"The Naming of Names" in Indian Folk Belief

By
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Kipling's Kim once made a precious remark about "the naming of names", which had nothing to do with the Evil Eye or lucky and unlucky names, but which I remembered the other day when I saw a Gujarati name board on a grocer's shop in Bombay, giving the *baniya*'s name as Gobarji—Mr. Cowdung. His father's name, following his own, was I think Dhanji—Mr. Wealth—and I smiled at the combination of the uncouth and genteel, but, of course, it was plain enough why this *baniya,* when he was still a harmless and no doubt charming baby, had been given this unpleasant name of 'cowdung': it was to inure his survival; and since he had lived to grow up, it was proof enough, surely, that the name had been efficacious!

Either his parents had lost two or three children before his birth, or he himself was born weak and unlikely to live; or perhaps his stars were unfriendly, or some unlucky sign had attended his birth; or he had a neighbour or even a relative with an evil eye of particular malignance; or it may have been fear of the evil eye in general, because, perhaps, he was a fair-skinned pretty baby, or a very fat and healthy one, and so in constant danger of attracting the covetous malice of an evil eye.

It is not clear, on the face of it, how an ugly name, or, as we say in Marathi, a "crazy crooked" one, can save a child's life; and though it is commonly believed all over India that it can and does, most of the people I have asked to explain it have answered vaguely. They are so used to the idea that a mean name is protective that they are surprised it can be questioned.

They say: "If a child is named 'Rag' or 'Rubbish', they think it is no good, that the parents don't want it, and so they say, 'Let it be,' and they don't harm it."

"But who are 'they'?" I ask. "Who would have harmed the child but for its ugly name? Who is it that is so easily tricked? Is it only people with an evil eye? Or is it some ill-disposed god, or dangerous planet, or a demon, or a ghost, that has to be deceived?"

A few people, including a very intelligent Brahmin lawyer, have said, hesitatingly, that sometimes the gods are at fault. A Rajput neighbour of mine in Poona, the devoted mother of seven very lovable children, who had never yet lost a child, was nevertheless always cynical about the gods; they were unscrupulous, and could not be trusted; they had to be buttered, and tricked too. When sad things happened, especially perverse and unlucky mishaps, she would say, "It is all a game of the gods. They like to play with men." Other people, not so frank, say guardedly that displeased gods can be dangerous, and that some are always to be feared. A few people have said that sometimes the child-snatcher in a given family is a jealous family ghost, or some wicked devil. When a whole family dies out it is sometimes put down to a demon called *Nirvanshi Kalam.*

The Arabic word *qalam* has many meanings in Marathi; one of which is an order to cut off a criminal's hands, feet, nose, ears, and still other members; and it would seem to be this meaning that gave the name of *Kalam* to the destroying demon who cuts off all the members of a family. The Marathi dictionary called *Sarasvati Shabda-kosh* defines the *Nirvanshi Kalam* as matter-of-factly as it would a poisonous snake, and says in conclusion: "This *pishacha* harms the new family that comes to live in the house of the destroyed family." The compiler, Mr. Vidyadhar Waman Bhide, (and how suitably he was named!), handles words with affection as well as learning; and though his work has not the scope and authority of the incomparable seven-volumed *Maharashtra Shabda-Kosh,* still he has such a chatty, almost fatherly way with him, as when in defining illnesses he prescribes their treatment too, that one comes in time to feel acquainted with the man himself, as one does with dear Dr. Samuel Johnson, and dearer Mr. H. W. Fowler.

However, to come back to the *Nirvanshi Kalam,* I think that comparatively few people have heard of it, and it is not often that a family is wiped out root and branch. A *pishacha* much

more commonly feared is that of the wife who dies pregnant or in childbirth, with her desires unfulfilled, and returns on backward pointing feet, with her hair unbound and bangles clinking, especially on *amavasya,* the dark night before the new moon, when all sorts of ghosts and goblins are due to be abroad. If she dies in childbirth but the child lives she is sure to come back for it if not prevented, and so before her body is carried away for burning or burial needles are stuck into the soles of her feet, into her hands, temples, and the parting of her hair, and the body is then followed by a person who strews on the road a fine grain called *rale* and the spiked burrs, which can be bought, of an edible and medicinal herb called *gokharu.* The intention is obvious: the needles in the feet will make walking painful and therefore slow; the burrs also will prick the feet and delay progress; the poor mother's thrift will make her gather the scattered *rale,* but the needles in her hands make this so difficult that long before she can reach her baby the night will be at an end. Besides this, one or two nails are driven into the threshold with the charms to prevent her entrance. They are also driven into the earth where her body was bathed. If one should meet her the thing is to pull out one of her hairs and then keep it, no matter how she pleads to have it back, and get a barber to sew it into one's leg, above the knee or in the calf. One is then safe from her, however often she may return to beg for the hair, and from all other ghosts or hostile spirits. The hair is almost as good a charm against all dangers as a tiger's eye worn on the neck, but I am not sure that it is proof against tigers too, as the eye is.

This special ghost is called *jakhin* in Marathi, or *hadal,* and in Hindi *churail.* Readers of *Kim* will remember that once he was able to change his sleeping place without arousing suspicion, by imitating the terror of a man waking after nightmare, and shouting *Churel* ! *Churel* ! A young man in Bombay once told me that he had seen a *Hadel* in De Lisle Road after midnight one very dark night; but when I asked about her feet and hair he said he had been much too frightened to look at them: he had *felt* she was a *hadal* and fled ! Today I learned that the brother of a man I know claims to have a *hadal's* hair sewn into the calf of his leg, and if ever I see him I shall ask for the story.

A charming young high-caste lady of the U.P. who speaks English well told me of a Sikh friend of hers who was married

to a young man who had recently lost his first wife, a girl devoted to him, and heartbroken by the death of her only child, an idolized boy who had died before he was a year old. The second wife's first child, a healthy, handsome boy, had sickened mysteriously when he reached the age of his father's first son, and was soon gone.

There is a Marathi saying that when a young wife's child dies it has only gone to play, meaning that she will soon have another in its place; as if the lost child had gone back to her after its play. And so in due time the second wife of the story had another lovely boy, perfectly healthy until he reached his brother's age, when he too sickened in the same way and died.

When the young mother again found herself with child she greatly dreaded a third loss, and by this time the elder members of the family believed that it was the first wife, jealous of her successor's happiness who was snatching away her children. The second wife's mother took her to the Golden Temple at Amritsar, where she confided the whole story to an old man, an Akali, I think, of the temple. He agreed that the first wife was at fault, said some *mantras*, did some magical rites, promised to be present in spirit at the third child's birth, and gave the girl a charm. In due course she had a third boy, saw the old man standing at the foot of her bed, and felt no fear. Her mother gave the apparition the eight-anna bit agreed upon at Amritsar, and it vanished.

The third boy throve and did not fall ill at the fatal age. He was followed by a fourth boy and a fifth, as if the first and second had come back, and then, I think by one or two girls; and all the children were thriving when the story was told to me. In a case like this, where ghostly interference is feared, probably a horrid name for the endangered child would never be considered an adequate protection, and the parents would resort, as in this story, to magic.

Most of the people I have asked about the agency feared when a child is given a mean or nasty name say, it is the evil eye. A Brahman schoolmaster I know, a clever, capable man, was discussing the question recently and said that he believed strongly in the evil eye, having again and again seen its effects. He said there was now in his neighbourhood an educated Brahman lady of good family whose *drisht* (look) was so greatly feared that some people had forbidden her entrance to their houses. If she only looked at a child something was bound to happen to it.

Plenty of other people, he said, have this unfortunate power in a lesser degree, and against them all an unpleasant name is a real protection. Because they lack children they naturally covet those of others, and look too admiringly at them; but if they learn that a lovely baby is named 'Husks', or 'Sweeping' or 'Tatters', their natural disgust at the name lessens the child's attractions; and the little shock they feel at the meanness of the name distracts the envy they first felt and so reduces its malicious power.

Of course, where *drisht* is really feared an ugly name is not considered enough; the evil look must at once be taken off the child by taking a little salt and mustard seed in the right hand, waving them over the child seven times and then throwing them into the fire of the cooking place. If the *drisht* is considered a bad one it is exorcized more sternly by taking not only salt and mustard seed but chillies, black peppercorns, a *bhilava* or blistering nut, the dust of three roads, a hair of the head, and sometimes still more things, all of them, one notices, very painful to any eye, evil or good. More elaborate methods are also used, and even husbands are sometimes exorcised because some widow is suspected of looking covetously or grudgingly at them.

A young Brahman friend of my used to tell me with wry resignation of how bored and humiliated he felt when his wife and sister insisted on taking off him the *drisht* of the young widow in the next house. The grim seriousness both disgusted him and made him laugh, but it was no use for him to protest. Did he but sniff or sneeze, or eat a mouthful less than usual, it was the young widow's *drisht,* and he was in for another cleansing. He had to sit on a stool while they made passes over him with all sorts of pungent expulsives, and his sister poured out as pungent abuse on the sad, subdued young creature next door. I have heard angry mothers not only abuse but curse the evil eye that had given a child colic or fever. Their bitterness at times is amazing until one remembers that they really do believe in the evil eye. "May he not live to see next Divali!" or whatever other festival may be close at hand. "May his eyes break"! "May Mhasoba eat his bones crack-crack!" "May devils bite and eat him!" "May his corpse go soon to the burning *ghat*! The wood for his burning has already gone!" These are among the commoner curses one hears in Marathi. There are many more and much fancier ones. Mhasoba is a god of

the ignorant, with a reputation for malevolence, but many gods and goddesses are envoked in calling down evil; and one would think that the active ill-will loosed in these curses should harm its object much more than the quite covetousnous of the evil eye, but curses are less feared as a rule. One young man told me that his mischievous pranks as a boy had brought down many curses on him, specially from one neighbour who promised daily that he should not see the next festival, whatever it was, of course she did not really want him to die, and would have "cried like a cow" if he had died. The curse that is feared is that of the *gosavi, faqir,* etc., and dealers in magic. And yet the mere glance of some very ordinary harmless person may be dreaded, because some unfortunate coincidence has saddled him with an evil eye.

To come back to the protective power of ugly names, it always seems to me that a lovely baby is a lovely baby even it is named 'Fallen-Cowdung', and that the name would not in the least put off a really covetous childless person, especially when he knows it is all a trick, a camouflage of pretence, but the Brahmin schoolmaster with whom I talked insisted that even so the name would partly at least neutralize the effect of an evil eye. However, it was always wise, he thought, to back the name with an exorcism, simple or severe according to the person feared. All the same plenty of children with nasty names die, and if a census could be taken it would probably show a higher death-rate for such children than for the majority, with ordinary names, many of which are beautiful, and many extravagantly ornate and poetical, because it is often sickly children with a poor chance of life who are given nasty names. Those who die are not noted; it is those who live to grow up who advertise and seem to prove the efficacy of a horrid name.

When I told the Brahmin schoolmaster that I had never come across any fear of the evil eye in America or England; that parents there were only delighted to have their children admired and praised, even by childless persons, he listened to me with a curious look of marvel and disapproval. I told him I had seen great friendliness spring up towards a stranger who by look or word has shown his pleasure in a child; and that even people who were not fond of children often tried to hide their indifference by showing interest in the children of others, as a polite duty, and to give pleasure to the parents.

I told him of a Brahman doctor who had told me he had lost his own belief in the evil eye by noting the disbelief of his English acquaintances. "I saw," he said, "that these people knew nothing about *drisht,* and yet their children flourished. So I too stopped being afraid. 'There is always a *Brahma-rakshas* at the back of the timid,' but if you stop running you find there is nothing running after you."

A *Brahma-rakshas* is a Brahmin's ghost, supposed to be an extra wicked *pishacha,* and the proverb is a well-known one; but inspite of its wisdom there are so many even educated Indians who believe in the evil eye that it is imprudent for a stranger, however sincere, to admire a baby by look or word, lest his next teething upset or cold be put down to his account. Childless persons, specially young widows, are most suspect.

In Kipling's story "The Return of Imray" poor Imray was killed by his sister, because he had innocently admired the servant's handsome little son, who sickened and died soon after the master's remarks. I have heard many stories of how some one's evil glance not only brought illness but broke a beautiful crystal bottle without a touch, cracked a new stone doorstep with only an admiring remark, caused all the fruit to fall suddenly of a loaded Mango tree, without wind, and so on, but it is rarely one hears of anyone being murdered for his evil eye; though, no doubt, a quiet dose of poison does from time to time account for someone especially feared and hated.

It is hard for me to whom the evil eye is only a superstition based only on coincidence to realise how very seriously it can be taken by people who have grown up with the idea and accept it as one of the facts of life. It is not strange if sometimes their passionate resentment and grief at the sufferings or death of a loved child rouses them to revenge.

Now many people, especially in towns and cities, no longer believe in the evil eye and make fun of the idea; and there must always have been many childless childlovers whose pleasure in other people's children was never suspect. After all, it is only human nature to enjoy having one's children admired. "If there is no deceit in the heart, praise cannot harm a child," said an old Maratha to me, fondling his beautiful little grandson; "but when there is blackness in the belly the very look of the eyes is as poison."

I knew a childless widow in Poona once, a pretty, merry young Marathin who might dote as she pleased on her friends'

children, without arousing any misgivings. She would snatch a fat baby from its mother as if it were lollipop, toss and kiss it, fondle and play with it to her heart's content, while the watching mother looked on with an indulgent smile. The girl had such a delightful way with her, such spontaneous gaiety and irresistible friendliness, that she was accepted as harmless in her own little world, and liked by all her women friends. If their babies got colic it was put down to someone else: her delight was guileless.

It may be a long time yet before belief in the evil eye dies out in India, but it may be still longer before the ugly names that sprang up out of the belief entirely disappear. In the first place, village taste is often uncouth, and long usage has had made these names less shocking. If a man from babyhood has been called nothing but 'Snotty', 'Cowdung', or 'Fallen-Cowdung', both he and all his acquaintances become so used to the name that except for a little occasional teasing no-one thinks of its meaning. Everyone knows why the name was given him, and in the mouths of older people it has an indulgent, affectionate inflection, as if it were a pet name. As a boy gets older and the name is dignified by the usual honorific, *ji* or *ba*. it becomes prosaically respectable. It is when he leaves home and is laughed at, specially if he goes to a city, that he is embarrassed.

"I don't mind most bad names," a woman of the Dhangar (shepherd) caste once told me, "but I do hate Pap (Sin) and Dukarya (pig). When I meet men with these names I am ashamed to say them, and say 'brother' instead. It is awkward to call strangers by crazy crooked names."

In the second place, such names may linger on a while in honour of elder members of the family, grandparents, or great-uncles and aunts who happened to have ugly names but must be remembered all the same.

Here there is no thought of the evil eye or of the meaning of the name, but only affectionate family custom.

Very often, too, an elder person's name is given a baby because it is believed that elder relations "come back to the womb" in the same family and are reborn in the younger generations.

I knew very well a Zanabai, a woman of the Namdev Shimp (tailor) caste, whose husband's mother was so fond of him, her favourite son, that she often told him, "When I die I shall come back and sit again on your threshold." She liked to sit in his front doorway, straddling the threshold so that she could watch

him at his work as well as the street and passersby. About a year after the lady's death Zanabai had a baby girl, who was named Vari, an insignificant little name which may mean 'portion', 'alms', or 'a day chosen for pilgrimage'. Perhaps she was born, on such a day; or, perhaps, being a girl, she was accepted as an alms, or the portion destined by her parents' *karma* (fate).

Anyhow, the little Vari cried so much for two or three months that her distracted parents took her at last to a *dev-rishi* (a diviner) to ask why she cried. He asked questions, found out about the fond old mother, did some magic, and decreed that Vari was her own grandmother and therefore displeased with her name and lack of recognition. Let them change her name, treat her with honour, and she would soon stop crying. So she was given her grandmother's name, the beautiful name of Chandra-bhaga, one of the sacred rivers of India; and as for *honour*, she was extravagantly spoiled. Her mother's feelings were naturally mixed at the thought of having her exacting old mother-in-law with her again; but the father was delighted, and the little Chandrabhaga ruled the house as her grandmother had done. She was shown every attention, addressed in the polite plural, and crossed in nothing. Her father called her 'Mother', and even her brother had to please her.

Naturally, she stopped crying; but when I first saw her at the age of five she was a different and difficult girl, imperious, sulky, obstinate and selfish. However, her father had died some time before, and her mother's good sense was asserting itself. Vari knew very well that she was her mother-in-law and treated her accordingly, but when she became too unreasonable Zanabai straightened her back and Vari got a smack.

Once from the Brahmin house next to Zanabai's, with only a wooden partition between, I overheard a dialogue between Vari and her mother:

"Chandrabhaga, fetch me the broom, child,"
"I will not. Go, die!"
"Vari, fetch the broom, or I will smack thee,"
"I will not. Thou hast cholera!"
Smack!
The rest was a dialogue of shrieked curses and smacks:
"Thou hast smallpox!"
Smack!

"The hast *pilig* (plague)! Thou art dead!"

This is a very immediate sort of cursing. Instead of the vague future, *May you have so and so; May you die:* the wish is put in the perfect tense of accomplishment, as if that could expediate its fulfilment: *You are already stricken: You are already dead!* I remember hearing Vari's brother speak of a man the whole village disliked and had dubbed Patki Kaka—Uncle Cholera—a parody of his real name, Patke. The boy finished his biting remarks, all relayed from his elders, by saying venomously: "His wood has already gone to the burning-ghat! Look! He is going there now on the shoulders of four!"

Sometimes when an old woman "comes back" to her family she is not given her old name but is called *Aji*—Grandmother—as more respectful. It is bad manners for younger people to address older ones by name. And so an old man too on his "return" to the family is named what he was called for years before he died: Mhatarya, Mhatarba, or Mhatarbuva, all meaning old man, and used among the middle and lower castes.

A Mahar woman I know named Punji, which means a little heap of sweepings, had a baby boy lately whom she believes to be her own father come back to her, and whom she was going to honour with his name of Mhataraba. It seemed a drab heavy name for a tiny boy who had never harmed anyone, and a very dull name to carry through life. I said so. Unfortunately her father had never had another name, being himself a "return" to the family from a still older generation, and so after much thought, Punjibai named her fourth son Ramnath, with Mhatarba only as a pet name. His brothers, too, all have rather grand names uncommon until recently among Mahars.

In *The Cradle of the Clouds* by Sudhin N. Ghose, his boy friends have such nicknames as Split Cucumber, Caterpillar, and Oxdung; but unless Bengal is very different from the Maharashtra there may well be many boys there who have many such names not merely as nicknames but as their own and only proper name. It is possible that the Maharashtra has more such names than other provinces, but from all I have heard I think it is very unlikely that any part of India entirely lacks them. I have not found them among my Mohammedan acquaintances, although they too believe in the evil eye, because, I think, they depend on charms, and would consider the name of a Prophet, or some other holy name, a better protection to a child than a name like Broom or Basket.

My own collection of old names is mostly of Marathi ones, but probably equivalents for many of them are to be found in many other Indian languages. It is among villagers that one finds them, and, of course, more commonly among the Shudras and Untouchables than among the upper castes. Very few are found among Brahmans, only Dhondu, a 'boulder', 'affliction', or 'burden'; Bhiku, an 'alms'; Keru, 'sweepings', and a few others; and when these are dignified by the Brahmin honorific *pant* from *pandit*, and become Dhondopant, Bhikopant, Keropant, etc., they are unobtrusively respectable. Very often the name Dhundo is given to a child born in Dhondmas, the extra month that is slipped into the lunar calendar every three years. These names used also to be given to Brahmin girls; though usually they were named for goddesses, heroines of the past, sacred rivers, shrines, flowers, and other beautiful things. Nowadays they are all vines of some sort: Charulata, Hemlata, Suvarnalata, Snehalata, vines that never grew on land or sea; or else a ray or someething else of *Shashi*, a slushy name for the moon which cannot compare with the equally Sanskrit *Chandra* and its compounds, popular until a generation ago. It was then that the new style, the Bengali style, of fancy flowery names flooded the Maharashtra, until now even boys are *Shahi* this and *Shahi* that.

The old names had substance, and suited the Maharashtrian character; the new names are only scent and sugar. Sita, Savitri, Anusaya, and Draupadi have a greatness and an aura of poetry and ancient legend that all the *Latas* and *Shashis* can never have. The new names tinkle, like the little bells on the dancing girl's feet, but the old names echo the stately music of the Ramayana and Mahabharata; they reverberate in caverns of time past measuring. They mean something.

To come back to unpleasant Marathi names, the ugliest of all originate and abound in Khandesh. They are harsh, heavy, and sometimes almost incredibly uncouth. I heard not long ago of a Khandeshi village *patil* (headman) who is called Jhipru Gadbadya Patil. His own name Jhipru means 'tousled hair', and his father's name Gadbadya means 'noisy'. Other Khandeshi names are Dharya, a 'smoke hole'; Chindhkya, Dudkya, Sudkya, Phadkya, all names for a 'rag' or 'tatters'; Toplya, Supdya, two kinds of basket; Kersunya, a broom; Thengya, Thamya, Shapsha, Lothya, Paththya, short, stocky, loutish or lubberly; Shembdya, snotty; Shenpadya, fallen cowdung. (The d's and t's in all these names except the first three are the hard ones made by the

tongue against the palate, and are, besides, heavily aspirated in several.) The last two names are fortunately not common, but one hears them from time to time. I once knew a Mang boy names Shenpadya, the youngest of five tall straight brothers, sons of a tall, straight ropemaker. The first four had ordinary names, but when the fifth was born the parents and their friends felt that such a run of luck was sure to attract malicious attention and called for the protection of a specially ugly name.

There are feminine forms of most of these names, but they are not so commonly used as the boys' names, because girls need less protection than boys, being always less desirable, except where there are already several boys. A Sindhi gentleman told me that in Sindh it is an "infallible rule" that after three boys a girl brings very great luck. He was eagerly hoping that his fourth child would be a girl: he wanted a promotion and a lot more pay, and the girl would bring it. He was greatly disappointed when a fourth boy joined his brothers, but the little fellow must have had "lucky feet," for in due course his father's wire-pulling landed the promotion and extra-pay.

Some odd names are not in currency but invented to fit some special circumstance. A baby in the Ahmednagar District, a Mahar or Maratha, I forget which, was named Gadhav, 'ass', because he was born in a field called Gadhav-loli, 'asses' roll'. Many fields have names, one where donkeys elect to gather to roll about is likely to be named for them. The baby's mother had gone there to gather fuel, when her time suddenly came upon her. Many village children are born in the open because their mothers are overtaken by labour before they can get back home. They rest a while, and then if not discovered by someone, and helped home they reluctantly empty their basket of the fuel or foodstuffs gathered, put the baby in it, and walk back the best they can, with the basket on their head.

In the Ahmednagar District also there is a village headman called Sabrya Patil because he was born near a clump of cactus outside the village but he was due in any case to have an odd name, his mother having already lost two babies, and naturally she and the village held that his survival after such an inauspicious birth was all due to his name. There are a number of common names that show where their owners were born in a wood or grove; Ranya, in a wild or a waste place; Janglya, in a jungle; Dongarya, on a hill; Chikhalya, in mud, Akhadya may also mean that a boy was born in the month of Akhad, or Ashadh,

the rains; Akhadya, at or near a cross-roads. There are feminine forms of all these for girls, and one more name I have in this class, which is, I think, the horridest name in my whole collection. It is Gukhadi, and belongs to a girl in the District Nasik who had the misfortune to be born near the village voiding place, on the village outskirts, where her mother had gone for her morning evacuation.

A Brahmin girl in the Ahmednagar District, whose father was a forestry officer, was born in a wild place while he was on tour and named Rani, which people naturally took for queen, though the two Rani's are spelt with different n's in Marathi. The girl had always to correct her teachers and schoolmasters, until she married, when her husband's family, thinking her name ambiguous and lacking in dignity, renamed her Kunda Rani, Queen Kunda. A Brahmin girl's name is usually changed after marriage; but a Brahmin lady who is a friend of Brahmin friends of mine, and was named Kyapi, because she was born in a G.I.P. train, is still called Jyapibai!

Anti-*drisht* names which are found in many parts of the Maharasthra are as follows: Konda, grain-husks, chaff; Matera, the mixed husks and fine stones that are cleaned out of grain; Keru, sweepings; Kacharu, rubbish, Punza and Kerpunza, a little heap of sweepings and rubbish; Ukardya, dunghill; Jhiprya and Khingya, tousled hair, Kalya, black; Naktya, snubnosed; Vakya or Sukya, dried up; Budan, drowning or loss (A Mahar woman I know named an illegitimate son Budin). Marya, dying or cholera; Maribhuva, Mr. Cholera; Vaktya, owl, calamity, impropriety; Batta, stigma, disgrace, Jhela, thrown and caught; Mangya, a Mang.

These last two names are especially interesting. When a woman's children "don't live," all die young, she may call a woman of the Mang caste who is unwidowed and a mother, a very auspicious combination, whatever the caste, and fill her lap with grain, dried coconut "bowls" (half-kernels), *supari* nuts, almonds, dried dates, and turmeric roots. If she can afford it she gives five seers of grain or even five larger measures, one coconut "bowl" broken into five pieces, and of the smaller things five whiles. Five is an auspicious number and it is considered good to give with five fingers, "to give five or a multiple of five."

When the Mangin's lap has been filled, the newest baby, the one that is to be kept from following the babies who died, is put in the Mangin's lap, or laid on her hands, and then by her very

carefully "thrown" back to the mother over a narrow space, so that there is no danger to the child. The idea is obvious: the baby has been thrown away and that by a Mangin and obtained by catching, and being of so little value it is not worth coveting. It is named Jhela or Jheli, but not every child with these names has been thrown and caught: the custom is found mostly among the middle castes, and never among the Mahars, who scorn their fellow-untouchables, the Mangs.

Among the Marathas, Malis, the other middle castes, and even sometimes among village Brahmins, a boy with a very poor chance of life may be named Mangya to make him live. Again a Mangin is called and seated, and her lap filled with the usual fivefold gifts; and when the baby is placed on top of them, the Mangin, as it were, accepts him for her own. She takes the *palav* (end of her *sari* of her head), tears of a strip about three-quarters of a yard wide, wraps the baby in it, and hands him back to his mother. After that, if he lives, she must supply him with clothes for a certain number of years, whatever is agreed upon, usually fives of it, even until he is married. In the old days he might have been married at five. In return the family gives her food daily, and once a year a good quantity of grain off the threshing floor, and if the boy thrives, still more gifts and favours. When the boy is married his Mangin "Mother" is brought, given a share of the wedding feast, a *sari* for herself, a *pancha* (very short *dhoti*) for her husband, and sent away in state, with the wedding musicians in attendance, piping her home. Her adoption of the child has saved his life; but once in a while a Mangin fears to take the child in her lap, lest it hinder her own child-bearing, and holds him only in her arms. No doubt it has sometimes happened that a Mangin had no more children, or at least sons, after such an adoption. Coincidence, if not the mother of superstition, who is fear, with ignorance for father, is at least one of the nurses of this irrational credulity which makes people go all their lives in diffidence and dread.

Besides the anti-*drisht* names of girls there are a good number of "awkward" names for girls who cheated their parents' hopes for a son. They are Naku and Nakoshi, not wanted; Navadi, disliked; Kantali, disgust, vexation; Ranji, botheration; Thaki, Vanchi, Dagi, Nahani, all meaning a cheat or fraud or deceiver; Nakali, sham or spurious; Abali, a poor weak thing; Mati, dust; Asoparti, let her be if you like; Nasoparati, let her not be if you like. These last two are soon shortened and soften-

ed to Asu and Nasu , which are politely meaningless. The blankest, I think, of all these names of disappointment is Jhali, because it is as if the family said grimly. "Well, at least she's born, that's something !"

Not long ago when I asked a dear old Mahar woman her name she looked up deprecatingly and said: "It is a very awkward name. I never like to tell it. It is Abali. When I was born my father's eldest brother was very angry because I was a girl, and on the third day he told my mother to take me and leave the house. She was only a girl, poor thing, and afraid of my uncle. My father was not in the house, but he too was afraid, for my big uncle was only two fingers lower than the clouds. He was a very angry man.

"So my mother put me in a basket on her head and left the house. She could hardly walk, poor thing, and went slowly, thinking, 'Now, what shall I do? I can't walk to my mother's village. I will go to the jungle and die there'. Then she met some Marathins and Maharins coming back from the fields and they said, 'O girl, are you mad? Where are you going with your baby on your head?' And she said, 'I am going to the jungle. My *bhaya* drove me out because I had a girl'. And they said, '*Wah, wah !* that's handsome ! What is it if it is a girl? In all the village is it only *you* that has a girl? Come, we will go back with you. *Wah !* if he doesn't listen we will go to the Patil (headman)! We will tell the Mahar Panch (Council)! Come, girl !'

"So they took my mother back. My uncle said, 'The girl is a big fool. Why did she go? Did I push her out of the house, the dead hussy?' Then the women railed, and he did nothing more to my mother. But he named me Abali. It is a very awkward name."

I was puzzled, for I could see nothing more embarrassing in Abali than *Abala,* a Sanskrit word for woman that comes in Marathi poetry and means nothing more than un-strong—*a-bala,* the prefix *a* being negative like the alpha privative in Greek, as in *a-morphous. 'Abala'* seemed to me no worse than the English epithet "the weaker sex," which is nothing to blush about even though one doesn't toot a horn over it; but when I questioned a clever village Mahar girl, who is now a schoolteacher, she said that to ignorant people 'Abali' didn't mean merely weak, but a *poor* weak thing, a miserable creature, which is really *not* very grand !

Another little family history was told me by a little Mahar girl of ten or so. Mahars are often very good talkers. Their *chutneys* (condiments) are fiery things, blistering *chili* pastes, or lively concoctions of *chili* and garlic, coriander leaf and tart tamarind, and their talk is often like their *chutneys;* and sometimes it reeks aloud, so crude and "high," it is revolting. But here is the little girl's story.

"I was my mother's first child, and my father wanted a boy. He felt bad but he said: 'Never mind. Girls have to be. The second will be a boy.' But on my back came another girl! My father was very angry. He gave my mother a lot of abuse. Still he said, 'Now the third will be a boy'. But on my sister's back it was a girl again. My father was terribly angry. He gave my mother lots and lots of abuse, he said, 'I will get another wife'. My mother cried very much. And he wouldn't look at my little sister. He named her Kantali (disgust). And he cursed her. 'Why doesn't this brat die?' he said. 'When shall I bury her corpse?' he said. And every day my mother cried. Last week my mother's sister came to see us after eight years, and my mother told her everything.

"But slowly my father began to like my little sister. She is pretty, and when she began to laugh and do little tricks he began to play with her. Then she became his darling, and he changed her name to Lahanbai (Little-Miss), and if anyone called her Kantali he got very angry.

"Then on her back came my brother, and my father was nothing but mad with joy. He said, 'This my Lahanbai has lucky feet: by the merit of her feet I have a son. So he still loves her very much. But my brother is his *big* darling."

Then a Mahar woman I know very well told me that in her village a Mahar was so angry when his first child turned out a girl that he named her Kombda, a cock. When the family said, "You can't call a girl Cock!" he said, "Why not? Cock is her name." So Kombda she became, and the village laughed and marvelled. "On her back" came a second girl, and again the man raved, and said: "Call her Kombdi. We can't have two cocks in the house. So 'Hen' she became, and the village laughed again. Then to his wife's horror, she had a third girl and the man was nearly besides himself. He abused and cursed her and named the child 'Khuta', which is the illiterate pronunciation of 'Khunta', a wooden peg, especially that by which a hand-mill for grinding flour is turned.

Fortunately, the fourth child was a boy and there were no more girls; but to this day the three girls, now all married and in their own homes, are known only as Kombdibai, Khutabai. The village got so used to the names that in time it thought them no stranger than Kamala, a lotus; Keshari, saffron; or Khirni, a melon. As James Stephens says in *The Demigods*, where he makes three Archangels join as fellow travellers a potato pedlar and his wife, no matter how astonished one may be at first by some marvel, one cannot *stay* astonished very long.

Fortunately Cock, Hen, and Peg are unique names; but there are other very odd names commonly given to girls; more in pique, however, than in spite, some of them by their very absurdity, or the tininess of the things they name, are even endearing rather than unpleasant and could be used as pet names. They mostly show worthlessness or little worth, and could serve as anti-*drisht* names. They are Mati, earth or dust; Mungi, an ant; Pushi, a flea; Muti, a very small river fish; Jhingi, a shrimp, or tousled hair; Bagi, an unfledged bird; Beli, the half of a coconut shell, Kondi, grain-husks, chaff; Banagi, the tiny cup which holds a *bajari* seed, itself a tiny thing, and by its stem fastens the seed to the parent ear.