony performed.'

As already stated, the Deswālis of the Central Provinces have abandoned the wild life of their ancestors and settled down as respectable cultivators. Only a few particulars about them need be recorded. Girls are usually married before they are twelve years old and boys at sixteen to twenty. A sum of Rs. 24 is commonly paid for the bride, and a higher amount up to Rs. 71 may be given, but this is the maximum, and if the father of the girl takes more he will be fined by the caste and made to refund the

¹ *Tribes and Castes of the N.W.P.* art. Meo.

4. The Deswālis of the Central Provinces.



balance. A triangle with some wooden models of birds is placed on the marriage-shed and the bridegroom strikes at these with a stick; formerly he fired a gun at them to indicate that he was a hunter by profession. A Brāhman is employed to celebrate the marriage. A widow is usually taken by her late husband's younger brother, but if there be none the elder brother may marry her, contrary to the general rule among Hindus. The object is to keep the woman in the family, as wives are costly. If she is unwilling to marry her brother-in-law, however, no compulsion is exercised and she may wed another man. Divorce is allowed, and in Rājputāna is very simply effected. If tempers do not assimilate or other causes prompt them to part, the husband tears a shred from his turban which he gives to his wife, and with this simple bill of divorce, placing two jars of water on her head, she takes whatever path she pleases, and the first man who chooses to ease her of her load becomes her future lord. '*Jehur nikāla*,' 'Took the jar and went forth,' is a common saying among the mountaineers of Merwara.¹

The dead are cremated, the corpse of a man being wrapped in a white and that of a woman in a coloured cloth. They have no *shrāddh* ceremony, but mourn for the dead only on the last day of Kārtik (October), when they offer water and burn incense. Deswālis employ the Parsai or village Brāhman to officiate at their ceremonies, but owing to their mixed origin they rank below the cultivating castes, and Brāhmans will not take water from them. In Jaipur, however, Major Powlett says, their position is higher. They are, as already seen, the trusted guards of the palace and treasury, and Rājput̥s will accept food and water from their hands. This concession is no doubt due to the familiarity induced by living together for a long period, and parallel instances of it can be given, as that of the Panwārs and Gonds in the Central Provinces. The Deswālis eat flesh and drink liquor, but abstain from fowls and pork. When they are invited to a feast they do not take their own brass vessels with them, but drink out of earthen pots supplied by the host, having the liquor

¹ *Rājasthān*, i. p. 589.

poured on to their hands held to the mouth to avoid actual contact with the vessel. This is a Mārwarī custom and the Jāts also have it. Before the commencement of the feast the guests wait until food has been given to as many beggars as like to attend. In Saugor the food served consists only of rice and pulse without vegetables or other dishes. It is said that a Mīna will not eat salt in the house of another man, because he considers that to do so would establish the bond of *Nimak-khai* or salt-eating between them, and he would be debarred for ever from robbing that man or breaking into his house. The guests need not sit down together as among other Hindus, but may take their food in batches; so that the necessity of awaiting the arrival of every guest before commencing the feast is avoided. The Deswālīs will not kill a black-buck nor eat the flesh of one, but they assign no reason for this and do not now worship the animal. The rule is probably, however, a totemistic survival. The men may be known by their manly gait and harsh tone of voice, as well as by a peculiar method of tying the turban; the women have a special ornament called *rākhdi* on the forehead and do not wear spangles or toe-rings. They are said also to despise ornaments of the baser metals as brass and pewter. They are tattooed with dots on the face to set off the fair-coloured skin by contrast, in the same manner as patches were carried on the face in Europe in the eighteenth century. A tattoo dot on a fair face is likened by a Hindu poet to a bee sitting on a half-opened mango.

Mirāsi.—A Muhammadan caste of singers, minstrels and genealogists, of which a few members are found in the Central Provinces. General Cunningham says that they are the bards and singers of the Meos or Mewātīs at all their marriages and festivals.¹ Mr. Crooke is of opinion that they are undoubtedly an offshoot of the great Dom caste who are little better than sweepers.² The word *Mirāsi* is derived from the Arabic *mirās*, inheritance, and its signification is supposed to be that the *Mirāsis* are the hereditary bards and singers

¹ *Archaeological Reports*, vol. xx, p. 26.

² *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces*, vol. iii, p. 496.



of the lower castes, as the Bhāt is of the Rājput̃s. *Mirās* as a word may, however, be used of any hereditary right, as that of the village headman or Karnam, or even those of the village watchman or temple dancing-girl, all of whom may have a *mirāsī* right to fees or perquisites or plots of land held as remuneration for service.¹ The *Mirāsīs* are also known as *Pakhāwajī*, from the *pakhāwaj* or timbrel which they play; as *Kawwāl* or one who speaks fluently, that is a professional story-teller; and as *Kalāwant* or one possessed of art or skill. The *Mirāsīs* are most numerous in the Punjab, where they number a quarter of a million. Sir D. Ibbetson says of them:² "The social position of the *Mirāsī* as of all minstrel castes is exceedingly low, but he attends at weddings and similar occasions to recite genealogies. Moreover there are grades even among *Mirāsīs*. The out-caste tribes have their *Mirāsīs*, who though they do not eat with their clients and merely render their professional services are considered impure by the *Mirāsīs* of the higher castes. The *Mirāsī* is generally a hereditary servant like the Bhāt, and is notorious for his exactions, which he makes under the threat of lampooning the ancestors of him from whom he demands fees. The *Mirāsī* is almost always a Muhammadan." They are said to have been converted to Islām in response to the request of the poet Amīr Khusru, who lived in the reign of Alā-ud-dīn Khiljī (A.D. 1295). The *Mirāsī* has two functions, the men being musicians, story-tellers and genealogists, while the women dance and sing, but only before the ladies of the *zenāna*. Mr. Nesfield³ says that they are sometimes regularly entertained as jesters to help these ladies to kill time and reconcile them to their domestic prisons. As they do not dance before men they are reputed to be chaste, as no woman who is not a prostitute will dance in the presence of men, though singing and playing are not equally condemned. The implements of the *Mirāsīs* are generally the small drum (*dholak*), the cymbals (*majira*) and the gourd lute (*kingri*).⁴

¹ Baden Powell's *Land Systems of British India*, vol. iii. p. 116.

² *Punjab Ethnography*, p. 289.

³ *Brief View*, p. 43.

⁴ Crooke, *loc. cit.*

MOCHI¹

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1. General notice.

Mochi, Muchi, Jingar, Jirayat, Jildgar, Chitrakār, Chitevari, Musabir.—The occupational caste of saddlers and cobblers. In 1911 about 4000 Mochis and 2000 Jingars were returned from the Central Provinces and Berār, the former residing principally in the Hindustāni and the latter in the Marāthi-speaking Districts. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *mochika* and the Hindustāni *mojna*, to fold, and the common name *mojah* for socks and stockings is from the same root (Platts). By origin the Mochis are no doubt an offshoot of the Chamār caste, but they now generally disclaim the connection. Mr. Nesfield observes² that, "The industry of tanning is preparatory to and lower than that of cobblery, and hence the caste of Chamār ranks decidedly below that of Mochi. The ordinary Hindu does not consider the touch of a Mochi so impure as that of the Chamār, and there is a Hindu proverb to the effect that 'Dried or prepared hide is the same thing as cloth,' whereas the touch of the raw hide before it has been tanned by the Chamār is considered a pollution. The Mochi does not eat carrion like the Chamār, nor does he eat swine's flesh; nor does his wife ever practise the much-loathed art of midwifery." In the Central Provinces, as in northern India, the caste may be considered to

¹ This article is partly based on papers by Mr. Gopāl Parmanand, Deputy Inspector of Schools, Saugor, and Mr. Shamsuddīn, Sub-Inspector, City Police, Saugor.

² *Brief View.*

have two branches, the lower one consisting of the Mochis who make and cobble shoes and are admittedly descended from Chamārs ; while the better-class men either make saddles and harness, when they are known as Jīngar ; or bind books, when they are called Jildgar ; or paint and make clay idols, when they are given the designation either of Chitrakār, Chitevari or Murtikār. In Berār some Jīngars have taken up the finer kinds of iron-work, such as mending guns, and are known as Jirāyat. All these are at great pains to dissociate themselves from the Chamār caste. They call themselves Thākur or Rājput and have exogamous sections the names of which are identical with those of the Rājput septs. The same people have assumed the name of Rishi in Bengal, and, according to a story related by Sir H. Risley, claim to be debased Brāhmanas ; while in the United Provinces Mr. Crooke considers them to be connected with the Srivāstab Kāyasths, with whom they intermarry and agree in manners and customs. The fact that in the three Provinces these workers in leather claim descent from three separate high castes is an interesting instance of the trouble which the lower-class Hindus will take to obtain a slight increase in social consideration ; but the very diversity of the accounts given induces the belief that all Mochis were originally sprung from the Chamārs. In Bombay, again, Mr. Enthoven¹ writes that the caste prefers to style itself Arya Somavansi Kshatriya or Aryan Kshatriyas of the Moon division ; while they have all the regular Brāhmanical *gotras* as Bhāradwāja, Vasishtha, Gautam and so on.

The following interesting legends as to the origin of the caste adduced by them in support of their Brāhmanical descent are related² by Sir H. Risley : "One of the Prajā-pati, or mind-born sons of Brahma, was in the habit of providing the flesh of cows and clarified butter as a burnt-offering (*Ahuti*) to the gods. It was then the custom to eat a portion of the sacrifice, restore the victim to life, and drive it into the forest. On one occasion the Prajā-pati failed to resuscitate the sacrificial animal, owing to his wife, who was pregnant at the time, having clandestinely made away with a portion.

2. Legends of origin.

¹ *Bombay Ethnographic Survey*
Draft Monograph on Jīngar.

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

Alarmed at this he summoned all the other Prajā-patis, and they sought by divination to discover the cause of the failure. At last they ascertained what had occurred, and as a punishment the wife was cursed and expelled from their society. The child which she bore was the first Mochi or tanner, and from that time forth, mankind being deprived of the power of reanimating cattle slaughtered for food, the pious abandoned the practice of killing kine altogether. Another story is that Muchirām, the ancestor of the caste, was born from the sweat of Brahma while dancing. He chanced to offend the irritable sage Duvāsa, who sent a pretty Brāhman widow to allure him into a breach of chastity. Muchirām accosted the widow as mother, and refused to have anything to do with her ; but Duvāsa used the miraculous power he had acquired by penance to render the widow pregnant so that the innocent Muchirām was made an outcaste on suspicion. From her two sons are descended the two main branches of the caste in Bengal."

3. Art
among the
Hindus.

In the Central Provinces the term Mochi is often used for the whole caste in the northern Districts, and Jīngar in the Marātha country ; while the Chitrakārs or painters form a separate group. Though the trades of cobbler and book-binder are now widely separated in civilised countries, the connection between them is apparent since both work in leather. It is not at first sight clear why the painter should be of the same caste, but the reason is perhaps that his brushes are made of the hair of animals, and this is also regarded as impure, as being a part of the hide. If such be the case a senseless caste rule of ceremonial impurity has prevented the art of painting from being cultivated by the Hindus ; and the comparatively poor development of their music may perhaps be ascribed to the same cause, since the use of the sinews of animals for stringed instruments would also prevent the educated classes from learning to play them. Thus no stringed instruments are permitted to be used in temples, but only the gong, cymbal, horn and conch-shell. And this rule would greatly discourage the cultivation of music, which art, like all the others, has usually served in its early period as an appanage to religious services. It has been held that instruments were originally employed at temples



and shrines in order to scare away evil spirits by their noise while the god was being fed or worshipped, and not for the purpose of calling the worshippers together; since noise is a recognised means of driving away spirits, probably in consequence of its effect in frightening wild animals. It is for the same end that music is essential at weddings, especially during the night when the spirits are more potent; and this is the primary object of the continuous discordant din which the Hindus consider a necessary accompaniment to a wedding.

Except for this ceremonial strictness Hinduism should have been favourable to the development of both painting and sculpture, as being a polytheistic religion. In the early stages of society religion and art are intimately connected, as is shown by the fact that images and paintings are at first nearly always of deities or sacred persons or animals, and it is only after a considerable period of development that secular subjects are treated. Similarly architecture is in its commencement found to be applied solely to sacred buildings, as temples and churches, and is only gradually diverted to secular buildings. The figures sculptured by the Mochis are usually images for temples, and those who practise this art are called Murtikar, from *murti*, an image or idol; and the pictures of the Chitrakārs were until recently all of deities or divine animals, though secular paintings may now occasionally be met with. And the uneducated believers in a polytheistic religion regularly take the image for the deity himself, at first scarcely conceiving of the one apart from the other. Thus some Bharewas or brass-workers say that they dare not make metal images of the gods, because they are afraid that the badness of their handiwork might arouse the wrath of the gods and move them to take revenge. The surmise might in fact be almost justifiable that the end to which figures of men and animals were first drawn or painted, or modelled in clay or metal was that they might be worshipped as images of the deities, the savage mind not distinguishing at all between an image of the god and the god himself. For this reason monotheistic religions would be severely antagonistic to the arts, and such is in fact the case. Thus the Muhammadan commentary, the Hadith, has a verse: "Woe to him