Tribal Gods and Festivals in Central India

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I. THE TRIBAL GODS

Gradually with the political awakening, but more strongly since the attainment of political freedom, the need for cultural unity is felt urgently in India by one and all. This need is manifested in diverse ways, as a vast literature in books, magazines, newspapers and reports of public speeches shows. One often gets lost in this confusing tangle of opinions, a bizarre jumble of facts and theories. Much of this confusion is due to our tendency to hold on to outworn traditions and beliefs, and also to our ignorance or misrepresentation of facts. So little is known about our people. Looking to the vast area of this country, the diversity of races, religions and languages, with the mist of hoary tradition pervading on all sides, it is no easy task to attempt tackling the problem of cultural unity directly. We must first divide the Indian population into definite groups according to race, religion, language, etc. and study each group separately, scientifically, without prejudice and rancour.

The following pages are intended as a contribution to such a study. I have collected the material for it during months of patient field-work in Central India. My intention was, above all, to study the extent of penetration of the aboriginal culture in Central India by Hindu religious beliefs and customs.

The clash between scriptural and popular traditions:

Our forebears in ancient time made a crude division of Indian society into the four *varnas*; they tabulated many a fact as confirmed by tradition and gave detailed directives regulating an

individual's relations with his family, with his society and with God. These directives were laid down in the Shastras which were often revised, commented upon and expanded. As far as Hindu society is concerned, the injunctions of the Shastras, especially in the parts which are called Smritis (tradition), in continuity with the Vedic tradition, are even to this day considered irrevocable.

However, the Shastras being mainly directed at perfection, we do not get a realistic picture of the society as it existed then, nor do the scriptures account for the various specific customs which are being practiced by the people for ages. In fact, there is an amazingly wide gap between the scriptural and popular traditions. Each little group of people has its own traditions. Each locality too has its own traditions. The curious mixture of local and communal traditions is a problem that presents immense possibilities for cultural study. We are not yet in a position to account for various disparities between groups of people who are inhabitants of the same locality, speak the same language, have come from the same stock and seem to share the same culture. Just as each individual differs from the rest, its kith and kin, so also each social group of people can be differentiated from allied groups, however subtle the differences might be. Thus, the Gond differ from the Korku, and the Korku from the Nihal, etc.

We are also not yet well equipped to explain the origins either of a community or of its customs. The historical data and the information we get about the similarity and/or disparity between cultures of different groups of people, living in a specific area, on the one hand and of one community scattered in different places on the other hand, are yet deficient.

And so, there are immense difficulties in arriving at a synthetic evaluation of the cultures. The importance of practical research work, i.e., collection of facts about the material culture as well as various other subtle aspects of culture, is immeasurable. The more facts we collect, the more we realize how little we know about our neighbours connected with us by a common destiny.

The place of the aboriginal problem in Indian social life:

Next to that of the Hindu castes, the problem of the aborigines is coming to the fore. The recent interest of people in the problem is neither merely academic nor purely political. It is a cultural problem also. As for instance, in Central India the cultural contact

of the aborigines with the Hindus has created great interest.[1] Are the aborigines compatible with the Hindus? The pig-sacrifice, the worship of Bara-deo, which no Hindu is allowed to attend makes the non-Brahmanic heritage of the aborigines quite plain. On the other hand their superstitions, language, dress, festivals etc. are so closely linked up with their Hindu neighbours of the backward classes that one can hardly make out a Gond from a Kosta or a Panka. In political and economic matters, the destiny of the aborigines is completely linked up with their non-aboriginal brethren, especially the low-class Hindus. Their social status, however, is much superior to that of an untouchable in all respects. The Gond even make fun of the poor Panka for having been created from the bottoms of Bhagvan and look disdainfully on the hard-working Chamar (tanner) for dealing with the carcasses of cattle, eating the flesh of dead animals. So the problem we have to tackle now deals mainly with the cultural affinities between various aboriginal tribes I have come across and their Hindu neighbours. The cultural contribution from either side is the chief item of this study.

I. THE TRIBAL GODS

Introduction

The aborigines of Central India are polytheistic, but their polytheism is of an elastic nature. Many of the gods are intertribal, though each tribe boasts of having its own pantheon, which is independent of other tribes. All tribes recognise *Bhagvan* or the Creator. All beings come from him and go back to him after death. In the creation legends we find many accounts of his deeds and especially of the way he planned the universe. Yet in the daily routine he is conveniently forgotten by the aborigines. God *Mahadeo* has been recognised by all tribes; he finds an important place in their mythology, though in actual worship, except in the western tracts of Hoshangabad, Seoni and Chhindwara he is almost a negligible figure. Only those Hinduised aborigines who go to the temple to offer worship, make offerings to the god. *Budhadeo* or *Baradeo* of the Gond is a real intertribal god. Though his

1. 1. Cf. The controversy between the late A.V. Thakkar and Verrier Elwin being carried on at cross-purposes in the papers and separate pamphlets has attracted considerable attention among the social reformers and academic circles.

origin is Gondid, he receives recognition from almost all the tribes in the province as well as by some tribes outside the province also. *Narayan-deo* is another inter-tribal deity. Some identify him with the sun-deity[2] but some believe that he is neither the sun-god nor the god Narayan of Hindu mythology, but an aboriginal deity of the household,[3] whose functions are certainly distinct from the former Hindu deities. Yet Narayan as he is worshipped by the Korku, Mavesi, Bharia, etc., is always called by the worshippers the sun-god. Narayan as the recipient of the pig-sacrifice, the remover of illness and the protector of the hearth, however, seems to be quite aboriginal in character. The homage paid to Narayan by the aborigines is universal.

The origin of the Gods:—What is most interesting and peculiar about the aboriginal gods in the province is their origin. There is a general belief that before man inhabited the world, all the space in the sky, all hills and plains and the rivers and the oceans were inhabited by the gods. It is also believed that these gods were created by Bhagvan and that the deities never left the spots assigned to them. Some of the gods are still performing their ancient functions. Thus *Bhainsasur* is the god of the fields. *Bhimsen* is the spirit which dwells in the fields as well as in hills and near all water places. There are very many *Dongar Deotas* or Hill-spirits. There is *Ratmai*, the goddess of the night, etc. Yet it is quite certain that nowadays the deities do not manifest themselves so often as in old days. Some say that with the advent of man on the earth the gods became invisible and hid themselves in their assigned places. It is only when they are offended or are invoked, they manifest themselves in some form or other. It is the village magician's duty to see that no god is offended or if he is offended that he is appeased. Why the gods disappeared or became invisible, when man came, no legend has so far revealed to us.

A myth however tells us, that in old times, when *Parvati* got her first offsprings, the aboriginal children troubled her and everybody a lot. *Mahadeo* got tired of their mischief and buried them in a pit, only four Gond children and a little girl survived. The children who were buried became deities and to them the other

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2. W. Crooke, *Religion and Folk-lore in Northern India*, London, 1926, I, pp. 5, 74.

3. V. Elwin, *The Baiga*, London, 1939, p. 404; S. Fuchs: *The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandla*. Bombay, 1960, pp. 391-3.

Gond children offered their worship. This myth is in keeping with the aboriginal tradition of ancestral worship. The legends of *Baradeo* or *Budhadeo* of the Gond, and the custom of the Kamar of worshipping nothing but *Duma* or the male-ancestor, confirm the theory.

The variety of the gods: There are two kinds of tribal gods who are actually worshipped, viz. (1) the clan-gods and (2) the village gods.

The Clan-gods:—The Gond and allied tribes have a very peculiar system of the clan-gods. They are also called "little gods" or household gods. The Gond are divided into septs according to "the number of the gods". These gods, the same as the number of the gods to which the clan belongs, are kept in an earthen pot called "gadwa", and kept inside the house of the head of the family.[4] Each clan is supposed to have a special spot in some part of the forest where the family Saj tree stands. The spot is called "gadha" or "pen-kara", the circle of the gods. High up in the branches, is kept a bundle of grass in which in bambu cases are kept the set of the godlings (in the form of stones, iron bits, chain, copper pieces etc.), the same in number as the domestic godlings. In reality, however, the bundle is called the *Bara-deo*, or the great god of the clan.[5] Every three years in the normal course, or when there is a marriage or death in the family the clan people worship first the gods in the home and then those in the forest.

Though each clan is thus supposed to have its special place of worship, in reality it is so far removed from the actual godlings of the family that they seldom have the satisfaction of going to the "ancient" place and offering worship.

Mostly they pick out a *Saj* tree from the forest nearby and perform the rites underneath it. Many people have even forgotten the name of the place also. I was told by a Raj-Gond in Raipur that the clans belonging to "four gods" had their *'gadh'* at Dhamdha, those worshipping "five gods" at Pavagadh, those with "six gods" at Chanda and those with "seven gods" at Ujjain[6] etc.

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4. V.W. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, London, 1938, p. 194.

5. *Ibid.*

6. (a) The "four gods" clan is called Netam and is divided into four septs, each has its own *gadh*, viz. (1) Sadmaki at Lanji, (2) Kowa at Varsegadh, (3) Sidam at Mandla, (4) Chidam at Surjalpur.

(b) The "five gods" clan called Tekam is divided into five septs, viz. Ghodam

The control on marriage:—The "number of gods" among the Gond, is very important and yet a difficult thing to explain. Who are the gods that make the pantheon is still a moot problem. Hislop in his papers has attempted to give lists of the various clan gods. But there is no uniformity between the gods belonging to different localities. Neither is the status of the gods nor is the animal they require for their worship the same everywhere.[7]

Grigson however states that it is hopeless to expect the householder or the *'pen-gadwa'* custodian to name each of the *'chuddur penk'* (the small gods) or their *Bhera Pen* (big god) counter parts.[8]

It happens many a time that a Gond only tells you the number of the gods of his sept but he does not know their names. Hislop's lists are sufficient to show, how broad and elastic the whole system of the gods is. Where the names of the various gods are known, they are given offerings separately as each god relishes a different kind of food. Otherwise the whole set of the gods is looked upon as one god and worshipped. The division of the septs according

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at Pavagadh (2) Kinhakal at Harigadh, (3) Tekam at Tikurgadh (4) Kalesiri at Rayratangadh (5) Raysiri at Soharigadh.

(c) The "six gods" clan called Vika is divided into (1) Kalam at Chanda, (2) Bedam at Boirgadh, (3) Atram at Chanda, (4) Vika at Vairagadh, (5) Vorkada at Mohada, (6) Podapa at Borigadha.

(d) The "seven gods" clan called Dhurva is divided into seven septs: viz. (1) Maravi at Gadha, (2) Pusanakka at Jhurigadh, (3) Kanaka at Hirapur, (4) Maldongaria at Chowkgadh, (5) Vadiva at Varamavati, (6) Dhurva at Ujjain, (7) Kunjam at Surajgadh.

7. As for instance, the "six gods" in Nagpur are (1) Pharsa Pen or the axe god, (2) Khode or Khodiyal, "so named from being made of the trunk of a tree called mundi" or Karam, (3) Sanalk is the spirit of the dead man, (4) Munjal is the spirit of the young unmarried man, (5) Durga is a male god, made of the same wood as Khodiyal and (6) Chuda Pen or a bracelet of iron.

In Bhandara "the four gods" of the Tekam sept are (1) Budha or Gagara-deo, (2) Dulha deo (3) Mahadeo (4) Parbati.

In the same district the "seven gods" of the Seiyam sept are (1) Budh deo or Gagara, the bell god (2) Dulha deo (3) Sakaliya-deo or the chain god (4) Nirra (5) Parbati (6) Mahadeo (7) Kalkoa.

In Seoni the "seven gods" are (1) Budha-deo (2) Matiya (3) Sale (4) Palo (4) Sakal deo (5) Gadwa or Kham (who represents the dead) (6) Khatar pen (7) Kodiyal.

The "five gods" from Chindwara are (1) Pharsi Pen or Dulhadeo, (2) Nurma, (3) Ghangra or Gagara, (4) Raytal (one of the Gond ancestors), (5) Badiyal (Raytal's brother).

S. Hislop, Papers, Appendix I-IV. Nagpur.

See also: S. Fuchs, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-150.

8. V.W. Grigson, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

to the number of the gods, is vigorous in the Chanda, Godavari, Nagpur, and Betul tracts. In Chindwara, Seoni and Hoshangabad, I found that the people had confused ideas about the number of the gods to which they belonged. In the eastern tracts of Mandla, Balaghat and Chhattisgarh, people only know their sept and have almost forgotten the number of gods.

This shows that the old system of the separate number of the gods and separate place of worship for each clan has already been broken.

The most useful and practical function this "number of the gods" performs is that it controls the Gond exogamy. People belonging to the same sept as well as having the same number of the gods cannot marry. If at no other time in life, it is at the time of marriage that the knowledge of the number of the gods becomes essential.

The names of the clan-gods:—Though Hislop has given us a few lists of the clan-gods of different localities, the lists are not conclusive; because most of the gods like Pharsa Pen, Nurma, Sankara-deo etc., cannot be definitely said to be the real clan-gods as the communal tribal gods[9]

Anyhow, one thing is certain that these gods are tribal gods whom the Gond and allied tribes worship at the present day; and in spite of a few local changes the Gond of the province do believe in them.

The Gond gods:—The Gond gods, whether the clan gods or otherwise, are few and striking. Though I am not yet in a position to give an exhaustive list of them, the most important are the following:—

(1) Baradeo, Budhadeo or Budhal-pen, the great god.
(2) Dulha-deo, the bride-groom god.
(3) Pharsa Pen or the battle-axe god.
(4) Gagara-deo or the bell-god.
(5) Sankara-deo or the Chain-god.
(6) Kodiyal or the horse-god.
(7) Matiya or the whirlwind-god.
(8) Hulera or the cattle-god.

Except Pharsa Pen, Gagara-deo and Sankara-deo the rest have

9. Grigson is of the opinion that these are "merely incidental and a later addition to their religion" (*op. cit.*, p. 194).

now become inter-tribal gods.

The Korku Pantheon:—The Korku call a deity *"Gomaj"* just as the Gond call it *"Pen"* in their language; Narayan or Suraj-gomai and Dongar-gomai or the hill-god are their chief gods.

The Horse-god, Khodiyal, is also worshipped by them.

The Baiga Pantheon:—The gods worshipped by the Baiga are not special gods of the tribe, but the gods worshipped by all the tribes staying in the same locality, viz. Mandla, Balaghat and Chhattisgarh. The Baiga has no respect for the Gond god Bara-deo. Even Narayan-deo he ridicules though he offers homage to him. In fact the Baiga even cracks jokes at the expense of his gods.

He recognises Dharti-Mata or Mother Earth, Thakur-deo, Bhimsen, Ratmai, Dulha-deo, Narayan-deo, Lohasur etc.

These are no special deities of a tribe, but deities who all the tribes in the locality give recognition to.

The Agaria Pantheon:—The Agaria have a more definite set of gods on account of their profession, though they believe in all the gods mentioned above, their special deities are Lohasur, the iron-god, Koylasur, the coal-god, and Patharasur Mai, the stone-god.

In the places where iron ore is found Lohasur is supposed to dwell.

In the pit where iron is melted Patharasur and Koylasur live.

In the bellow, Bhudhi-mata, Kamania and Bahudhukan live.

In the skin of the cow used for the bellow lives Sallaitrai, etc.[10] Proper offerings of fowls, pigs and goats are to be made to the gods each time iron is smelted.

The Bharia gods:—The Bharia worship Narayan, Khodiyal, Khattapal and Dhanwai and Durga.

Mother Earth:—Besides the tribal gods mentioned above, there is Dharati Mata, who is the only goddess who is really loved by the aborigines. The earth-cult is very prominent in Central India and many tribes celebrate the Earth's marriage with the Sun in springtide. The Baiga would not take to the tilling of the soil, because they would not injure Mother Earth. This belief is found not in the Baiga alone but also in other aboriginal tribes who have practised *"bewar"* or shifting cultivation in the tribal areas. The cult of Mother Earth is seen in the harvest festivals as well as in the worship of the disease godlings.

The village gods:—Besides these deities there are also special

10. See V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

village deities, whose worship is communal and performed by the head of the village. These deities are more often than not common with the village-deities of the lower caste Hindus, the deities which belong to the 'impure' class as Crooke puts it and are given offerings of blood. In mixed villages of aborigines and the Hindus, the deities are the same. Only where the aboriginal influence is predominent, the victim is the pig. The Hindus favour the goat. In many of these village shrines, it is the aboriginal priest, viz. the Baiga, the Pardhan or the Ojha who alone can perform the worship.

The village gods who are purely aboriginal are few. The most important of them are (1) Mutua-deo or the god of the village boundary of the Korku tribes, represented by a heap of stones, picked up from the nearest stream with an offering of a pig and a fowl.[11] Apart from the annual offerings the god is worshipped when there is a break of epidemic in the village.

(2) There is the god Mirhoia of the field boundary in Sagour and Damoh.[12]

(3) In many villages all over the province there are stones representing a female deity Bijasen, who is supposed to protect children. In the Hinduised villages she is identified with Devi.[13]

The Hinduised and the most popular village-gods, however, are:—

(1) Devi or Mata, representing Mother Earth with a multitude of synonyms, a malevolent deity, the patron of diseases.

(2) Dulha-deo or the bridegroom-god.

(3) Hardul, the cholera-god.

and fields.

(4) Bhanisasur, the buffalo-demon, who lives in water places

Most of these deities are malevolent and the bringers of diseases.

BARA-DEO

His inter-tribal nature:—Bara-deo or Budha-deo is the most

11. W. Crooke, *The Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India*, London, 1926, I. p. 103; also *The Hoshangabad District Gazetteer*, p. 73.

12. *The Sagour District Gazetteer*, p. 43.

The Damoh District Gazetteer, p. 36.

13. *The Hoshangabad District Gazetteer*, p. 72.

important of all Gond gods. The Gond pantheon is extremely varied and elastic. Bara-deo is the only god who is universally respected and propitiated by the Gond of all parts in Central India, and even by those who have settled in other far-off provinces like Singbhum and even Bengal.

The prestige of Bara-deo as an inter-tribal god is immense. Besides the Gond, the Baiga, the Agaria, the Pardhan, the Ojha, the Majhwar, the Savar, the Sahis, the Maria, the Ghasia, the Halba, the Gowari, the Bharia, the Dewar, the Dhanuhar, and the Khond give him either the first or a very prominent place in their recognition. Even tribes outside the province such as the Kharwar of Mirzapur, the Khond in Orissa and the Kharia from the same place call him their supreme deity. The one god who competes with him in regional diffusion is the sun-god, called either Narayan-deo or Thakur-deo, who is recognised by all the tribes of Central India, and even outside, in the states of Orissa, Chhota Nagpur, Mirzapur etc. The Korku worship the sun and call him Narayan, so do the Bharia, and the Mawesi and the Nahal in Hoshangabad, and accord him special respect, and priority of attention. And even in the tribes mentioned above as venerating Bara-deo, Narayan and Thakur-deo play a prominent part. Another god whose cult is widely spread is Dulha-deo.

The synonyms of Bara-deo or Budha-deo.

(1) Near Chanda Budha-deo is called Pharsa-pen[14] or Pharasi-pen while in Deogadh and to some extent in Nagpur also the same belief prevails.[15] Pharsi-pen, as we shall see later on, is the war-god and is represented by an axe. He is recognised in other places as a separate deity.

(2) In Bhandara, he is identified with Gagara-deo or the bell-god and in Seoni also he is represented by Salegagara, the ring and the bell.[16]

(3) The Maria Gond of Bastar and the other Gond also call him Bhera-pen.[17]

14. S. Hislop, *Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces*, Nagpur, 1866. Appendix V.

15. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix I, iv.

16. S. Hislop, *op. cit.* Appendix ix, and Appendix iii.

17. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, p. 194. According to Mr. Grigson's opinion the words Bara and Budha are the Hindi corruptions of the original Gondi word Bhera. He however does not attempt to give the meaning of the word, and takes it as the original proper name of the god.

(4) The Gond and Pardhan of Mandla and Bilaspur call him Prem-narayan.

(5) In Chhindwara, Balaghat, Nagpur, Sagour especially and in all other parts where the Hindu influence is growing he is called Maha-deo.[18]

(6) In Mirzapur he is known as Ningo[19] or Ningo Baghia[20] among the Majhwar, also known as the Gond-Majhwar. The Gond and allied tribes call him Badiyal-Pen in Orissa, and his worship has spread as far as Singbhum.[21]

In Sarguja also he is called Bariya-sah, who is said to have been Raksel Chhatri and the Raja of Sarguja.[22]

(7) In Chhota Nagpur, the Khariya, the Oraon, the Khond and the Maler, call him Biri, Bero, Ber, Bero Gosain and Berupennu. He is identified with Dharmesh or Dharam Pennu, the sun-god.[23]

(8) The Khond in Orissa also call their chief god, Bura Pennu, the god of light, viz, the sun.[24] The Kachari in Singbhum also include two gods called Bura Mahadeo and Bura Gosain in their pantheon.[25]

Legends about him:—The legends about Bara-deo, though they are scrappy and conflicting, like the various names by which he is called, give us some clue to the origin of the god, and the significance of his worship. The legend of Prem-narayan is very important. Two Gond brothers, the first known ancestors of the tribe, Bariyar and Raital, were in need of a god whom they could worship. They went to Mahadeo and asked where they could find their god. Mahadeo told them that Prem-narayan was their god, and that he lived on a Saj tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*) on the Himalayas and he was waiting for their services. The brothers went to the Himalayas, and found the Saj tree, and though the god remained invisible they heard his voice. Prem-narayan demanded a pig-sacrifice from the brothers, if they wanted his protection. The brothers offered him pigs and fowls also, and the

18. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*
19. *The Gazetteer of the United Provinces, Mirazpur*, p. 102.
20. W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. & Oudh III*, p. 435.
21. E. Dalton, *The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, pp. 278, 281.
22. W. Crooke, *op. cit.*, p. 437.
23. S. C. Roy, *The Khariyas*, II, p. 321.
24. E. Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 297.
25. S. Endle, *The Kacharis*, London 1911, p. 38.

god, pleased with their services, blessed them, and is still blessing their tribe.[26]

The allusion to Maha-deo, and the brothers finding a deity which was specially waiting for the services of the Gond brothers sounds artificial and seems to be a later appendage. Even the name Prem-narayan does not sound a tribal name. However, the most important point in the story is the reference to the name of the Gond men, especially Bariyar, which is linked to that of Budha-deo as we have already seen. Another point worth attention is the allusion to the pig-sacrifice which is both consistent and inconsistent with the tribal tradition. The pig-sacrifice is an indispensable feature of the worship of Narayan, while in the case of Budha-deo, as the practice reveals it, it is of secondary importance; the cow is his victim.

A legend prevalent among the Gond of Bilaspur says that Bariyar was the most powerful of the first Gond created by Bhagvan. When he died in old age, he was buried under the Saj tree and since then his spirit was called Budhal Pen, and the Saj tree was looked upon as his abode. It became a practice among the Gond to pay him homage from time to time as also to the departed under that tree.

Another legend from Raipur says that Bara-deo was an old Gond chieftain who bade the Gond worship him as he was dying and became their first god.[27]

The legend of Bariyar given above, bestows god-hood on Bariyar himself after his death, instead of making him a devotee of Prem-narayan or Budha-deo. A legend from Sarguja of Bariyar Sah also supports it.

Ningo is also looked upon as an ancestor of the Majhwar.[28] Baghia is the name of a man who was killed by a tiger and then deified. In some places in Mirzapur Budha-deo is called Ningo Baghia which suggests the possibility of Ningo having been killed by a tiger. Some believe Baghia to be Ningo's guard. Any way, hero-worship clings to these legends of Bara-deo.

A broken legend of Pharsa-pen or Bara-deo incorporated in a charm, suggests that he killed his three brothers Subhadra, Kubhadra and Lingobhan Pariyar. The sixteen women in the family,

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26. Vide V. Elwin, p. 259.
27. *Raipur District Gazetteer*, p. 107.
28. *The Gazetteer of the United Provinces, Mirzapur*, p. 102.

viz. the mother of Pharsa Pen, the three wives of the three victims and twelve daughters of Subhadra, killed themselves.[29] What the reason of the dispute was we do not know. The instrument with which he hacked his brothers to death seems to have been an axe (Pharsa or Pharsi) from which he got the name of Pharsa Pen. The name of Manko Raytal is also connected with him.

The terrible feud seems to have left a deep impression on the people, who began to look with awe on the victor and called him Pharsa Pen the axe-god.

This also suggests the human origin of Bara-deo.

Other legends current about him in Mandla and the Baiga territory suggest that Bara-deo lived with Annadai (goddess of food) in the belly of a Chamar. She was the first to break out of it and Bara-deo followed her.

'The Baiga who have taken to the plough have a very different opinion of this ancient god. Bara-deo's temple was the *bewar*, his present shrine the Saj stump carefully preserved. But with the passing of *bewar*, Bara Deo lost his temple and power.'

The Baiga have succeeded to some degree in establishing a relation between Bara Deo and their ancestor and god Nanga Baiga. 'At first Bara Deo lived in an anthill. Then he went to Nanga Baiga in a dream and began to live with him. Nanga Baiga took him to the forest, and put him in the stump of a Saj tree.'[30]

After being many centuries the chief of the deities of open air, he has in many villages sunk to the position of a mere household god, 'sharing Narayan Deo's kicks on the threshold, or living with Dulha Deo behind the hearth'.[31]

There is also a legend which tells us that a Rawat woman in ancient times made love to a Gond man. Of their illicit connection a boy was born. The father killed the boy and buried him. Since then, in order to appease the spirit of the dead, the Gond made him their special deity and called him Bara-deo.[32]

Bara-deo in the creation legends:—In the creation legends of the Gond as well as in the ancient song of Lingo, Bara-deo does

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29. S. Hislop, *op. cit.* Appendix I, iv.
30. *Ibid.*
31. V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.
32. Russell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, IV, p. 355.

not seem to take any active part in the creation of mankind as others like Maha-deo, Lohgundi, Bhimsen, Pavan Daseri, Lohasur, Agyasur, Nanga Baiga etc. are supposed to have done. Only in a Baiga legend, the part he plays is described thus:—

'When Bhagvan saw that Bhimsen could not fix the earth firmly in its place, he sent the crow to call the two Baiga to come and do it instead.

'The crow flew and flew and flew, at last she saw the smoke from Nanga Baiga's fire rising above the trees. When Nanga Baiga saw the crow, he said, 'Here's something good to eat'. He was trying to catch her when Bara Deo called out from the Saj tree, 'Don't trouble her, she has come from Bhagvan'. When he heard that, Nanga Baiga took the crow in his lap and fondled her'.[33]

The legend only suggests the presence of Bara-deo when mankind was about to be created. His place is much inferior to that of the other gods mentioned above as far as the mythological records of the Gond are concerned.[34]

Some Gond in Bilaspur and Mandla believe that Shriyal Jangu[35] is the wife of Bara-deo. Shriyal Jangu is also called Rat Mai in Chhattisgarh and Mandla. Rat Mai is the goddess of the night and makes children happy.[36] She, like Budha-deo, is of a mild nature and looks upon mankind as her children. Like Bara-deo, she also showed favour to Raytal (or Rakhtyal) and Bariyar. Once great illness spread among the Gond. They did not know which deity it was that had brought illness on them. The goddess Shriyal Jangu went to the above mentioned two Gond brothers in a dream and told them that if they offered her pigs in the dark-half of the month of Magh all their trouble would stop. 'Worship me in the dark, in the dark-half of Magh, and call me Rat Mai'; ('Mother Night'), she said to them. Ever since she protects the Gond very fondly.

About the paraphernalia of Bara-deo the only thing we know is that Matiya-deo, the whirlwind-god, is his attendant.[37] In Seoni,

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33. V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

34. See p. 57.

35. V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

36. In the song of Lingo, a list of Gond gods is given. Jingo Raytal is one of them. Can it be the same as Shriyal Jangu? Because there Manko Raytal also is mentioned (Hislop, *op. cit.*, Part I. Also Forsyth, *Highlands of Central India,* p. 190).

37. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix III.

and as we have already seen, in Mirzapur, Baghia is called his guard.

His relation with other Gond gods:—Bara-deo is not only the greatest of the Gond gods, but also stays quite aloof from the rest. He stays high up on the Saj tree in the thickest portion of the forest and never leaves it. He does not interfere with human affairs in any way. The house-hold gods of the Gond, called the small gods or Chuddur Pen, control exogamy, according to the number of gods worshipped by the clan. These gods also remain aloof and do not care to look into the dealings of men, unless they are not propitiated in the proper way and at proper time. Bara-deo also does the same. Yet what is the nature of that relation between him and the clan gods we are unable to say.[38]

The legends suggest four important points, viz. (1) his birth from the Chamars, which points to the human origin of the god, (2) his connection with the agricultural deities, (3) the Saj tree as his abode, (4) that he is a Gond god and not a Baiga god.

His cult:—The origin of the worship of Budha-deo as found in a legend which I got from a Gond in Raipur, says that once the Gond king Mardandi slept under the shade of a *'dumar'* tree (*Ficus glomerata*). Devi, Budha-deo, Bar-deo, Singhdeo and Mata came out of the tree. They took forms of the *'lawa'* birds and sat on the tree, chirping merrily. Mardandi woke up with the noise, he saw the birds, and caught them. He then brought them as far as Dhamdha in Raipur. Being tired, he put the birds on the ground, their legs tied up with a cord. In a moment the birds changed into five stones. Mardandi was astonished at this extraordinary happening. He knew they were some gods and immediately set up two flags, one black, the other yellow, in their honour and worshipped the stones with sumptuous offerings, of cow, goat, pigs and fowls. The gods, pleased with the offerings, came to him in his dream and told him their respective names and when and how they should be worshipped.

In Raipur Budha-deo is thus represented by a stone, though

38. In Mandla, Bilaspur and Balaghat, where the Baiga influence is predominent, Bara-deo is supposed to have sunk to the position of a household god, and lives on the threshhold sharing kicks with Narayan Deo. This was the result of a curse given to him by Nanga Baiga for eating the impure food prepared by Dom Raja, when other gods like Bhimsen, Pavan Daseri refused to touch it. (Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-321).

really speaking he is not represented by any fetish. He is an ethereal god who lives in the Saj tree. Bara-deo is represented by a platform of earth about six inches high.

Devi and Mata are represented by the flags, which is definite borrowing from popular Hinduism current in the province. There is no emblem for Sing-deo. When worship is offered only his name is announced. Another legend from the same place says that Budha-deo came to Mardandi in a dream in the form of a tiger[39] with yellow and black patches on his body. 'I am lying in the forest neglected. No one has cared to offer respects to me for the last twelve years!' The king knew it was for him to make an offering to the great and ancient god. He put on clothes with black and yellow dots, and gave an invitation to all the local gods and then to all his kith and kin to attend the worship in honour of Bara-deo.

Budha-deo's worship, which takes place once in three years, begins with songs. The songs are sung in Budha-deo's worship only at the preliminary stage, by men and women, when the invitation is extended to the local gods to participate in the worship. Of the few songs of the Gond which are still preserved in the original Gondi dialect and not yet allowed to be translated in any other language like Hindi, are the songs of Budha-deo, the funerary songs, the Gotulgit or the traditional songs of the Gond sung in the dormitories.

A song from Raipur:—

ri-lo-yo-ri-lo-ri-ri-lo-ri-ri-lo-ri-lo-yo
Of what is the staff made?
The staff is made of bamboo
This is the staff of god
The staff of Mother.
The cloth-flag,
Of the Desai Mother,
The Mother of the village.
The bunch of peacock feathers
For the Devi of the *garh*.[40]
The Devi of the royal family.
The Devi Deomagaral.

39. That is why 'sing', really speaking a 'lion' and in coloquial language interpreted as a 'tiger' is called a god and worshipped along with Bara-deo.

40. '*Garh*' means a place which has an exogamous significance. Several septs belonging to one *garh* cannot intermarry.

Dhamkarati Devi
The god Bar-deo
The god Budha-deo
The god Lingo
And Sing-deo
Honour to them.

After invitation is given to all the gods, men take the yellow and black flags, beat the drum and men and women dance and sing beginning with the song given above, and then any other songs may follow. The songs need not be in Gondi.

In the morning both men and women in the family bathe in the river, and return home. The women clean the house with cow-dung. All the old earthen pots are thrown away and new pots are brought in. The eldest member of the family then makes the various emblems of the gods as mentioned above and throws rice before each of the gods. The Devi is worshipped first along with the Mata. The women in the house walk out of the house when these deities are being worshipped. The head of the family offers these deities a goat each. When the victim eats the grains of the rice spread before the deity, the deity is supposed to have accepted the offering, and then the throat of the animal is cut with one stroke. The head of the animal is offered to the goddesses and the rest of the flesh is cooked by men. The eldest male member partakes of the food first, then the other members of the family. Women are allowed to partake in the sacrificial food after the men have finished. Then comes the worship of Budha-deo, for which the women need not leave the house. Either a white goat or a pig is offered to the god. Even the head of the victim is appropriated by the members of the family. When the feast of Budha-deo is celebrated no one in the village can refuse the invitation. No distinction of caste and creed is observed. The sacrificial food is distributed to all. Even Brahmins cannot refuse pork that day. The remaining food, and then bones etc. are not thrown out. A ditch is dug in the inner room of the house in which all that remains is buried. Men and women now can sing abusive sex-songs and enjoy themselves in any licentious way to their heart's content.[41] But that does not form a compulsory part of the ritual.

In the Oundhi tract of Drug, the ritual is more elaborate and

41. Here Budha-deo's worship takes place in the house only and hence as in Mandla, the god seems to have sunk to the position of a household god.

preserves the distinction between the worship of the local gods and that of Budha-deo much better.

Worship is offered to Budha-deo once in three years. Usually the month of Pus (Jan.-Feb.) is chosen for the offerings. The head of the house then goes to the village Gond or Baiga priest (called Baiga) and gives him an invitation to attend the function. The Baiga then goes with a fowl and rice to the most prominent of the village goddesses. He puts the rice before her and sprinkles water on the head of the fowl. If the fowl shivers, the goddess is supposed to have given permission to celebrate the feast and to accept the invitation. The Baiga then kills the fowl or sometimes a pig, and offers the head to the goddess. The goddess Mata then enters into the house-holder and he begins to whimper and dances a frantic dance. Dancing ecstatically, with his eyes half-closed, he comes home with the Baiga. The women in the house, his wife and sister especially, bring a jar of water from inside and put it upside down on the threshhold. The householder then steps in and cleaning a piece of the ground with cow-dung and marking it with a rectangular design (*chouk*) with red earth or rice flour, in it puts a peg usually of the Mahua wood in the name of the village goddess. Then he calls out the names of other deities also and puts more pegs, one for each in another *chouk* (the rectangular figure). Men and women dance and sing Hulki, preceded with the song of Budha-deo. In these songs special importance is given to the non-Brahmanic goddesses known as Sat Bahini or "the Seven Sisters". The youngest one (Helad Bai, the youngest sister) is remembered most affectionately. Below is given the song of Budha-deo.

Mother! Oh mother!
Whose Budhal is it?
It is Budhal of Narethi sept.
Mother! Oh mother!
It is his Budhal.
Play, mother,
Play and dance.
Do not pick up a quarrel,
Do not be displeased.
Put all your heart in the play.
There are the seven sisters.
Play all together, with one heart,
Oh seven sisters!
There are seven younger brothers,
Who is older than they?

The gods on the hills
Are older than they
And all the sisters.—

The Hulki songs are sung all through the night. Next morning all men go to the river and bathe in it. Returning home they tie all gods (pegs) with a rope and say, "We have honoured you in the best way possible. Now only the worship of Budha-deo remains, so do not interfere!" They then steal a virgin cow from the village. This is the victim of Budha-deo. They tie the front legs of the cow to a tree with a rope and also the hind legs to another tree. Then the Baiga cuts its head with an axe. The rest of the gods are offered goats, pigs, fowls etc., i.e. the animals which they are supposed to relish. The head of the cow is placed carefully in a bundle of cloth and tied to the roof. The rest of the body is cooked by the householder as also the flesh of the other victims. The sacrificial food is offered to all that have assembled irrespective of caste, creed and sex. The remaining portions of the flesh, bones, etc., are buried in a hole dug inside the house.

The male members then proceed to the forest outside the village where the family's Saj tree of Budha-deo stands. The male relatives living in other villages, and at least ten male neighbours accompany them. And all the village gods are of course with them all the time.

The head is cooked in a new earthen pot under the tree and also rice in another pot. A little portion of the flesh and rice is served to Budha-deo on seven Saj leaves. The flesh then is eaten by the householder and the Baiga first and the rest of the people are given it later. They stay under the tree the whole night and dance and sing and return home next day with a little portion of the sacrificial flesh and rice. It is distributed to all the members of the family, except unmarried boys, virgin girls, and children. It is believed that if the latter eat it or even touch it they will die within a year.

Now the village gods are to be sent home. Again their respective victims are offered to them. The chief Devi is given a male goat of black colour and others are given either a cock or a pig.

It is evident from Gond tradition that a cow was offered to Bara-deo when his feast took place every three years. The worship took place not in the house but in the forest where the family Saj

tree rested.[42] The offering of a white goat[43] to him seems to be a later change which must have been due (1) to the growing influence of Hinduism, where the cow is revered and (2) to the growing poverty and timidity of the tribes which made them unable to get hold of a calf. The offering of the pig is made on lesser occasions when the god is propitiated.

Other occasions when Bara-deo is worshipped:—

In addition to the normal triennial propitiation of Bara-deo, he is worshipped on some special occasions also. (1) The most important is the worship offered to him, which in every detail corresponds to the rites described above. When a young unmarried man dies, a special worship with a calf-sacrifice is offered to Bara-deo.[44] In Mandla, Bilaspur and Drug however, Bara-deo is propitiated also when the eldest male member of the family dies. Only men take part in the worship and eat the sacrificial food. (2) In the Oundhi tract Bara-deo is worshipped with some details when a marriage[45] is to be celebrated. A female calf is the only offering to be made. The only addition to the rites is that special honour is paid to the sister and her daughter and they are given proper presents. (3) When a vow is made to Budha-deo, then also cow-sacrifice is to be made, so a Gond Baiga from the Oundhi tract told me. (4) When the ceremony of eating new corn[46] takes place in the month of Bhado, Bara-deo is offered a pig. This time he is treated entirely as a household god and the Saj tree in the forest is not taken into consideration. (5) He is also worshipped when the oil of the new Mahua fruit is extracted and eaten,[47] along with other household gods, and is offered a pig.

The tree of Bara-deo:—Though Saj is considered the real abode of the god generally by all Gonds in the Central Provinces, in Sagour, Koha (*Terminalia arjuna*) is looked upon as the sacred tree of Budha-deo.[48] The Gond and Majhwar in Mirzapur and

42. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix IV. Grigson, *op. cit.*; Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh*, III, p. 440, Crooke, *Folk-lore of Northern India*, II, p. 103, Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

43. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix III. Also Appendix III, where instead of Budha-deo, a cow is offered to Gagara and Palo. Sale-gagara however is the emblem of Bara-deo in Seoni.

44. S. Hislop, *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Sagour District Gazetteer*, p. 55.

Orissa look upon Saj (*Shorea robusta*) as his abode.[49] The Gond in Bengal worship him under the Asan tree[50] (*Terminalia alata tormentosa*).

In Jaipur, 'a huge rock forming the most prominent feature in the configuration of the valley is assigned as an abode of Baradeo'. The Nagbansi Gond sacrifice a buffalo before it every three years.[51]

Conclusion:—The various legends of Baradeo and his cult point out that (1) the human origin of Baradeo seems plausible as the legends of his origin plainly reveal, as well as the curse given to him by Nanga Baiga, a mere mortal. Bara-deo in that case seems to be not superior to Nanga Baiga, though more ancient. (2) His real victim is the cow, female calf, though a pig is offered on lesser occasions and goat and buffalo are later additions due to outward influence. (3) He is connected with the cult of the dead.

The degradation of this god is indicated by the fact that on the occasion of his great worship it is preceded by that of a Devi. This we may attribute to Hindu influence.

DULHA-DEO

The god of the hearth:—Dulha-deo or the Bridegroom-god is one of the most cherished deities of the hearth, among the primitives of the northern portion of Central India. He is also supposed to be a marriage-godling.

His emblem:—He is represented by a stone, or a man riding on a horse,[52] as well as a battle-axe.[53]

Ethnic distribution of the cult:—The worship of Dulhadeo is widely spread among the lower castes and the tribes all along the Satpura and Vindhya ranges, including the Narmada and Tapti valleys and also in the plains of Chhattisgarh, and the former Feudatory states. It is almost an impossible task to enumerate the number of the tribes who worship him. Among the Boyar of Chandbhakar Dulha-deo is the household god and 'the sole object

49. W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. & Oudh*, III, p. 440.

50. Dalton, *op. cit.*, pp. 184, 281, 283.

51. E. Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

52. This emblem is found in places where he is taken to be a village-deity to whom the bridal pair pay their first visit after the wedding. *The Sagour District Gazetteer*, p. 42. *The Damoh District Gazetteer*, p. 36.

53. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix II.

of worship'.[56] He is also the tribal god of the Ghasia, Kharwar and Savar in Mirzapur, where he is 'preeminently a marriage godling'.

Legends about him:—All the legends of Dulha-deo centre round the fate of a Gond bridegroom who was devoured by a tiger on the way to his bride's place to be married. Another legend says that the Gond bridegroom was killed by lightning with his bride and he now lives in the stars and has become a god of the household and marriage.[55] The wide spread of this cult and of this god can be aptly described as in a Chhattisgarhi proverb—'where there is a hearth, there is Dulha'. The most important tribes who worship him are the Gond, the Baiga, the Pardhan, the Binjhwar, the Dhanuhar, the Majhwar, the Musahar, the Savar,[56] the Sahis etc. The four latter tribes look upon him as the most important god after Baradeo and equal to Narayandeo. Among the castes the Ahir, the Kosta, the Panka, the Agharia etc. worship him. In fact he is an intercommunal god of tribal origin.

Referring to Dulha-deo, Sleeman says, 'In descending into the valley of the Narmada over the Vindhya Range from Bhopal, one may see on the side of the road, upon the spur of the hill, a singular pillar of sandstone rising in two spires, one turning and rising above the other to the right of some twenty or thirty feet. On the spur of a hill, half a mile distant, is another sandstone pillar not quite so high. The tradition is that the smaller pillar was the affianced bride of the larger one, who was a youth of a family of great eminence in those parts. Coming with his uncle to pay his first visit to his bride in the marriage procession, he grew more and more impatient, and she too shared the feeling. At last, unable to restrain himself, he jumped from his uncle's shoulders and looked with all his might towards the place where his bride was said to be seated. Unhappily she felt no less impatient than he did, and they saw each other at the same moment. In that moment the bride, bridegroom and uncle were all three converted into pillars, there they stand to this day, a monument to warn mankind against an inclination to indulge in curiosity'.[58]

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54. E. Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
55. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh*, pp. 425-6.
56. Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 512.
57. *Ibid.*, II, p. 8 ff.
58. W.H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, Oxford U. Pr., 1915, p. 101 ff.

The motif of the tale, viz. the force of the custom that the bride and bridegroom must not see each other before the wedding starts, is against the spirit of Gondi culture and is a part of the Hindu culture where *purdah* prevails. It is typical of the Bhopal tract. The legends however unanimously maintain that he was a Gond. The Gond in Chindwara, include him in their pantheon of household gods, and identify him with Pharsa Pen, the battle-axe god, and look upon him as the first god.[59]

His cult:—Dulha-deo is worshipped in Pus, one month before the Holi (in Phag). The worship continues fifteen days or a month. Hislop describes the worship of the god in Chhindwara in the following manner:—

"The head of the family leaves his house with an offering of flowers, fruit or animals, i.e. sheep or fowls, to lay at the foot of the Saj tree which is supposed to be inhabited by the god. On arriving near the tree, the fruit is cut in half or the animal slaughtered and a part offered with liquor. The whole then is cooked during which priest addresses the audience and then he and other Pardhans eat what they want of the part that was offered with liquor, and if any remains it is buried in the earth. The people in like manner eat and drink what was offered. The officiating priest never gets drunk on these occasions".[60]

In Sagour and Damoh, the bride and bridegroom offer him a pair of shoes before entering the village of the bridegroom, after a marriage has taken place.[61] The aborigines of Mirzapur offer flowers to him on the last day of Phagun and at marriages a goat.[62]

Conclusion:—That marriage is regarded as a critical period of one's sex-life, and that strange fears surround it is very well reflected in the episodes of Dulha-deo. Gansam's marriage brought catastrophy on him. The desire was aroused in the bridal pair, but consummation of marriage did not take place. In the case of three of the hero-gods of the province, Dulha-deo, Gansam and Hardul, tragedy looms over love and marriage. All the three heroes show a distinct ardour for love.

Hardul would appear to have been deified as a marriage-god because of his great affection for his sister and his miraculous doings

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59. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix II. Also Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India*, I. p. 120.

60. S. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix II.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India*, I. pp. 119 ff.

in connection with her marriage. Dulha-deo on the other hand appears as a warning against hasty sex-love.

The connection of Dulha-deo with the axe-god suggests some warfare in connection with marriage. We do not know what it is.

GANSAM

The God and his cult:—Gansam is a popular village god (not of a malevolent type like the village goddesses) who protects the village from the tiger. He is represented either by a stone on the village boundary or a platform and a pole.[63] He is propitiated once a year regularly when the autumnal harvest festival takes place. He is offered only a fowl by the village Baiga. Special worship is also offered to the god when the village fowls, pigs, cattle etc. are stolen by the tiger or any men are killed by the beast.[64]

Geographic spread:—His cult is wide-spread in the Northern portion of Central India, especially the Narmada and Tapti valleys, Seoni and Chhindwara plateau, Chhattisgarh and the former Feudatory States right up to Mirzapur. Crooke says that Gansam is one of the chief divinities of the Seoni Hinduised Dravidian races who touch the North-Western regions to the south across the Kaimur and Vindhya ranges, the physical as well as the ethnical frontier between the valleys of the Ganges and Jamuna, and the mountain country of Central India.[65]

His legend:—He is also called Raja Lakhan. And some even identify him with Ghanashyam, Ram and Krishna.[66] However looking to the form of worship and the popularity of the god among the primitives, the legend current in Mirzapur, seems more plausible than his identification with Ghanashyam. The legend says that Gansam or Raja Lakan was a Gond chief, who was devoured by a tiger immediately after his marriage. The spirit of the dead man visited his bride at night and consummated their marriage, and their conjugal relations continued ever afterwards.

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63. V. Elwin, *The Baiga,* p. 59.

64. The Musahar in Mirzapur call him Dau Gansam (uncle Gansam) or Bansgopal (the deity residing in the bamboo and protecting it) and celebrate his marriage in Baisaka with Banaspati Mata (the goddess of the woods). W. Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India,* II, pp. 34-35.

65. W. Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India,* I, pp. 17-18.

66. W. Crooke, *op. cit.*

The Gond of Amoda[67] in Central India are said to be the descendents of the progeny of the pair.[68]

Tragedy looms over the marriage of Gansam like that of Dulhadeo and his protection is sought against the tiger. Dhulha-deo is however much more popular and has become a household deity.

The tragedy also permanently links his name with the tiger and makes him indirectly a protector of cattle.

HARDUL

God of Cholera and Wedding:—

Hardul is also one of the deified heroes who is worshipped widely in Central India by tribes and lower caste Hindus, as a village god. He is looked upon preeminently as a godling connected with cholera.[69] The Korku seem to have incorporated him in their household gods[70] recently. In the North West of Central India he is propitiated at weddings.

Geographic distribution:—Hardul, like Dulha-deo, has not, except in the solitary instance quoted above, yet become a tribal god. He is worshipped in the Vindhyan districts of Sagour and Damoh, the Narmada and Tapti Valleys, the Chhindwara plateau, Chhattisgarh and slightly in Bastar.

His legend: Hardul is said to be 'the second son of Bir Sinha Deva, the miscreant Raja of Orcha in Bundelkhand'. He used to have illicit relations with his elder brother's wife. When the brother came to know about it, he arranged a grand feast in honour of his brother and his friends and forced his wife to serve poisoned food to all the party. This took place in about 1600 A.D.

It is also said that his younger sister loved him dearly. She was already engaged and was to be married soon after his death. The elder brother refused to take any part in her wedding. He was the eldest male member of the family. He taunted her with sharp words that she should not ask any help from him any longer

67. Can it be Amadob or Amadoh in Bilaspur district, lying on the road from Pendra to Amarkantak? It is an extremely dangerous spot thickly shaded with mango and other wild trees and has a spring of water where tigers come every night.

68. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 232.

69. Burns, *Sons of the Soil*, p. 84.

70. He is worshipped extensively in the United Provinces and is a cholera deity. North of Jamuna he controls plague. Crooke, *Folk-lore*, I, pp. 135 ff.

but call her loving brother Hardul. When he died, she went and wept over his grave. Hardul's spirit was moved. The gallant man's ghost came out of the grave, dressed as a warrior and celebrated his sister's wedding in the grandest manner. Since that time he is looked upon as a marriage godling and propitiated on the occasion.[71]

His name was connected with cholera in quite an accidental way. Cholera broke out shortly after some cows had been slaughtered in the grave where the ashes of Hardul lie.[72]

II. THE TRIBAL FESTIVALS

Introduction

The tribes are as fond of festivals as we are. Yet they know how to enjoy them much better than we. The food, however coarse it may be, is better and the quantity also larger than usual. Liquor also is indispensable on these occasions. There is dancing and singing going on all through the night and the behaviour of men and women is usually unrestrained. Licentious gestures, and obscene songs form a part of the festivals. In many rites and rituals, as in marriage and in funerary rites, in the harvest festival, in the Phag and in pig sacrifices, etc., such ceremonial abuses are indispensable.

Essential features:—The most essential features of the primitive ceremonials are the offerings of blood and liquor to the deities who are honoured. The Gond offer cows to their gods and all aborigines offer pigs. Goats and fowls are also offered.

Though I am not yet able to give a detailed information about all the festivals of the aborigines of Madhya Pradesh, I have given in the following pages detailed sketches of the most typical and representative festivals.

THE HULKI

The autumnal dance:—The *Hulki* dances are the autumnal dances of the Gond, in the Oundhi tract of Drug and Bastar. They

71. Crooke, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

72. D. Ibbetson, *Glossary of Punjab Tribes and Castes*, I, p. 195.

correspond with the *Divali* dances of the Ahir and the Gond in other parts as well as the *Karma* dances. The *Hulki* dances are mixed dances accompanying the *Hulki*, a great festival of the Gond. Men and women stand in a circle and a man holds by waist two women on either side of him. The beaters of the drum stand in the middle and the dancing party steps a little towards the centre and then draws back a little. The hands of the women are free and they waive them to and fro, the movements of the feet are dragging and slow.

The *Hulki* dance and songs also correspond with the feast of Thakur-deo wherein the Earth Mother is married to him. But this seems to be a later addition as the songs dedicated to Thakur are in the Chattisgarhi dialect. The original *Hulki* songs are in Gondi and are dedicated to Lingo, the goddess Mata, the goddess of tattoo, or small-pox, the village goddess etc., and particularly to the seven sisters. The *Hulki* begins in the month of Bhado and lasts till the *Diwali* day, which is also the proper *Hulki* day.

The songs:—The *Hulki* begins with the following songs:—

Ti-no-na-mar-na-na-re
On the hill-top,
Whose temple is that, oh grand-father
Of what tree are made the pillars?
Of 'Odcha' tree are made the pillars.
Of what will the planks of the roof be?
The planks on the roof will be teak.
What shall be above the planks?
There will be posts
Of straight and unknotted wood on it.
What will you place on it?
The Odcha branches with leaves.
What rope shall be used?
Of green grass the rope shall be made.
The peacock-feather grass
Shall be spread on it.
Of the tail of the *tehra* bird
Shall be the protruding portion of the roof.
Of the bird's tail
Shall be made the groove.
Such will be the temple
With doors on four sides,
And with beautiful panels,
Adorned with scales of the fish.
Inside the temple
Blankets are spread.

On that sits Pandari Koko.[1]
And Lingo also has descended.
Johar, Johar, oh Lingo!
The minda-lyre gives out tunes,
'Kadur-kum', it says.
On his waist he wears brass bells,
Anklets on his feet.
With his mouth he plays on a flute.
From his ears also burst out
The melodious notes.
They come from all sides.[2]

The following song describes Singar Mata, the goddess of small-pox and tattoo. The marks of small-pox on face and body are compared to tattoo marks. The goddess of small-pox is identified with an Ojha woman who puts the tattoo marks on the Gond women. This is the song:

Ti-na-ho-ti-na-na
The earth is formed of four islands.[3]
Above is the yonder world.
This island[4] is called Singaldipa.[5]

(1)

There is another island underneath.
Who is this Ojha woman?
She belongs to the island above.
What is she doing?
She has a basket called 'hila'
Her needle is made of 'thelka' thorn
Of marking nut is made her oil and black-soot.
The Ojha woman from the yonder world!

(2)

The black and yellow cords!
How does she descend?
She holds the cords and comes down.

1. Lingo's brother.
2. Lingo and his brother Pandari Koko are the patrons of dance and music.
3. According to the Hindu conception the earth consists of seven islands (Saptadvipa).
4. The Earth.
5. The name Singaldip or Lanka is very important in the folklore of the province. In the pig-sacrifice to Narayan-deo, the pig is called the deer of Singaldip. In funeral songs also Singaldip is mentioned. In a Phag song from Sagor the soul is called the swan of Singaldip.

She comes with a basket in her hand.
She descends on Singaldip.
Where does she go and sit?
Where does she sit?
She sits on a broad rock.
She enters the village.
'Tattoo, oh tattoo yourselves' she calls out.
The Ojha woman is very strong.
She tattooes for the whole life.
Such is the mighty Ojha woman.

(3)

Oh mother's mother,
The lyre is playing!
Oh mother's mother,
Of what is made the bar of the lyre?
Of what is made the peg?
The peg and the bar are made of teak wood,
On the bar is put leather.
Of Kosa silk the cords are made.
I was fast asleen
Oh mother's mother,
I was fast asleep.
At mid-night.
Whose lyre it is
That gave out bird-like notes?
I was cooking rice
The pot I threw down
When I heard the sweet lyre.
It was the first cock-crow,
The baby began to cry
With feeble voice.
I heard the sweet lyre.
When I was about to take the baby.
I was grinding Kodo
And the grinding-wheel stopped
When I heard the sweet lyre.

(4)

Whose gods are these?
They are the gods of the Poya sept.
And the relatives of the gods are playing,
And all the deities.
The 'sisters' also,
Play, mothers, play.
The playground is broad
Like the teak leaves.
Ears are long like the bamboo leaves.
Big are the hills

And dense the woods.
We went there to pluck leaves.
We then heard a sound
Which came from the horn of a bison.
We pushed our silver ear rings aside,
The silver ear rings like pumpkin flowers.
And then the sound
Entered our ears.
We have not come
For the sake of the rice,
We have come for enjoyment.
Play, mothers, and dance.
A solid cane is chosen for flag-staff.
A cloth stitched by the tailor
Is fixed on it.
Of teak wood a palanquin is made.
With legs of Koria wood
The pole is made
Of a bamboo with fewest knots.

(5)

Give me your anklets,
I am going to dance the marriage-dance.
I shall return it.
Give me the rings on your toe,
I am going to see the mandhai.[6]
I shall return it,
Give me your *lugra*[7]
I am going to dance the *dewari*.[8]
After dancing is done
I shall return it.
I shall return it.
Give me your bodice,
I am going to dance Suwa
When I have finished it,
I shall return your bodice.
Give me your necklace.
I am going to dance Karma.
I shall come back after the dance
And return your necklace.

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6. Mandhai is the special bazaar day, after the rains and somewhere in November, when all the household and village gods are brought in procession to the bazaar. Several village-gods come and the priests possessed of the gods dance fiercely. Hookswinging and tearing out flesh with nails and teeth is very common in Mandhai.

7. *Sari.*

8. Divali.

(6)

Ti-na-na-na-mara-na-na-re
Who is the Thakur man, oh brother,
Who is the Thakur man?
The one who wears armlets
Is the Thakur Man!
Who is the Thakur woman, oh boy?
The one who wears armlets
Is the Thakur woman!
Who is the Thakur's son, oh boy?
The one who wears a wrist-band
Is the Thakur's son.
Who is the Thakur's daughter-in-law, oh boy?
The one who wears a pair of bangles
Is the Thakur's daughter-in-law.
Who is the Thakur's grand-son, oh boy?
The one who wears bangles
Is the Thakur's son-in-law.
Who is the Thakur's grandson, oh boy?
The one who wears a necklace
Is the Thakur's grandson.
Who is the Thakur's grand-daughter, oh boy?
The one who wears a large ring on the neck
Is the Thakur's grand-daughter.

(7)

ro-ro-lo-ho-re-lo-
Where does the grass spring up?
Where does the cane spring up?
In hills the grass grows
And in Dhamdha the cane.
How does the grass look?
How does the *bas* (cane) look?
Green looks the grass
And long is the *bas.*
With what is the grass cut?
And with what is the *bas* cut?
With a knife they cut the grass
And with an axe the *bas.*
How is the grass bound?
The grass is kept in a cart
The *bas* in a yard.
What is the use of grass?
What is the use of *bas?*
The grass is used for thatching the roof
And *bas* is used for the ceiling.

The festival:—The *Hulki* is a communal festival. The songs given above are sung by men and women at night in their respective villages, accompanied with the *Hulki* and *Re-la* dances and songs from the beginning of the *Hulki* period. The proper *Hulki* falls on the same day as the *Divali* of the Hindus.

(1) *Hurra:*—On the thirteenth day of the dark half of month Kunwar, the young men from one village go to another village to dance and sing. They are received well by the young men and women. Here again the villages must work in chains or links. At night after dinner is served properly to the guests, all young men and women dance together. The young men from the former village try to dance with the girls of the latter village. And the girls are enthusiastic to dance with them. But the men from the latter village attack the strangers and a mock-combat dance takes place. Then the girls retire and young men from both the villages dance a friendly dance. Next morning the guests receive presents of rice and other food-stuffs from each house in the village. They cook it on the river-side and have their dinner. All the corn that remains is taken by the young men to their village, and offered to the head man of the village, that evening. If the young men have not been received with proper welcome by the people or the head man of the village they had visited, the head man of this village and his wife, send a sari and bangles to the host, as a challenge. That means the village will take revenge for bad treatment the next year, when the young men of the former village will have to come and dance *Hulki* in this village.

In normal course also, the visit of the young men from the first village is returned by the other without any formal invitation. But in the case of insult a special invitation amounting to a challenge is extended to the former hosts. It cannot be refused. In the normal course, once the visit is repaid, the first village can pay the *Hulki* visit to another village and so on. The *Hulki* thus consolidates friendly relations between the villages, and also starts feuds. It appears that the youths of the visiting village are looked upon as potential mates of the girls of the village visited. It may be that once upon a time there used to take place raids from one village into the other for purposes of carrying away marriageable girls.

THE PUSKOLAM FESTIVAL

The *Puskolam* is definitely a Gond festival, which is celebrated on the full-moon day of Pus. It is a communal festival.

Puspunni is celebrated by the Gond, Muria and Halba of Batar and Oundhi tracts.

The festival:—In the evening preceding the full moon of Pus, the young men of a village, go to another neighbouring village. The young men on this occasion wear all the ornaments of the women in their village. They are received well by the young men and unmarried girls of the village. In every house the guests are accommodated and no one takes any objection to the freedom the young men take with the girls of that village.

Next morning they are given rice and other food-stuffs by the villagers and they cook their dinner on the river-side. In the evening, with the rise of the moon, the rites of *'deur chadwa'* (climbing the temple) begins. It is only the guests that take part in it.

They form a circle and with the sacred drum beating, begin a *danda* (stick) dance, in which they jump and move on briskly.

The following song is sung during the dance:—

(1)

re-re-lo-yo-re-re-la
From what village
Do these young men come?
Oh young boys and girls!
From Mohola have the young men come.
What is the plan of the youths?
Oh young boys and girls!
They have come to play the Danda.
Of what tree are the sticks made?
Oh young boys and girls!
Of *bhiria* tree the sticks are made.
From what village the sound will come
—aga baga dang, kudar kang,
Oh young boys and girls!
From Chilan village will that sound come.
From what village do the small bells come?
Oh young boys and girls.
From Mohola the bells do come.

Three or four men then hold one another's arm and dance in a line. Each young man allows as many smaller boys to stand

on his shoulders, one above the other, as he can. This is called the *'deur'* or temple. The men dance in a line, the dance is called the *Munjota* or monkey-dance. They sing the following song:—

(2)

The monkey sits on a high rock,
'Vayang, vayang'[9] it says.
With whom are you angry, oh monkey?
'Vayang, vayang'.
Get down, oh monkey,
'Vayang, vayang'.
What will you eat, oh monkey?
'Vayang, vayang'.
Eat a pot of wheat, oh monkey
'Yes! Yes! Vayang'.

Mundikavadi:—While the youths are thus dancing and singing the villagers throw coins at them. This is called *'mundikavadi'*. Young unmarried girls from the village rush towards the dancers to pick up the coins. But the dancers prevent them. They beat them and try to drive them away. The girls do not retreat easily. They break the line with force and give a good fight to the young men. There is a great din and roar of laughter during all the time. When all the coins are picked up, the dance is finished.

Next morning the young men again receive presents of corn from the villagers and an unmarried girl who is not engaged or betrothed is also given to them by the villagers. If a girl is not available a bull is given.

The young men take the girl to their village, and get her married to a boy who has a sister or cousin eligible for marriage. Next year the dancers have to return the gift when their visit is repaid by their hosts. In return for a bull, however, a cow and a calf are returned. The bull and the cow are killed and their flesh is eaten on the return home.

The return home:—After the young men of a village have left for the adjoining village, all the young unmarried girls in the village, gather food-stuffs from every house and go out of the village into the jungle on the boundary. They cut the branches of trees, clean the ground and make a *pandal.* It is imperative that every unmarried girl of the village must take part in this and other items of the festival that follow. Before the young men return home, the

9. This is an imitation of the sounds which a monkey produces.

girls fill water in new earthen jars, and prepare a sumptuous dinner. The roars of laughter, echoes of jubilant songs, of the battalion of the youths marching in the direction of the home village is audible from a distance. The girls rush to the boundary of the village where they receive their male friends with joyous exclamations and various other gestures and movements expressive of love. The young men then are served with water to wash their feet by their respective girl friends. Then the young men take their meals together. Girls serve them and eat dinner after the men have finished. Liquor is consumed in liberal quantities. Again the whole party of the elated young men and girls then form a dancing party and drink, dance and sing to their heart's content. Below is a sample of the songs sung on the occasion.

(3)

Oh! Phadki bird!
Why are you sullen?
Oh! Phadki bird!
You eat the fruit of the Gothia tree
Sit on the branch of the Tendu tree
Oh! Phadki bird!
Eat the Tendu fruit.
You sit on the Gothia tree
Oh! Phadki bird!
Why are you sullen?
Eat the fruit of the Gothia tree!
Sit on the branch of the Char tree
Oh! Phadki bird!
Go to the plains (of Chhattisgarh)
Oh! Phadki bird!
What do you eat?
Oh! Phadki bird!
I eat the corn of wheat.
I eat the Urad grains.

They thus sing and dance till past midnight. The boys and girls then sleep in the same pandal. Many a love-game is played that night and many a match arranged. If the parents of any girl disallow her to stay in the frivolous company of the young men, the matter is reported to the boy-friends of the other girls. The young men unanimously agree on the point that as a protest to the insult, no one of the company should make an offer of marriage to the girl unless she apologises. But usually this does not happen as the girls are eager to mix with the boys and their parents also have

tested similar enjoyment. Next day in the morning, the girls cut a branch of Semar or cotton tree which is now covered with fresh green foliage and ready to burst into bright red blossoms. The tree is the symbol of youth. A girl cuts a branch, and four or five other girls, stand below and catch the branch in their arms. The branch of the plant of youth must not fall on the ground. The boys gather all the sticks (*danda*) of Semar which they had used in the dance, and tie them in a bundle and fasten it to the branch of a Semar tree. They remove all the female ornaments they have been wearing so long, and bathe in the river. Each of the boys then keeps a stone under the tree, which gives an idea of the number of dancers that have taken part in the festival. The bigger the heap of the stones, the greater is the glory of the village.

The girls carry the branch, (without letting it touch the ground, till its proper destination is reached) and plant it in the centre of the village. All the elderly people of the village then smear oil and turmeric on the young people in their respective homes.

A very typical and interesting feature of this most amorous festival is that love songs of any kind, and even 'Rela' songs are forbidden from beginning to the end. The explanation given by the Gond is that *Puskolam* is a feast dedicated to a god (to which god we do not know). Can it be that when actual love-making is allowed to any extent there is little need to give vent to emotions?

Conclusion:—This festival is important in more than one way.

(1) It is a real Gond festival and self-sufficient as it is not subsidiary to agricultural operations or to any even in life or even to the propitiation of the village gods as are other rituals like Hulki.

(2) It reflects indirectly on the exogamous system of the Gond into the Dudhbhai and Mambhai divisions. The festival clearly suggests a chain of villages where girls and boys could mix with one another with a view to matrimony. The exchange of unmarried girls in the two villages testifies to it. Only the system is not well developed as it is among the Bhuiya or Oraon, where they have the Bandhu village system of exogamy and where the dormitory system is much more advanced.

The dormitory system still prevails in the south-eastern portion of Madhya Pradesh and in Bastar.

In the south of Raipur, the dormitory system has decayed and yet some ideology of the *Puskolam* festival has survived. The young

boys form a solid group of their own, the eldest boy being called Mariyan (a cousin) or Mukadam (chief etc.) So also the girls form a group of their own, and the eldest girl who leads the group is called Marandal (cousin) or Belosa. These terms are now used by boys and girls also as synonymous for lovers. Another striking feature of this system is that each boy and each girl has a secret name of the society which only the young men and women know. The boys are called Raja, Pardhan, Mukadam etc. Girls are given names of flowers. Whatever affairs take place in the group remain secret and parents have no voice in declaring a match unless the young men and women decide.

(3) There is a faint trace of group marriage in it.

(4) It is impossible to explain the custom of the men wearing female ornaments when they go to the dance.

(5) The Festival in all its aspects is symbolical of conjugal love.

THE KARMA

The festival:—The Karma is the harvest festival which takes place in the rainy season, in the month of Bhado, the bright fortnight.

The triple aspect of the festival is (1) the ritual, (2) the dance and (3) the songs.

The ritual consists of the worship of the Karam tree (*Neuclea parvifolia*) accompanied with mixed dances of different formations and also a variety of songs. The festival is very complex and unless we analyse each of the three items, together with its ethnic and geographic spread, we shall not be able to understand how the ritual is modified and how the dances are expanded and also how the songs are utilised in the festival. The contents of the ritual, dance and songs are given below in all possible details.

The Ethnic and Geographic Distribution

The Ethnic distribution:—The ethnic distribution of the *Karma* dances and songs as they are (a) accompanied by ritual, and (b) detached from the ritual, in Madhya Pradesh and the adjoining regions of Chhota Nagpur and Bihar, the former Feudatory States, and the Mirzapur district in the Kaimur range, is of a primary

importance as it discloses to us some of the moot points regarding, (1) the origin of the *Karma* festival, (2) the tribes which are special representatives of the old *Karma*-worshippers both in the central regions and the adjoining ones; (3) the technique of the ritual, the dances and the songs, (4) the popularity of the *Karma* dances and songs; (5) and the religious significance attached to it (as it is actually observed).

In Central India the *Karma* is widely spread among all the lower-caste Hindus, and aborigines in the eastern portion, viz. in Mandla, Balaghat, Bilaspur, north of Raipur, and the northern half of Drug, the former Feudatory States in Chhattisgarh and then in the former Jashapur, Raigarh and Sarangarh States which merge into the Kaimur range, and the Chhota Nagpur plateau where the *Karma* or *Karam* festival and dances still thrive vigorously. The absence of the *Karma* in the south-eastern portion of Raipur district merging into the Muria country, and the south-eastern corner of Drug, the Oundhi and Panabaras tract, where we find some of the rare specimens of the concentrated Gondi culture, is very significant. The *Karma* is not known in Bastar and also in the northern portion of the Godavari district which is strongly influenced by the Gond culture of Bastar. This geographic distribution shows that the *Karma* is not a part of the indigenous Gond culture, and that it is merely superimposed on the Gond and allied tribes either through the contact with tribes living on border lands and being influenced by the culture of the neighbouring regions, or through the migration of the tribes which belong to some group of the prominent neighbouring tribes. This leads us further into the inquiry of the problem of the particular tribes in Central India among whom the details of the *Karma* festivals are preserved in an elaborate form and their connection with the tribes outside the province. To the east the *Karma* or *Karam* does not exceed the limits of Singhbhum,[10] to the west not beyond Nagpur, to the north not beyond Mirzapur and to the south in the northern parts of Drug and Raipur districts.

Ethnic distribution in Central India:

Hindu lower castes:—Among all lower caste Hindus of Chhattisgarh, Mandla, Balaghat and right upto Nagpur, the agriculturists dance and sing the *Karma*. The medium of the Karma songs

10. E. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, pp. 131, 135, 198.

being some form of the eastern Hindi dialects, the *Karma* songs have not reached places where the people speak Gondi, Marathi, or Telugu. In Chhattisgarh the *Karma* is very popular among the Rawat, Koshta and Panka.

Tribes:—Among the tribes, the Gond dance the *Karma* vigorously. Even more systematic are the Baiga. Their *Karma* songs are famous. They know a great variety of *Karma* dances.[11]

Very famous are the Ghasia, whose *Karma* songs are well-known. Even more famous are the *Karma* songs and dances of the Majhwar of Bilaspur. And they also preserve the ritual of the worship of 'Karam-raja' or 'Karam deota' in the form of the 'Karam' tree. A few of their neighbours both from the Hindu and Hindu and tribal population imitate them.

Equally well-known are the Sahis *Karma* songs, and the ritual is identical with that of the Majhwar.

Looking to the ethnic distribution of these tribes, the Ghasia, the Majhwar, and the Sahis are spread profusely in the bordering former Feudatory States, Chhota-Nagpur and Mirzapur districts. It is also to be noted in this connection that in parts outside Madhya Pradesh, and especially in Chhota Nagpur, it is the agricultural Hindu population who dance the *Karma* more vigorously than the Bhuiya, Munda and Oraon, the latter having their Jadur and dormitory dances first and *Karam* dances next, which makes Sarat Ch. Roy believe that the *Karma* festival and the dances have been boorrowed by the Munda tribes from the Hindus.[12] But looking to the condition of Madhya Pradesh and Mirzapur, where also Hindu lower castes indulge in the *Karma*, the inspiration comes mostly from the aborigines, from the Baiga, Majhwar, Sahis and Gond in Central India, and from the Majhwar and Sahis in Mirzapur. The *Karma* legends also, after proper analysis, show us that both the ritual and the dances and songs point more favourably to an aboriginal origin.

The legends about the origin of the Karam or Karma festival:—The legends about the *Karma* festival shed light on its origin and spread. The following legend comes from the Majhwar of Mirzapur.

'There were seven brothers of the Majhwar tribe who lived together. The six elder ones used to go out to work, while the younger one stopped at home to cook food. He used to get his

11. Elwin, *The Baiga,* pp. 432 ff.
12. S. C. Roy, *The Mundas,* p. 478.

six sisters-in-law to cook it and when it was ready would take it to his brothers in the fields. This youngest brother was in the habit of planting a branch of *Karam* tree in the courtyard, and of dancing before it with his sisters-in-law. Now this delayed the cooking and one day the elder brothers, coming home unexpectedly found them so engaged, tore up the tree in anger and threw it into the river. At this the younger brother was enraged and left the house. Then everything went wrong with him, till he saw the Karam-deota floating on the river. He tried to draw near to it, but a voice from the branch sternly forbade him to approach because he was a sinner. He then propitiated the god by prayer and was directed to go home. On his return he found everything that had been evil on his former journey was changed. Even the family house, which had fallen into ruins and his brothers who had been reduced to great poverty were restored to their former state. He accordingly called his brothers together and told them that their misfortune had fallen on them because they had dishonoured Karam-deota. Since that time the deity has been worshipped by the tribe.[13]

The story contains two important points which are common to the non-Brahmanic and aboriginal cultures, viz., (1) the intimacy between the younger brother and the elder brothers' wives, and (2) mixed dancing. The reference to the dancing is all the more interesting on account of the boy's being unaware of the fact that the tree round which he danced for the sake of merriment was the abode of a deity, who enjoyed dance and songs.

The 'sin' alluded to in the story seems to be the offence against the divinity when the tree was thrown away. This seems to be a typical instance of the aboriginal idea of the divinity. It is only the offence that counts. The motive is of no consideration for the deity. And so the Karam-deota does not take into consideration the ignorance of the boy. The Karam-deota does not even take into consideration that the youngest brother did fight with his brothers in order that the tree might remain in the courtyard.

The 'sin' cannot be a man's making merry with his sisters-in-law, according to the moral code of the aborigines in these parts, unless the Brahmanic idea of 'decency' intervenes.

A legend of Karam prevalent among the Pauri Bhuiya of Orissa, recorded by S. C. Roy says that a merchant returned home

13. *The Gazetteer of the United Provinces,* Mirzapur, pp. 103-4.

after a very prosperous voyage. His vessel was loaded with precious metals and other valuable things, which he brought from foreign countries. Before he unloaded the ship he wanted his wife and sons and daughters to go to the ship and perform a religious ceremony for his safe and happy return. It was however the Karam-puja day and the women were dancing round the Karam branches and men were beating drums. No one paid any attention to the merchant's call. The merchant then became furious and uprooted the branches and threw them away. But no sooner was this done, than the wrath of the Karam-god fell on him and his ship with its precious loads sunk in the depths of the water. The man then consulted an astrologer and asked him what was the matter with his ship and how could he get it back. The astrologer told him that it was the curse of the Karam god that had caused the ship to disappear and the only way to get it back was to invoke the deity. The merchant again set on a voyage in search of the Karam deity. He found the deity in the sea, worshipped Karam Raja and the god then told him to perform the Karam ritual every year. His sons and daughters-in-law must fast for seven days and nights and dance and sing during the Karam festival.[14]

The legend describes the importance of the Karam ritual and the evil consequences at the omission of it (like the previous tale). Yet it does not give us any clue, like the former tale, about the origin of the ritual. The legend implies that the Karam festival was already in existence. Yet the contemptuous way in which the merchant treated the sacred branches, may suggest that it was not a very popular custom among the well-to-do. No Hindu can treat a sacred object of worship in his own community with such contempt. It is probable that the worship of this tree was prevalent in communities which were different from the one he belonged to, mostly in a class of people which belonged to a lower stratum.

Another story prevalent among the Brahmins of Chota-Nagpur, relates that there were two brothers. Dharma was the elder brother and Karma, the younger brother. Dharma was a rich man and Karma very poor. Karma's wife once asked him to go to his rich brother's house and bring some money. Karma went. But his brother and his wife were very unkind to him. Repulsed and insulted he returned home in a very sullen mood. On his way, he saw some women worshipping the Karma tree. The women

14. S. C. Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa*, pp. 267-9.

saw how poor and dejected he was and they advised him to worship the Karma as they did, for prosperity and happiness. He did it and soon his bad days were over. He continued the practice and others followed his suit.[15]

This tale also suggests not the origin, but the practice of the custom which did not exist among the Brahmins of the province to which he belonged and also hints at its spread among the Hindu castes.

The strength of the Hindu population being enormous in comparison with that of the tribes, the area of the distribution of a custom is much larger, and there is a greater possibility for a modification of the original custom. After a custom has thus been sufficiently stabilised in the major portion of the population, a reverse process takes place. The minority of the aborigines from whom the custom had earlier been borrowed by the Hindus, on account of the growing influence of Hinduism, are likely to borrow the new details from their Hindu neighbours. The cross-currents of culture may thus continually go on, silently and yet with a great momentum. Similar seems to be the case of the Karma festival which originated among the aborigines and was borrowed from them and popularised by the Hindus.[16]

The festival and dance:—The Karam festival is both a communal[17] as well as a household[18] one. The Karam festival *in Mirzapur* is simple. If begins on the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Bhado[19] and lasts for a least ten days. Men fast on that day and wear a thread on the right arm over which some crude spells are recited. Then they go into the forest and cut a branch of the Karam tree, which they fix up in the courtyard. The men bow to it and the women decorate it with red lead. Then they get drunk, dance round it and sing *Karam* songs. The festival is an occasion of rough license and debauchery. It is understood that if any girl takes a fancy to a man, she has only

15. E. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal,* pp. 259-60.

16. W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh,* III, pp. 439 ff.

17. Viz. the Bhuiya, the Ghasia, the Musahar etc. in Mirzapur. W. Crooke *op. cit.* II, pp. 71-83, Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas,* p. 240.

18. Viz. The Majhwar in Mirzapur and also the Savar, the Kharwar, the Boyar etc. in the district; Crooke *Ibid.* also, II, pp. 94-7, Roy, *The Khariyas,* II, pp. 342 ff.

19. It can also take place on the 14th day, called Ancient Chaudas. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh,* II, p. 83; III, p. 439.

to kick him on the ankle during the dance and parents get the pair married.[20]

During the dance 'men and women stand in opposite lines and advance and retreat to the music of the sacred drum'.[21] The dance goes on the whole night and then next morning the branch is taken in a procession by men and thrown into a tank or a stream outside the village.[22]

The Karam Festival in Bihar and Orissa

The Karam Festival among the Oraon:—The Oraon observe the Karam festival zealously. The chief items of the ritual are (1) cutting of three branches of the Karam tree, which are called Karam Raja. (2) The entry of the branches into the village dancing ground, accompanied with dance and music. (3) Dancing and singing continuing the whole of the night. (4) Garlanding the branches the next morning and recitation of the Karam legend. (4) Offerings of flowers, rice and curds to the branches, (5) Red Karam baskets full of grain are put before the branches and 'some ceremonially nurtured barley seedlings' are distributed among the boys and girls who put the yellow blades in their hair. (6) The branches are taken up and carried by women through the village and are thrown into the stream.[23]

Among the Hill-Bhuiyas, the Karma is observed as follows:—

'The men plant the Karam tree on the altar' while women go on making hur-hura sound. The girls now bow down before the Karam branch and say, 'O Karam Raja, O Karam Rani, we are making Karam-Dharam[24] night.'

It is interesting to note that the Hill Bhuiyas have no special Karma-dances included in their dances, like the Oraon and Munda.

The Karma in Central India

The Majhwar in Central India dance the Karma dance in the month of Asarh and Kunwar or at the beginning of the rains.

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20. W. Crooke, *op. cit.*, II, p. 83.
21. *Op. cit.*, II, 439.
22. *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 94-7.
23. S. C. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs*, pp. 240-247, Archer, *The Blue Grove*, p. 413.
24. S. C. Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas*, p. 240.

When the time has come the Gaonta (village) headman or the Baiga priest fetches a branch of the Karma tree from the forest and sets it up in his yard as a notice and invitation to the village. After sunset all the people, men, women and children, assemble and dance round the tree, to the accompaniment of a drum known as Mandar. The dancing continues all night and in the morning the host plucks up the branch of the Karma tree and consigns it to a stream, at the same time regaling the dancers with rice, pulse and goat's meat. This dance is a religious rite in honour of Karam Raja and is believed to keep sickness from the village and to bring prosperity.[25]

The Binjhwar in Bilaspur also perform the Karma ritual in the same way as the Majhwar.[26] Among the Savar and Sahis of Bilaspur the same customs are observed regarding the ritual. The Gond in Bilaspur District and even the low-caste Hindus, like the Ahir, Kosta, Panka, Ghasia, etc., perform the Karma ritual in the manner mentioned above. However, the Karma does not form a nucleus of the indigenous Gondi culture. In the south-eastern portion of the State and in Bastar, where the Gondi culture is found in concentrated strength the Karma ritual is not observed at all. Nor is it observed in the western parts of the area where the Gond are found in considerable numbers. It seems from this that though the Gond in the eastern portion of the State observe the Karma ritual and though the Karma dances and songs are so popular, it is borrowed from the local culture rather than a part of the tribal or Gondi culture. The Baiga are adept Karma dancers, but they do not seem to observe the ritual as the Binjhwar, with whom they have racial and cultural affinities, do.

Transfer of application:—So far we have seen that the Karma ritual in its original form, i.e., the worship of the Karam tree, is performed by the tribes in Bilaspur. In the remaining eastern portions of Madhya Pradesh, the Karma dances and songs are held at another harvest festival called Jawara, which is celebrated in the month of Bhado. Seven kinds of corn are sown by men in an earthen pot and then women dance round the pots of seedlings for three nights. On the fourth day of the bright fortnight, the pot containing the Jawara seedlings is thrown into a tank or stream

25. Russell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces,* IV, p. 153.

26. Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.,* II, p. 335.

by the women. The Jawara festival is observed all over Madhya Pradesh, but the Karma dances and songs are performed only in the eastern tracts. The Gond are very fond of the feast. The Ghasia, Panka and Kosta also observe it. The Baiga, on the other hand, do not observe Jawara. They seem to have dropped out of the Karma ritual entirely.

It is interesting to note that this application of the Karma dance and songs to the Jawara is not peculiar to the tribal people of Central India. The Oraon also have a form of the ceremonial use of the seedlings in the Karma ritual. Only it forms a secondary part of the ritual, while in Madhya Pradesh, it forms the central item of the ritual. This transfer of the dance and songs of one ritual to another, shows how local culture gradually absorbs and transforms customs which belong to outside areas. The popularity of the Jawara among the Gond and the transfer of the Karma dance and songs to it once again emphasise that the Karma is not a Gond festival and that it has been imported into the land of the Gond by some tribes other than the Gond viz. the Majhwar, the Savar, the Sahis etc. who are found in strong concentration in the adjoining former feudatory states, in Orissa as well as in Mirzapur district.

The Karma dance:—The *Karma* dance is more popular and more widely spread than the ritual. Even in parts where the ritual is unknown, the *Karma* dance with its various forms is danced vigorously. In the eastern regions of Madhya Pradesh, the *Karma* has ceased to be a seasonal dance and is danced all the year round, on any and every important occasion, in winter and in summer also, when nights are moonlit, or even when the darkness of the nights is made less fearful by the little glow of a fire, round which the young boys and girls dance. It is the principal dance of the tribal people in these parts. The social life and love-life of the people get so much colour from these nightly enjoyments.

Its significance:—The primary significance of the *Karma* dance is an accompaniment to the ritual and hence religious. As a rainy season dance—complementary to the harvest ritual, it implies certain magical qualities which are beneficial for a good crop. Certain movements in the dance are imitative of agricultural operations and this leads one to believe that the object of the dance is primarily magical,[27] though it is true that the symbolism is many

27. S. C. Roy, *The Oraon*, pp. 275-296.

a time, 'vague and elastic'.[28]

In Madhya Pradesh, however, the symbolism has almost disappeared as the ritual itself is observed to very small extent and chiefly by the tribes like the Majhwar, the Savar etc. who are found in strong concentration outside the province rather than in it. So the *Karma* ceases to be a 'festival dance', and is looked upon rather as a 'traditional social dance' in the larger portion of Central India.

Varieties of the dance:—The *Karma* is a mixed dance, with different formations and steps. Though it is not possible for us to discuss the technical peculiarities of all the known varieties in detail, we shall see some of the chief aspects of it. The varieties of the dance are formed on (a) either the circular or linear formation, (b) accompaniment or non-accompaniment of the drum, (c) postures, (d) steps and (e) slow or rapid movements.

The Karma in Mirzapur:—In Mirzapur men and women stand in opposite lines and dance the *Karma* to the accompaniment of the drum. About other varieties of the *Karma* in Mirzapur we do not know.

The Karma in Jashpur:—(1) The standard *Karam* dance with the drum is the one in which 'the boys and girls form two curving lines on the rim of a circle, and the dance then consists of a zig-zag walk to the right with the torsos erect, followed by a zig-zag walk to the left with the dancers leaning forward. In the latter movement the emphasis is on every step by on the left leg, the left foot being brought down firmly with a bond of the knee while the right leg is brought lightly back behind![29] The formation of the dance is either circular or semicircular.[30] The two varieties of the dance are (1) Jugia Karam (in which 'the girls form two parts of a curved line half facing the centre of the circle. Two boys are strung out in a loose line holding hands, while the girls interlock their arms and stand with their bodies touching. The line then moves round the circle the girls walking smoothly while the men proceed with leaps. After an erect zig-zag progress they move backwards, and then do a figure of four movements before the walk is resumed. This consists of two paces forward, first with the right leg and then with the left. The right foot then moves upto just

28. Archer, *The Blue Grove,* London 1940, p. 24.
29. Archer, *op. cit.,* p. 202.
30. *Ibid.,* p. 21.

behind the left, and the left is then brought back to a pace behind the right!)[31] and (2) Lujhki in which the movement is to the right and there is no reverse. The action consists of two figures each with four movements, the rhythm rising and falling round the third movement of each figure. The dance is done with the knees partly bent and goes rapidly with running swing'.[32]

The Karam dance in Chota-Nagpur:—The *Karam* dance in Chota-Nagpur is popular among the Hindus as well as the tribal people. The Munda dance it. The *Karam* dances of the Oraon are very popular and are called 'stooping dances' as distinguished from the other tribal dances like Jadur and the *Kharia*-dances which are danced in an erect position.[33] In all the varieties of the *Karam* dance the boys and girls form separate rows.

The varieties of the dance are (1) *Lujhki* in which the girls adopt 'a peculiar limping gait' and clap with their hands.

(2) *Hutungia Karam* is a dance in which 'each girl claps her neighbour to the left by passing her left arm round the latter's waist and placing of her neighbour on the right!'

(3) *Kesari Kappa:*—This dance imitates the gathering of the Kesari nuts or water nuts in the tanks. In this dance the girls kneel down and the drummers (the boys) squat on the ground facing them. The girls go on shaking their heads violently, so that their hair is dishevelled. As the dance progresses, it reaches a climax when 'one or more girls show signs of spirit possession! Then the knot of the cloth of the girl who is thus possessed of the spirit gets loose at the waist. One of the young men then has to kick her or pull her by the hair till she comes back to her senses. This is a very exciting dance which makes allowance for obscenity.[34]

The Karam dances of the Munda:—The Munda have three varieties of the *Karam* dance, which are different from the Oraon. They are:—

(1) *Lahsua Karam:*—This is the Central Karam dance from which the *Khemta* and *Binsari* have evolved. This is a mixed dance 'in which the dancers join hands, stoop forward, and form themselves in an arc or circle. Towards the centre of the circle

31. *Ibid.,* p. 202.
32. *Ibid.*
33. S. C. Roy, *The Oraons,* p. 294.
34. S. C. Roy, *op. cit.,* pp. 294-5,

they advance with graceful steps and retire backwards in the same bending posture, all the dancers slightly moving towards the left so as to complete the circle.

The Khemta:—In the Khemta Karma all we know is that the movements are slow and graceful.

The Binsari:—The *Binsari* is danced from cock-crow to sun-rise, in which 'the posture is more erect than in other *Karam* dances'.[35]

The Karma dance in Madhya Pradesh:—The *Karma* dance is an intercommunal dance as it is danced by the low-caste Hindus as well as the tribes. The tribal dance is however more lively and vigorous. Among the tribes like the Baiga, the Savar, the Majhwar etc. the dance is the principal dance. It is danced not only during the rainy season, but even in summer and winter also. The Gond in these parts also dance the *Karma*. But the small and very typical forest tribes like the Bhunjia and the Kamar in Raipur district do not dance it. Neither do the Gond in the southern part of Drug, penetrating into the Bastar tract, dance it. It is only where Hindi influence is predominent that the *Karma* songs and dances thrive. It is also obvious from the ethnic spread of the *Karma* dances, that it is the non-Gond tribes mentioned above, who have introduced the *Karma* into the province, though the Gond bye and large have taken it up and popularized it. This led even close observers of the tribes like Russell to believe that the *Karma* was the main dance of the Gond.[36] The varieties of the *Karma* dance is typified by the performances of the Baiga who are adept dancers. They are:—

The Khalla Karma:—The *Khalla Karma* affords a very good performance of the circular movement. 'The woman advances the left foot, brings the right up to it and swings it back and to the right, brings the left foot back a little to the right of its original position, and bows, then repeats. Another formation of circular movement is this:—

'Bring the left foot forward and across the right, then back a little to the left of the original position, then bring the right foot forward and across the left, then back, this too a little to the left'.

35. S. C. Roy, *The Mundas*, p. 478.
36. Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, III, p. 136.

(2) *The Tadi Karma:*—In this formation and the following, 'advancing and retreating movements' are significant. 'In the *Tadi*, there is a quick left, right, left movement forward, then the right foot is brought upto the left, touches the ground with the toes and is taken back at once. The left follows, then the right, then a bow, and then steps are repeated'.

(3) The *Lahaki Karma:*—"The *Lahaki Karma,* which is generally sung to the rhymed songs, and has a powerful effect on the emotions, is a jerky, rather suggestive movement. The women stand in line, each lifts the left leg by bending the knee a dozen times, then puts the left leg a little forward, bends the knee, brings the right foot up beside the left, puts the left forward again, bends, brings up right, and so on. Or the line may go round and round; in this case the right foot is moved first a bit to the right, the left is brought upto it, but always a little in front. In this movement, one foot only takes the lead and the other follows and at every pace the body is jerked from the knee'.

The Jhumar Karma:—This dance is typified by its rapid movement and is very attractive. It is described by Elwin as one 'in which the feet are alternately brought forward and back very quickly. The right shoots forward and is back in its place immediately, and the left is out and back as quickly![37] It is curious to know that *Jhumar* is taken to be a variety of the *Karma* in Madhya Pradesh. Crooke takes *Jhumar* or *Jhunhir* to be a dance different from *Karma,* but corresponding to it.[38] Dalton has also expressed the same opinion about the dance as it is practised by the Nagesur and Boyar tribes from Mirzapur.[39] Looking to the practice of *Jhumar* in Bihar also it is a separate dance and is in no way connected with the rainy-season dance, the Karam.[40]

Just like the connection of the Jawara harvest festival with the *Karma* dance, the *Jhumar* also is patched to it, though in the rest of Central India, it is entirely a separate dance.

The Karma songs:—The classification of the *Karam* or *Karma* songs can be made like this:—

(1) Songs dedicated to Karam Raja in which the celebration

37. V. Elwin, *The Baiga,* pp. 432-5.
38. W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh,* III, p. 439.
39. E. Dalton, *op. cit.,* pp. 131, 135.
40. S. C. Roy, *The Oraons,* p. 299, Archer, *op. cit.,* p. 20.

of the ritual is glorified.[41]

(2) Love-songs, in which marital as well as premarital and extra-marital love is described.[42]

(3) Licentious and obscene songs.[43]

(4) Songs discussing village-gossip and recording events of social importance in the history of the village or the tribe. People of prominence also form a subject of the *Karma* songs, as for example King Bhartari (Bhartrihari, the famous composer of 'the three centuries of verses' in Sanskrit) has found a place of prominence in the *Karma* of the Sahis in Bilaspur.

In Madhya Pradesh all the varieties of the *Karma* songs except the first are found. All the elements mentioned above will be seen from the songs that follow.

Karma Songs

From Baiga in Drug

1

The fair woman pulls up
The end of her sari (covering her breast)
And she throws a glance,
And a pair of bullets with it.

2

On the bank of the river
The ascetic has put up his camp
Oh ascetic! Give up your camp.
Kalaram is going to plant a mango there.

3

On the branch of the mango tree
The cuckoo bird cooes sweetly
Oh! the cuckoo bird cooes sweetly.

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41. Archer, *op. cit.*, pp. 44 ff..

42. Elwin, *The Baiga,* pp. 444 ff., Hivale and Elwin, *The Songs of the Forest,* pp. 51, 55, 61, etc.

43. Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 49, W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh,* p. 83,

4

In whose courtyard
Do you play the danda?
In your office-ground
Oh father! we play the danda.

5

While she went to fetch water
In a pot of gourd
You were seated on a hillock
And looked askance
At the moon-face of the fair girl.
While she was fetching water, Oh Kalbatiya
Be seated, Kalbatiya, my darling,
Be seated on my cot.
All guests have arrived.
Be seated on my cot,
Oh Kalbatiya.

6

Where shall I hide myself,
Oh 'gondali' flower?
Let tigers and foxes
Feast on my body,
Oh 'gondali' flower.
I shall send you back
To your father's house,
Having known your tricks.

7

Take this away, oh drummer,
But do not touch my breast covering
Under-neath my breast covering
Are plentiful sweets
If you touch my cloth,
It will kill me,
So take the sweets away, oh drummer.

8

Do not crack jokes, my boy.
Do not crack jokes.
Mother-in-law sits in the verandah,
Father-in-law squats on a cot,
Do not crack jokes.

9

On a high hill
You are screaming loudly,
Oh peacock.
Your life shall be enclosed
In the pouch of the hunter.
On a high hill you are screaming.

10

On a high hill
Four men are sitting,
In a high village,
The fisher-woman and wine-grocer's wife are sitting.
The wine grocer has
Distilled the liquor himself.
The wine was made,
The youth drank it,
And yet the old man got intoxicated.
Oh young man! Do not drink Phulli-wine.
Let the intoxicated old man drink it.
Let the old man sleep on a cot.
Let the young man sleep on a bed-stead.

11

The drummer has a beautiful body.
Saint Kabir knows that the body is subject to decay.
Where does she inform her lover?
In the bazaar does she inform her lover.
The lover with a money-bag in his hand
She tells him this—
Oh king! How is it possible
I am in an impure condition?

12

Bring mud, smear the ground
You are in the habit
of sleeping without a mattress.

13

The new drum has
A string of bells,
Four brothers are keeping
A vigilant watch.

14

The office at Bahyar
White-wash it properly.
Do not make a mistake
When the lover is watching you.

15

The seeds of brinjals are broken and eaten,
We go to see the fort of Ramgarh.

16

In the sea they have spread a net
Do not go in the stranglehold of the fish.

17

Black is your jacket,
With a double row of studs,
How can I resist you
Oh, my elder-sister's husband?

18

On the bank of the river
Kodon grain is sown;
A man is put to shame
By his wife.

19

It requires two men to fell a tree,
Oh! my love,
Give me water in the pot,
Oh! I am dying of thirst.

20

The lightning flashes in Khairagarh,
The Bagela youth mounted on his horse,
He holds a gun in one hand
And a sword in another.

21

The bicycle is run by feet.
Even if I am taken to the well
I shall throw the rope in it.
But water I shall not draw
Until I am taken for a drive
In a motor-car.
The seed is covered well with its coat.
My king the baby is rocking well in the cradle.
The Kasi flowers bloom
In Savan and Bhado months
When the yarns of hemp are pounded.
Love once realized never breaks off.

23

Keep the net ready on the dark night.
The peacock is caught in the net behind.
Rajaniya, the lover is caught in the first.

24

Such a beautiful flower[44]
Has bloomed in the courtyard
How can I know about it,
Oh brother!
When I saw the tree,
It was widely spread.
I saw the leaves and they were huge.
The bud too I saw
and it had not bloomed.
How can I know about it,
Oh Brother!

25

The stranger wants to bestow
Knowledge upon us.
If it is a bird
You can catch it and coach,
But when it is a woman
She won't pick up knowledge.

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44. This suggests pregnancy and childbirth. The woman sees the plant, i.e., her husband and herself, and its leaves, viz., the relatives. The bud is the enlarged abdomen, the flower is the baby.

Gonds of Raipur:—

Girl:

(1)

With a gusto have you come
To dance the Karma;
You have to give up mischief
And stand quietly by the wall.

Boy:

The red vegetable is no good.
In the turmeric the plough-share is stuck.
Oh! Blooming girl! Light the lamp
So I may see your beauty.

Girl:

Oh! They have gone to your house,
To bring fire.
Let it be burning the whole night.
Go back, oh man, to the hut
Where you fitted so well.

From Gonds and Hindus of Bilaspur:—

(2)

You be gone!
Why are you calling me?
I do not understand such things at all.
Why beckon me by hand?
Who will hold my basket?
Who will hold the fish-net?
Who will show the pond?
I do not understand such things at all.

(3)

He reads the black letters,
From where have you brought the scripture?
From Chhuri have I brought it.
Kotwal has brought only a book
And reads black letters.

(4)

The fun of conversation is gone.
You wander far and wide,
Even in the house the cart moves on,
As there is no strength in the waist.[45]
And yet you wink at me, oh king!
The fun of the talk is gone.
You are seen in the Chanda Pahad.
Drumstick vegetable is cooked.
Eat it dish after dish.
From the Chanda mountain falls a rock.
And the world sees the sun now,
The deities[46] make 'kalkal' noise
In the crevices.
Stones are thrown this way and that way.
Run away, oh witch, to the cemetery.
Oh king, now the trumpet sounds.

From Majhwar in Bilaspur:—

(1)

The small darling youth
Is considered a big person.
He ties a beautiful turban
And also a cloth on it.
On his arms are marks of sandalwood,
On his chest, beads.
He climbs the ghat of Gomnati
And wanders in Katghora.
He could neither give,
Nor take sufficiently,
As there are few
Who appreciate love.

(2)

The flower of 'kalinder'
Shines near the plantain tree.
The Teli asks for oil,
The Brahmin for ghee.

45. Viz. impotence.
46. Birds.

(3)

Showers have come
How shall I go?
The showers beat on the head,
The water-pot falls down,
A stable is the shelter for a female-ass
Mother's home for a woman.
She weeps with pain
In the house of the father-in-law.
She dashes and breaks
The water-pot on the head.

(4)

Says the mother-in-law:—
The daughter-in-law
Wore a red sari
And served rice, slowly, slowly
In the dish of gold.
Her eyes were red,
Her face became dark
Where are the bangles?
Where are the armlets?
Where is the collirium for eyes?

(5)

A blind man sees a fort
Dim, very dim.
I reach Ranchi
And my body thrives.
The plain protects the fort.
The corners of the winnowing fan are triangular.
The winnowing fans are kept
In five-two markets.
The milk-man milches with fingers
The milk is poured into the jar.
Of that milk curds are made.
Of it becomes the ghee.
Semi-liquid, semi-solid.
Oh Johar! From where does the *sipalu* (police man) come?
Sitting on the verandah,
Offer him a seat
I bestow my household on you.

(6)

The fair woman
Weeps in the month of Savan,

Who can escape a co-wife?
The man has left his wife,
But the fair woman cannot
Escape a co-wife
And she weeps.

(7)

With an axe the earth is dug.
The crab is searching for its hole.
The big fish searches for a deep current.
The small one for a ditch.
The crocodile walks majestically.
The dust is thrown up.

From the Sahis in Bilaspur

(1)

The king of Bhartari line
By the name of Lalikar,
The day he was born,
Drums were beaten as announcement.
Fresh, green cow-dung was brought,
With it the ground was cleaned.
With six pegs was it marked.
In it a water-jar was kept,
A silver lamp was also kept burning.
From Kasi pundits were called.
They sang auspicious songs.
The ordinary folk danced the Karma
The farmers' faces lit with joy
Such was the king Bhartari
By the name of Lalikar.

(2)

The king of Bhartari line[47]
Named Lalikar

47. The reference to king Bhartari alias Bhartrhari in Sanskrit literature, the famous king and sage, composer of the three centuries of poems on love, polity and asceticism, is very amazing indeed. Just like Vikrama he is popular among lower classes in this part. The ideology of the two songs is typically Hindu. The poetry in them is finely developed and the theme of the second song is superb. The reference to the deer in the pig sacrifice obviously glorifies it. It may be that the primitive object of worship gradually changed place for the cow.

Went out hunting,
A deer was playing,
It was romping about,
The king shot in a moment.
He shot in its direction,
The beautiful deer fell to the ground.
It got up for a while
And said —
Give my hoofs to the glorious cow,
So they will be worshipped in every house.
Give my horns to a warrior
So he will fight in battle and die.
Give my hide to a sage,
So he will (sitting on it)
Contemplate in the forest.
Give my eyes to a wise woman,
So she will be praised in the world.

(3)

She went to Pali bazaar
To buy a sari.
While making a bargain
She stopped,
And started looking at that (man's) hand
Near the 'Kosam' tree
In the Hardi bazaar.

(4)

Shall I make gruel of wheat flower?
Or shall I cook the *maina* bird?
Surely this girl wants
Wear, oh daughter-in-law,
Bangles from Chapa,
Armlets from Chhuri,
Collirium from Katghora
Wear them, oh daughter-in-law.

Conclusion

Summing up the discussion about the Karma ritual, dance and songs, we can say that the Karma is not an indigenous element of the Gond culture but seems to be the product of the Munda culture. In Madhya Pradesh, the Baiga, Majhwar and Savar are the people who perform the Karma. The other tribes seem to have

copied it from them. The Karma ritual is observed by the Bilaspur tribes alone, and in the eastern tracts of the State the Karma is amalgamated in the Jawara festival which is very popular among the Gond and the Hindus all over the region. The Karma tree thus recedes into the background in the land of the Gond. There is only one solitary instance given by Hislop known to us where the Karma or Mundi wood is used by the Gond to make Nurma Pen (a god in the Gond pantheon) in Chhindwara. No other instance is known where the Karma tree is looked upon as sacred in the Gond religion. The Karma dance also, owing to the deterioration of the ritual in the region, exists mainly as a social traditional dance of the rainy season, though we find people dancing the Karma even in summer and winter.

The varieties of the dance in Central India as well as the adjoining regions show that most of the movements of the Karma are circular. The steps are varied according to the technique of the performance. One fact which becomes noticeable in the ritual and dance of the Karma in Madhya Pradesh is that the ritual has lost importance while the dances have become more popular. The original Karma ritual is very much curtailed and the dances etc. are transferred to the Jawara. The dances however are spread widely and include even the Jhumar in them. The songs drop the ritual basis and change in the dances according to the emotions the dance is supposed to express (for instance, the Lahaki is expressive of rich emotions). The chief item of the songs is licentious sex-love. The next item is gossip and other motifs, like natural beauty, hero worship, satire etc. The songs are ever fresh and made up on the spur of the moment.

In short, the Karma is one of the most complicated festivals of the tribal people in Central India in which the ritual, the dance and the songs are each of them of a complex nature and cannot be explained until we study these things as they are practised by the tribes of the neighbouring regions.

THE PIG SACRIFICE

The cow-sacrifice:—The cow-sacrifice seems to be a speciality of the Gond culture, as we saw, in the worship of Bara-deo.[48] It

48. Hislop, *op. cit.*, Appendix: Grigson, *op. cit.*, *Godavari District Gazetteer*, pp. 63-64.

exists only among the tribes which belong to some class of the Gond. The other tribes like the Baiga,[49] Korku etc. though they have many customs in common with the Gond, have kept themselves scrupulously aloof from cow or bullock-sacrifice.[50]

The pig sacrifice:—The next important sacrifice is the sacrifice of the pig, which is zealously sponsored by all aborigines and even lower caste Hindus, like the Ahir, Kosta, Panka[51] etc. Yet the pig sacrifice is not restricted to the aboriginals of this province only. It is distributed widely over India.[52] The pig sacrifice is not per-

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49. Elwin, *The Baiga,* p. 4.

50. The only case where a non-Gond tribe sacrifices a bullock is that of the Bhil in Khandesh. Bullocks are offered to Vaghach Kunber and Hatipawa. *Khandesh District Gazetteer,* p. 93.

51. Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.,* I, p. 8; II, p. 223-225; III, pp. 31, 466; IV, p. 310; *Sagour District Gazetteer,* p. 42; *Narsingpur District Gazetteer,* p. 54; Elwin, *The Baiga,* pp., Grigson, *op. cit.,* pp. 161.

52. In South India the pig sacrifice is very common viz. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes in South India, I.* The Banthuk Savaras kill a pig at a wedding (p. 263), II. The professional thiefs Dandasis, sacrifice a pig and seven fowls to their goddess (p. 107). The Domars sacrifice the pig (p. 186). The Haddis sacrifice a pig in marriage (p. 317), so do the Handijogis (p. 323). The Hasalas offer a pig to the dead (p. 325). The Jogis kill pigs in marriage (p. 494). The Jatapu offer pigs to the caste goddess (p. 455). IV, The Koyis offer a cow and a pig to their gods (p. 61). The Konda Dora kill pigs in marriage (p. 351). The Khond bury a pig with the dead (pp. 374, 396). VI. The Nanga Poroja sacrifice pigs to the Bhumideota. (p. 215). The Savar also sacrifice pigs to the dead in marriage and when crops are not good. (p. 321). In Coorg, the pig is sacrificed in honour of the dead and in the worship of Mariamma when an epidemic breaks out. (Ritcher, *The Manual of Coorg,* pp. 163, 170). In Assam also it is widely spread and for every little thing a pig is sacrificed, viz. when a man is ill a pig is killed (Hodson, *the Naga Tribes of Manipur* p. 137). The Ao Naga kill a pig when crops are growing. A pig is killed when a god or a dead person is seen in a dream and also to the lesser spirits when a vow is made (Mills, *The Ao Nagas,* pp. 219, 220, 222). The Lhota Naga kill pigs when there is sickness in the home and in all social gennas (Mills, *The Lhota Nagas* pp. 131, 138).

In Northern India a pig is offered to Banaspati-Ma, the Mistress of the Wood by every passer-by (Crooke, *Northern India* p. 231).

The Ahir in Northern India, in the Sohrai festival which takes place on the fifteenth of Kartik when a cow is made to run or dance. Sometimes a young pig is made to squeak near her calf and the mother followed by the whole herd, made to pursue it and gore it to death (Crooks, *Tribes, and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh,* I, p. 65). The pig is killed by the Munda tribes Cf. Roy, *The Khariyas,* II, pp. 522, 227.

In the Punjab a pig-sacrifice seems to be very rare.

In Maharashtra and Karnatak also it is almost extinct save in some few cases like famine or draught, when a Brahmin minister offers a sacrifice when

formed in every social 'genna' in Central India as in the case of the Naga tribes of Assam, yet it is very important. It forms part of both the regular ritual as well as occasional worship of the aborigines and is also a communal as well as a family affair according to the purpose, and the rite in which it is employed.

It is a communal rite, performed by the Baiga of the village when the village gods are to be worshipped. The ceremony is just as we saw it in the preliminary stage of the worship of Budhadeo. The Baiga ascertains whether the god is willing to accept the offering or not and then making the animal eat some rice cuts its head. This forms part of the regular communal offerings which are annually made.

The occasional communal pig sacrifice takes place when there is a break of epidemic in the village.[53] What I found in the Narbade valley and the central plateaus of the region was that four pigs are buried alive in four quarters of the village boundary. Only their heads are seen above the ground and they are trampled by feet and killed. In some villages they are also buried completely so that no sound is heard. In Chanda, driving the chariot of the goddess and crushing the pigs and fowls to death is popular.

'two animals, a goat and a pig are killed, the latter over the body of the former and it is essential that no iron instrument be used in killing the animals. The animals are done to death by all the Brahmins headed by the Yajaman, pomelling them to death with their fists (Abbot, *the Keys of Power,* p. 216).

It is to be remembered that in Assam, Bihar and Orissa and in South India (except when there is an epidemic when the chariot of the goddess crushes the animal to death) that the pig is decapitated. The methods followed in Central India shall be duly discussed. The methods of the pig sacrifice however are not fully known and the information about them is scanty and scrappy and hence it is not possible for us to give here even a full idea of the ethnic and geographic distribution of pig sacrifice. It seems however, that it began with aborigines. It is widely distributed in Assam, and in Eastern Central and Southern India. In the North it does not seem to be popular. Pig sacrifices are of paramount importance and widely distributed in Indonesia and Oceania also. (Lowie, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, pp. 40, 41, 51. Also Mead, *Cooperation and competition among the primitive people.* Section 5. The importance of the pig in ceremony). Rivers, *Melanesian Society,* pp. 91, 112), II, pp. 210-5, Harrison, *Savage Civilization,* pp. 92, 110, 115).

53. Pig-burial among the Mochi, Parsi, Ahir, Lodha, Kori, from Uttar Pradesh and Central India, at the Yellandu Coal field, in honour of Kali is described by Bishop Whitehead. When an epidemic bursts out a pig is buried in a pit. And another is buried at a distance of about a mile facing the first pig. (Whitehead, *The Village Deities in Southern India,* p. 184).

Pig-Sacrifice in Family Feast

The pig sacrifice is however more frequent in the family circle than in community feasts. A pig sacrifice is regularly offered to the family gods (1) when the harvest festival takes place, and (2) when the worship of Bara-deo is made once in three years.

It is occasional when (1) there is a disease or (2) death in the family.

Approximate geographical distribution

From what I saw in Madhya Pradesh, I found out that the pig-sacrifice is not so frequent in the Vindhyan territory, namely. Sagour and Damoh. Also in the western portion of the Narbada valley, i.e., Hoshangabad and Narsingpur and also in Berar, the pig sacrifice is not popular and not very common. The goat seems to have replaced the pig and so has the fowl. A pig is sacrificed in the case of a vow made to Narayan Deo in illness and when sowing begins, the seeds are smeared with the pig's blood or with that of a fowl.

As we advance to the areas where primitive culture is found in a more concentrated form, the pig sacrifice also becomes more common.

Varieties of the Pig-Sacrifice

There are mainly two rituals of the pig-sacrifice, namely, the one of the Baiga and that of the Gond. The Baiga form of the pig-sacrifice is typified in the *laru kaj* ceremony, in honour of Narayan-deo, a demon, often identified with Bara-deo and the sun-god,[54] the chief household deity of the aborigines in the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh, where the Baiga are found in strength. Laru is the name of the sacred pig. When there is illness in the house, a vow is made to Narayan-deo for the patient's recovery. When the patient recovers, a pig is dedicated for sacrifice by cutting a bit of its ears or tail and it is fed for three years. The head of the house prepares plenty of kodo and rice and gets a quantity

54. V. Elwin, *The Baiga,* p. 404; S. Fuchs, *op. cit.,* pp. 391-3,

of liquor. He invites his friends and relations and on a Saturday[55] begins the *laru-kaj.*

The details of the *laru kaj* ritual, described by Elwin and Fuchs,[56] are given here in an abridged form, but with the addition of items which I myself was able to collect.

(1) The *laru-kaj* is performed by the Samdhi (a male relative, through marriage) of the sick person, called Kamri, and three Barua (magicians)[57] or the temporary priests.

(2) In the courtyard at the house a pit, called Narada, is dug with some logs across its mouth and a small hole about a foot square and foot deep is dug before the door in the courtyard of the house.

(3) The *'phulera'*, i.e., a bundle of *bel* leaves is made by the sick person.

(4) The most important stage which follows after the preparation of *narada* and *phulera* is the handling of the pig. The pig is caught and dragged squealing to the door. Once more rice is put before it and the Dewar cries 'Look, Maharaj, today we give you rice. Don't give us any trouble'. Directly it eats even so much as a mouthful of rice, it is lifted up and its front legs are tied. A lighted lamp in an iron vessel is waved round the creature three times. Its mouth is forced open with two bamboo sticks and more rice is pushed into it. Boiling water is put over its phallus and allowed to run into the hole in the ground before the door. Then three men, holding the pig by its two hind legs and buttocks, push the pig's head into the hole which is now half full of water. Earth from the sides is shovelled in so that no air can reach its nostrils. The squealing stops abruptly though the animal's struggles are redoubled. Then the men begin to bump it up and down in the hole. The bumping is most efficient to cause death, which is due to suffocation, and in about ten minutes the pig's struggles cease and it is carried out to be washed and singed. While this is going on, all the women present throw wet cow-dung and other refuse over the men and scream insults at them'. This is accompanied with abusive songs.

(5) The pig is then washed and its hair singed off over a fire. Its body is dragged to the bigger pit and its blood is allowed to

55. I was told that the *laru kaj* could also be performed on a Tuesday.

56. V. Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 403-7; S. Fuchs, *op. cit.*, pp. 427-49.

57. The number of Barua can also be five. The wife of the eldest Barua also plays an important part in the ceremony as I shall describe later on.

flow into it. The grand-father and grand-mother wrap up the head and the liver in *bel* leaves and put the bundle in the swing and they sing.

The song I have got runs as follows:—

Bring milk, oh, bring milk,
Bring milk of the Surahi cow
Bring milk for washing feet.
Bring oil, oh, bring oil,
Wash the feet with oil,
Wash the feet with milk.

I was also told that when the dead pig is decapitated, its head is kept in the leaf-bundle. Then its skin from neck to the loins which is called 'Badhari' is also taken out and kept near the head. Then the rest of the skin of the hind-part including the genitals is taken off. The heart and liver are then extracted, wrapped in Mahua leaves and cooked first. Women are not allowed to partake of this food nor are outsiders given a portion of it. They can partake only of the rest of the flesh which is cooked separately. Elwin however says that the meat beneath the swing is distributed by the Kamri and an old woman, four scraps of meat and a share of rice for every household.

It is followed by a supper accompanied with songs mostly obscene and they also dance. This is according to Elwin the final stage of the ceremony.

The Kajwar Ceremony

I learnt from my informants, however, that the head of the pig is cooked in the house the next day. It is given only to the members of the household and the Samdhi. The head of the family then says to Narayan-deo, "Come again when a boy will be born in this house. Do not come any other time"! The head is then thrown into the pit. The pit is then covered with mud. On it is made a small mud platform. The baruas then go to the jungle and bring a huge thorn of the 'narisay' tree. They pretend as if they were riding a horse, in the form of the thorn. They now are in search of the Barua, who is supposed to be an elderly woman and who has helped them in feeding the pig on rice the previous day. The Baruin hides. The men neigh like a horse and beat the Baruin when they find her. The women then attack the men who

run and disperse. This rite is symbolic of the dispersion of Narayan-deo's ceremony, who was attacking the Baruin. Then the Barua men go to the river and throw the thorn into the water and bathe. Rice is cooked and placed in the *phulera.* The Baruas take a mouthful of the cooked rice and go on spitting it in the whole house. And they sing:

Oh deer on the riverside
With knotted horns,
Hold the horns
And dance, and copulate.
Oh Kajwar-baba,
Hold the horns
And dance.

Then baruas catch the *phulera,* and run with it to the *Narada* into which they throw it. All the bones, and remains of food, water etc., are thrown into the pit. Then the Kamri keeps the head of the pig on the side of the pit and says, 'Come again'.

The householder and his wife are then made to sit near the platform on the sacrificial pit and are covered with one cloth. In an iron bowl, called Karchul, oil is poured. Three wicks are burnt in it. The *kamri* then holds the lamp and approaches the couple followed by the Baruas. Then they sing and call out the names of all important gods, Narayan Deo, Budha-deo, the Sun and the Moon, Banaspati-Mata, Budhi-mata, Nanga Baiga, Nangi Baigin etc. and put the lamp upside down and pour water on it.

Then the Samdhi who has taken a prominent part in all the operations pertaining to Laru Kaj, comes to the door in the disguise of a Sadhu. 'I have come from the East, I go to the West!' The householder and his wife then give him a winnowful of rice and pulses. Abusive songs are sung and the pig-sacrifice is ended.

The Gosai and Pusai of the Gond

Though the Gond staying in the Baiga neighbourhood follow the same method of a pig sacrifice in the name of Narayan Deo, in Drug, I came across a different form adapted by the Gond, called Gosai Pusai. Gosai Pusai, done in the name of Narayan Deo is a prophylactic, disease-curing form of worship. *Gosai Pusai* is also done before the worship of Bara-deo every three years or by some, as the Kothia in the Oundhi tract, once in twelve years,

Gosai Pusai is performed in the month of Pus, usually in the dark half of the month, or on the fullmoon of Baisakh. Any day except Monday is chosen for it.

Gosai means the 'lord'. The *Gosai* is Narayan-deo. When there is illness in the house a pig's tail is cut and it is let loose for three years. The Samdhi* of the householder then takes a prominent part in the sacrifice and four more men who assist him, one of them being the sick man (in case of a woman another man is chosen).

Narda and phulera:—Women clean the house with cow-dung and then men make a pit on the threshhold and also a *phulera* of the leaves of *mango* and *bel,* as in the case of the *Baiga Laru-Kaj.*

The pahara:—A pit is dug by the men inside the house over which planks are laid. The legs of the animal are then tied to four pegs in four directions with a rope. The pig is made to eat a little rice strewn on the planks and with an iron bar its neck is crushed, and also the testicles and the penis.

The head is then severed from the body and so are the genitals. The blood is allowed to drop into the pit. The Samdhi blows air into the scrotum of the animal and all the men sing and dance.

The head is kept near the pit and the liver and heart are cooked by the officiating men and also eaten. The rest of the flesh is cooked and distributed to all. Some say women can eat it. Some say they cannot.

Then another meal takes place.

(1) The Maria Gond also adopt a similar method of tying the legs of the animal and crushing the testicals with stones. But in their sacrifice the pig is killed as in an ordinary offering, i.e., it is decapitated with an axe or its head is smashed with a huge wooden pestle, or if it is a small pig it is whirled in the air and smashed down.[58]

Men cook the pig and some rice. Having finished the meals men and women throw mud and cow-dung at each other and sing abusive songs. Songs are sing at various stages of the pig sacrifice.

When women clean the house with cow-dung and make a square in which the pig is to be sacrificed, they sing.

During the *pahara* or crushing ceremony, men also sing:—

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58. Cf. Elwin, *The Baiga.*

* The Samdhi is the male member, either the father of the bride or the bridegroom; he is father of one's daughter-in-law or son-in-law.

(1)

The tree of bel,
The creeper of bel,
Loaded with fruit.
Oh son! drink the milk of the bel fruit.
Oh Gosaiya! Wash the feet with milk.
The 'Khichari' made of rice and urad pulse.
Eat, oh Gosaiya eat.
The twigs of the mango tree
And a stump of saj
Let it be your resort.

(2)

On the full moon of Baisakh,
Oh deer on the river side,
Dance and jump
Hold the horns and dance and capulate.

(3)

King Paramesar (god) had five daughters
The daughters played and jumped
On the golden throne of Paramesar.
Paramesar asked the five daughters
By whose fate do you eat?
(The first four said) —
We eat by your Karma,[59] oh father.
He asked princess Chango,
By whose Karma do you eat?
By my Karma do I eat, oh father!
Paramesar sprang up,
From his golden throne
Shaking with anger.
He ordered:
Take princess Chango to the forest,
Let her live there.
Twelve mountains were crossed,
And to Sondhad mountain
She was taken.
She was asked to stay there.
On the mountain a temple
Began to rise out of the ground.
A throne of gold also was visible,
The golden throne of Chango.
A big golden palace emerged.

59. Fate of man resulting from the deeds of a former life.

The city of Chango,
Came into being.
Chango sat under the golden umbrella.
King Parsamesar was crestfallen,
He bowed down before her,
Come, oh child, to your old place.
I shall not go to your place, oh father.[60]

(4)

The Chowk is made,
And polished with a pearl dye.
Oh Gosaiya, be seated on your seat.
Be seated, oh earth,
Be seated, oh sky,
Be seated, king Narayan.
Let the four gods be seated.
Let the sun and moon be seated.
The worship of Narayan is taking place,
The sun and moon witness it.
Where were you born, oh barua?
Where were you known?
In the plantain grove
Was I born,
And known in the abode of the gods.

(5)

The Khichari dish of 'urad' and 'mung',
And the 'pirapeti' snake
Eat, oh Gosaiya!
On the 'Janaira'[61] night
Mango leaves are cut,
And also the pillar of Saj.
The scorpion bites the mother-in-law,
And the mother-in-law shouts.
The pulp of brinjal[61 a)]
It is well bitten by the scorpion.
What will you give,
If the scorpion sting is removed?
Oh Jatalsing deer of Singaldip,
Hold the horns,
And dance on the banks of the Jumna.
Have sex-intercourse,
Charbar charbar,
The penis should move briskly,

60. The story is exactly like the Marathi tale of Varnasathi.
61. The night on which the sacrifice is performed.
61 a). The pulp of the brinjal is the vagina; the scorpion is the penis.

The warrior, his the penis
Runs on the surface of the bed
Then comes horripilation on the chest.
Get up, oh wife,
Light the lamp,
For sex-intercourse call your father.

(6)

Hold the horns,
And have sex-intercourse.
Your eyes and ears are famous.
Let them be famous,
The penis should strike,
The famous peg of the buffalo.

The two kinds of sacrifices mentioned above are the most important ones. Whenever Narayan-deo is to be propitiated, and in Gosai Pusai, only the pig and no other animal is to be sacrificed. Another peculiarity of these sacrifices is that no blood of the victim is shed. While in other smaller sacrifices the details are not specific and any other animal also domesticated can be killed.

Minor pig-sacrifices

When the harvest is gathered and new corn is eaten a pig is offered to the household-god in all the Gond regions. Sometimes a fowl is substituted for a pig. In this case the ritual is not elaborate. Here decapitation of the victim is the central item of the sacrifice and bloodshed is essential.

Rat Mai festival:—In Chhattisgarh Rat-mai or Mother Night is worshipped in winter, in the dark fortnight of the month of Magh. Black lines of lamp soot are drawn on the inner walls of the home which represent the goddess. In Raipur, however, I was told that a crude female figure was formed of mud and covered with the soot. In Bilaspur a stick covered with black soot is planted on a platform in the interior of the house. The stick is the symbol of the goddess.

A pit is dug by the eldest married male member of the family who fasts the whole day before the symbol of Rat-mai, and a lamp is burnt. He calls out the name of the goddess and sacrifices a cow or a black goat. But a pig is preferred. He then takes out the heart and liver and cooks them separately. Only men can partake

of this flesh. Women are not allowed to enter the room and cast even a glance at the light that is burning in the place. If they intrude, they may lose their eyesight. The rest of the flesh is cooked and rice also, and that is given to all the members of the family. All the remains of the food and even the refuse is thrown in the pit in the room and buried.

Conclusion:—As pork forms an important portion of the aboriginal diet, pig-sacrifice is more common among them than any other sacrifice. From the different varieties of the sacrifice I came across in Central India the household sacrifices seem to be more ancient and important than the communal ones. In the household sacrifices also the sacrifices in honour of Narayan-deo seem to be very old as the method of killing the animal without bloodshed, by suffocation or crushing, belong to that stage of human civilization, when implements like an axe or knife had not come into existence.[62]

The distinction between the Baiga and Gond methods also is striking. The absence of women in the principal rites of pig sacrifice is essentially Gondi. The purpose of the Baiga and Gond sacrifice however, is just the same, i.e., warding off disease. In the case of the harvest ceremonies the bloodshed symbolises fertility.

THE PHAG

The *Phag* or *Holi* is a typical Hindu festival which is celebrated on the full moon day of Phagun, in honour of the goddess Holika and in commemoration of the event of the burning of Kamdeo (god of love) by the fire from the third eye of Siva. The *Holi* is the spring festival of the Hindus. The most important features of the festival are (1) lighting of the *Holi* fire symbolical of the burning of the god of love. (2) Obscene gestures and songs, (3) swinging which is prevalent only in the Narbada tract, Sagour and Damoh. The Holi is widely celebrated in Central India. The aborigines who live in closed-up areas, like the Bharia of Chhindwara, observe it. The Korku in the wildest tracts of Hoshangabad also celebrate it. The only tribes which do not celebrate *Holi* are the Kamar and the Bhunjia from Raipur and the Gond and other tribes from the Oundhi tract in Drug.

The festival:—

The festival is celebrated in the Hindu way, excepting a few

62. Elwin, *The Baiga*, p. 403.

details.

In the Narbada and Tapti valleys, in Chhindwara and Seoni districts the *Holi* is celebrated in a peculiar way. A pole of wood called *Khandera* is erected in honour of Meghnath, the son of Ravan. Men and women gather round the pole, dance and sing extremely obscene songs. Some men try to climb up the pole and women beat them and drive them away which is called the *'gur torna'* or 'the breaking of jaggery'. Aboriginal women are very fond of this game. Another thing they do is to tie a coloured cord on the wrist bands called *'band'* on the hands of their wives and sweethearts. The Maria Gond in Ahiri tract make two figures of cow-dung, one a male figure, the other female. They are then burnt in the *Holi* fire. A group of Raj-Gond who hailed from Bastar described to me the festival as it is celebrated by the Gond and Halba of Bastar who still adhere to the old tradition. The *Holi* is supposed to be the mourning of the people for Ravan, the king of Lanka. Ravan is called Bonaro.

Nine kinds of wood are required for the *Holi* fire, of which the *bel* (*Aegle Marmelos*) wood is the chief wood, the other eight being of any kind. A stick of the castor tree is kept on a hen's egg. On that is placed an iron ring. Earth is thrown on them till they are completely covered up. Then the wood is piled on it, the *'bel'* wood first. The head-man of the village or the eldest male member of a family with wife and children, lights the *Holi* fire. The *Holi* fire is supposed to be the funeral pyre of Ravan. The one who lights it has to take a bath.

A small bird called Chiral is generally heard making a noise, sad and wailing. It resembles a cry. It is said that the bird mourns for Ravan, for two months.

The importance of Ravan in aboriginal culture is striking. The Gond have a branch which is called Ravanbansi. There are some villages in the province which go by the name of Ravanvadi. The commemoration of Ravan and his son Meghnath are also peculiar. The Hindus in Chhattisgarh make three figures of mud representing Ravan, his brother Kumbhakaran and his son, Indrajit. They shoot arrows at the two brothers, but spare the son.[63]

The Phag dance:—The Phag dance is danced by men and

63. The Shanar in South India also worship Ravan. They rejoice in Rama's defeat and Ravan's victory. (*The Madras Manual of Administration,* I, p. 126).

women separately. The dance of the men, called Danda or Sela, is a vigorous and most lively stick dance. They form a circle, the drummers standing at the centre, and go round and round, the steps uniform and movements rhythmical. The dance of the women is unorganised and has not any importance attached to it as the *Phag* dance is essentially the dance of men.

The songs:—The contents of the *Phag* dance songs are (1) the songs about Khandera or Meghnath as we find them in Hoshangabad, Betul[64] etc. (2) The songs describing the *band* ceremony as in Hoshangabad.[65] (3) Love songs of a licentious character. (4) Obscene songs. (5) Miscellaneous songs.

In Sagour the *Phag* songs are divided into *Rahi, Suwan* and *Khyal.*

Rahi is the name given to the musical performance of a dancing girl and hence the *Rahi* songs suggest a licentious spirit.

Khyal of course is the Hindustani variety of songs.

What *Suwan* means is not known. The songs however seem to contain some serious element and sometimes even philosophise on the riddle of life.

(1)

The songs of the Raj-Gond from Bastar:—

The pile of wood is made.
So high it is,
Clouds have gathered thickly.
Bonaro! Oh brother! Bonaro!
The white ashes are applied
To all that are standing around,
And also the black soot.
In the stomach of Rayratan[66]
There are all sparks of fire.

(2)

The *Danda* song, from the Gond of Drug:—

The worms eat the raw mango
And also the linseed crop.

64. A sample of these songs can be seen in my paper on folk songs. Vide *Folk-songs in the Satpura valleys.*

65. *Ibid.*

66. Another son of Ravan, who mourns his death.

Lightening crashes on Mahua tree,
The Teli and Kalar cry.

(3)

From the Gond and Hindus in Sagour:

Rahi:—

Oh woman!
Why are you standing dejected in a corner,
Did your husband's elder brother
And his wife cause pain to you?
Did your husband abuse you?
Did your husband's mother and sister hurt you?
My husband's brother and his wife did not hurt me,
Now was I hurt by his mother and sister,
Nor did my husband fling abuse at me
I only remembered my mother's house.

(4)

Suwan:—

Oh departing swan,[67]
No more shall we meet.
The swan of Singaldip
Flew to this country.
It has not picked the pearls
That were strewn before him.
He travelled about the land.
The swan flew over the field of Kodo,
And the fool wanted to drive him away.
Oh fool! do not drive the swan away,
The swan has no love for farms.
Nor does he eat the wild fruit.
The swan eats unbored pearls.
The creator is able to provide them.
The swan has taken a flight to the lake.
Adieu! Oh friend!
Where are you gone?
When shall we meet?
Send a messenger!
The lake is dry,
There is no water.

67. The swan is the lover. The song is also said to describe the riddle of life. Swan is the soul. What happens to the soul after death no one knows.

The swan goes away thirsty.
Oh swan, the old love still tortures
From time to time.

(5)

The body is visible
Through the sari of muslin.
Where is the sari made?
Where is it sold?
The sari of muslin,
In Sagour it is made
And is sold in every market.

(6)

Khyal:—

Give up living in Brindaban,
Ways are becoming reverse,
For the sake of a little curds
The Ahir abuses profusely.
My eyes are surely not my enemy.
(Formerly where Tulsidas sat)
Saying but one word Hanuman,
Till Ram met him,
Now people play dice,
Both sides win and lose,
Till both become beggars,
The beggar has a red leg.[68]
In his hand there is loss,
And the wealth of dreams
Has gone far far away.

Conclusion:—Looking to the contents of the songs given above it is clear that the songs from Hoshangabad and Betul are very good specimens of licentious love-songs.

The songs from Sagour cannot be called exactly love songs, excepting the swan-song, but they (especially the *Khyal*) are obviously licentious.

The *Holi* as it is celebrated by the aborigines is a copy of the Hindu festival. The real and most important appendage of the aboriginal culture is its connection with Ravan. The *Holi*-fire more appropriately symbolises the burning of Ravan's corpse than

68. Penis.

that of Kamdeo. Had it been the death of the god of love the songs would not have been so jubilant. It is the spring festival, rebirth of the god of love, that calls for jubilation, swinging etc. The *Holi* festival thus is a complex festival in which a variety of festivals have merged:

(1) Burning of Kamdeo symbolised by the fire as well as the 'bom' or 'bum' cry, which is used to express grief in mourning and in abuses.

(2) Rebirth of Kamdeo, i.e., spring festival symbolised by the *band* ceremony, swings, etc., and also licentious songs, which is of Northern Indian origin.

(3) The festival of the goddess Holika which can incorporate any feature of the complex Devi-cult according to the taste of the people and convention.

(4) The cult of Ravan as we have already described it.

THE DIVALI

Hindu festival:—The *Divali* like the *Holi* is not a Gond festival. It is essentially a harvest festival and the cattle festival dedicated to Devi. The Ahir in Central India are supposed to be the most adept *Divali* dancers and their songs have been imitated by the tribes.

The aborigines in the south-eastern portion of Central India, who are not influenced by Brahmanism to any great extent, do not observe *Divali.* The Kamar do not know it. Neither do the Bunjia. The Baiga pay little respect to it. The Gond in the Oundhi tract do not observe it.

In Sagour especially the influence of the Ahir is very great. The Divali songs of the Gond and Hindu alluded to the Ahir in some way or other.

Ethnic significance:—The Gond and Korku in Betul and Hoshangabad draw wall drawings on the front side of the huts and the cattle-pens also. The drawings are symbols of the granary and cow-pen.

Aboriginal form:—The aboriginal way of celebrating the *Divali* consists in worshipping the household gods with goats, pigs or fowls. The dance is the *Karma* dance and where *Karma* is not known women dance *Setam* and men *Sela.*

In Sagour Bilwari[69] songs are most popular. They comprise special *Divali* songs, love-songs of a licentious nature.

The songs:—The *Divali* songs of the Gond from Betul contain a delighted conversation between a girl and her mother, and reveal maternal love.[70]

In Chhattisgarh it is the songs of the Rawat that are borrowed by the tribes. They comprise (1) Doha, (2) Parrot songs of the Rawats[71] and songs in honour of Krishna.

Doha:—*Doha* is a Northern Indian variety of songs. The *Doha* songs in Chhattisgarh are very obscene.

(1)

I shall beat you with the penis.
I shall also beat your mother's vagina,
If you do not listen to me.
I shall put the penis in your knot of hair.

(2)

The impotent man
Tries sex intercourse.
He spreads the bed
On the bank of the river.

Parrot-songs:—

(3)

Get up, oh parrot, sit on the arm.
So, says Bhagvan
Oh Lachman,[72] you are injured, on the head
By an arrow.
Get up, oh parrot
And sit on the hole of the ear.[73]
You bite the ear and spoil it
Get up, oh parrot!
And sit on the nose tip.[74]
Bite and spoil it.

69. The Bilwari songs are also sung when wheat is sown in the field, and by women when they grind corn.

70. D. Bhagvat, *Folk-songs in the Satpura valleys.*

71. These songs are entirely different from the parrot songs of women in Chhattisgarh.

72. Lachman is the parrot and the parrot is likened to the penis.

73. Vagina.

74. Clitoris.

Song in honour of Krishna:—

(4)

Bhagwan is born.
From where comes the blanket?
From where the Khumri?
From where does Bhagvan come?
From Raipur comes the Blanket and Khumri,
From Dhandha comes Bhagvan.

Songs from the Gond in Saugor:

Divali:—

(5)

Fine indeed is the caste of the Ahir,
Every day, after getting up,
He eats stale rice gruel.
Kankuvar became thirsty,
Slowly he walked to the well.
There Rahi was filling water
Whose cow — my enemy — is this?
Oh chief! Drive the cow slowly.
The parting of my hair
Is filled with dust.
Once only I do my hair
Let it not get spoiled.

(6)

The line of the parting of the hair
Is as fine as a straight thread.
Oh Panihari, drawing water from the well,
Fill the jar and listen to my request.
Kankuvar is thirsty.
Give him a little water to drink.
Why should I give you water?
Let your mother and sister do it.
Or your respectable wife.
Why should I give you water?
I shall break your pot
If you mention my mother and sister,
If you mention my respectable wife.
Give me only a little water to drink
Or here the traveller goes away thirsty.
Rahi started drawing water.
And Oh! Kankuvar pulled the veil

Sticking to her ears.
The end of the garment
That covered her breast
slipped off
And oh! her ears have since then
Become crooked.[75]

Bilwari:—

(7)

My *odhni* is lost.
My age is small.
The *odhni* of Asur
Which was given by my lover.
Where is the bodice made?
Where is it sold?
The Asur[76] bodice
Which the lover brings
Is sold in every Asur market.
The lover gave me the Asur bodice
When my *odhni* was lost
Who gave the bodice?
Who gave the *odhni*?
Who paid for it?
My lover gave me the bodice,
My husband gave the *odhni.*
My friend paid for it.

(8)

Where is collirium made?
In what market is it sold?
For my lover I chose it.
I shall give you collirium.
All my life, oh beloved.
For the sake of the beloved
Collirium was made.
In the town collirium is made
In every market it is sold.
Now and again, all my life
I shall give you collirium, oh beloved.
Who buys collirium?
Who pays the money?
I shall give you collirium
Often and often, all my life, oh beloved.

75. i.e., she has lost her good name.
76. The reference to Asur is ambiguous.

For the sake of my sweetheart
I chose it.

(9)

How fine the fair limbs look,
And how nice too
The bangles of my husband's sister.
Where are the bangles made?
In what market are they sold?
They look so fine on my husband's sister
In town are the bangles made
In every market are they sold.
Who gave the bangles?
Who paid the money?
The beloved gave them.
My husband paid for them.

Conclusion:—The *Divali* in spite of its wide spread in Central India, retains the Hindu element entirely and the aborigines do not seem to have contributed anything special to the festival. They copy the Ahir in every respect. The *Divali* dances of the Ahir and the Rawat in the province are danced by men alone. They are vigorous dances. A small boy is made Krishna and the rest of the men his Gopas or friends. They all wear beautiful plumes of peacock feathers. They form a circle and dance with a brisk step.

The aborigines dance the *Sela* or *Karma* at *Divali* and have not borrowed the dance from the Ahir though they have copied their songs.