

# Dances and Charms of the Tribes of Central India

By  
DURGA BHAGVAT

## I. The Tribal Dances of Central India

Of all the communal activities of the primitive people dancing is the most attractive and important. Though its recreative utility is apparent, its social and religious significance moored deeply in the local and tribal tradition, is greater still. If a man or a woman breaks any moral rule of the tribe, the person is debarred from taking any part in the communal dancing, just as he or she is not allowed to take food with the rest.

No rite, no ritual of the primitive is complete without dancing and hence its religious significance is paramount. However, looking to the variety of the typical aboriginal dances, there are some where the ritualistic accompaniment is sometimes merely farcical or sometimes altogether dropped. It is from the seasonal employment of the dances and from some typical gestures that we have to conjecture the rite the dance is supposed to accompany. This is mostly due to the deterioration of the original rite and the dance also, owing to its coming into contact with an alien culture and being superceded by it.

The most important among the prevalent dances of the aborigines of Central India are:—

(1) Ri-na, (2) Ri-lo, (3) Re-la, (4) Karma, (5) Setam, (6) Sela-Danda, (7) Mandar, (8) Hulki and (9) Suwa.

These again can be divided into three groups viz. (1) Mixed dances, (2) dances of men, and (3) dances of women.

*Mixed dances*:—The mixed dances are very important, socially and culturally. In all aboriginal territories where the primitive culture is very much less disturbed by the Hindu civilization, and where the dormitory or Gotul system is still in vogue mixed dancing is mostly resorted to. It is true that the dormitory system itself is decaying very fast even in the most secluded tracts like Bastar and Chota-Nagpur regions adjoining Central India, and it is altogether extinct in the rest of

the area. And hence mixed dancing also is becoming day by day a rarity. Excepting the Maria in Bastar as also in Chanda and the Godavari tract, the Gond to the extreme south of Raipur and Drug and sometimes the Baiga, and Devar (who are professional dancers) of Raipur, we rarely find mixed dances.

In my observation of the mixed dancing in the Godavari tract and in the south of Drug, I found that (1) only such unmarried girls and boys whose septs permitted them to be partners in marriage can take part in the dancing. There are several such groups and several pairs of lovers take part in it. Matrimonial alliance thus seems the chief aim of these dances which thus provide opportunities for courting. (2) Married women generally do not take part in the dance except where forced by others and with the permission of the husband. (3) Widows are also excluded except very old women, who have ceased menstruating. These women are generally allowed in all primitive territories all kinds of freedom in word and action. They enjoy life in any way they want as their strength allows. The Re-la and Mandar (the drum-dance) and sometimes Karma are the most favourite mixed dances.

(2) *Dances of men*:—The dances of men are exclusively the Sela or Danda, or the drum dances. On account of the growing unpopularity of the mixed dances, the same Re-na or Re-la and Karma, Hulki and Phag dances are danced by men and women separately in one courtyard, forming two rows. Sometimes one party sings a song and the other answers or, in more deteriorated conditions, the songs also are different. At weddings there are seldom any mixed dances and hence men and women dance separately making groups which face one another.

(3) *Dances of women*:—Women are more adept in dancing than men and have a variety of dances. Except the Sela or Danda they dance all the dances which are primarily mixed dances and also some special dances like Setam and Suwa which are their monopoly. In all these dances however the instrumental music and the drum is invariably played by men. The greater the deterioration of mixed dances the sharper is the distinction in the technique between men's and women's dances. In Chhindwara, in the Narbudda region and in the Vindhyan territory, women dance Setam only, and men Sela.

*Traditional significance*:—It is not merely the long practice of the dances and dance-songs that gives them a place of honour in the culture of the people, but the source of tradition is sacred. Lingo, the ancestor and the greatest hero of the Gond is the

deity of music, his brother Pandari Koko, is an adept dancer and a singer. So every dance, accompanied with a song is dedicated to these two. It is the later songs and dances like the Hulki which are dedicated to other deities.

*The form and songs*:—In spite of the variety of names and cultural application, the movements of the dances are usually monotonous. It is usually the songs which demarcate one form of dance from the other, except the Sela or Danda which is very lively.

The Ri-na, Ri-lo and Re-la dances have the same identical form. The dancers form a circle or a semi-circle, hold the person on the left with the left hand round his or her waist and the right is free to move to and fro. Thus they go round and round bobbing up and down. Excepting a little variety in detail, this is the most acceptable form of the dances in the aborigines of Central India.

The Ri-lo dances and songs are sung by women only and Re-la by both the sexes together at any time and in every function. Ri-na is employed in marriages alone<sup>1</sup>.

The Re-la dance songs:  
(From the Gond from Drug)

1. "The road to the market  
Goes through the field, oh boy-cousin<sup>2</sup>  
Whose field this is, oh boy cousin?  
There are two plots in one field, oh boy-cousin.  
This is my son Singa  
The field belongs to him, oh niece,  
What is sown in the field, oh boy-cousin?  
I shall come to your field, oh boy-cousin.  
To cut 'Kutaki' and 'harala'  
With you, oh 'mariyun' "<sup>3</sup>
2. "In the seven hills  
There is a 'pipal' tree, oh girl-cousin  
On the yonder side of the hills is the pipal tree,  
And on this side is the banyan tree, oh girl-cousin,  
Come, we shall swing on them, Oh Belosa, marandal.<sup>4</sup>  
We shall swing on their hanging roots.  
Not that I do not want to come, Oh Subedar, my boy-cousin,

1. See, Folk-songs from the Satpura Valley. J.U.B. VIII, 4.

2. The cousin is either father's sister's son, or mother's brother's son. Similarly the female-cousin is the father's sister's daughter, or mother's brother's daughter. Cross-cousin marriage is in vogue in this tribe and generally in this part of the country.

3. Boy-cousin.

4. Girl-cousin.

My mother will take objection, my boy-cousin.  
 My mother will abuse me, oh Subedar.  
 I shall tell your mother, my girl-cousin,  
 I brought a beautiful basket  
 And filled it with clothes, oh girl-cousin  
 And gave it to your mother, oh girl-cousin.  
 My father will take objection, oh subedar,  
 I shall tell your father, oh girl-cousin.  
 I have paid him the bride-price, my girl-cousin.  
 I have given gifts to all your relatives, my girl-cousin.  
 I have given so much, my girl-cousin.  
 When did you give, oh boy-cousin?  
 When you were swinging, my girl-cousin,  
 In a tiny cradle of cane, my girl-cousin.  
 That time I have given it, oh girl-cousin.  
 I shall not let you go now,  
 Oh Belosa, my girl cousin."

The Ri-lo dance songs:  
 (From the Maria Gond of Drug)

- (1) The marriage pandal will soon be made  
 Who shall marry, my boy-cousin?  
 The marriage of the boy of 'harro pepora' sept  
 Will take place, oh girl-cousin.  
 I shall live with you, oh girl-cousin.  
 I shall sing with you.  
 I shall marry you, oh girl-cousin.  
 My mother will dance, oh boy-cousin,  
 Oh my leader.

*Mandari dance*:—The Mandar is the drum dance and is very lively owing to the rhythmic beating of the drums. Each man carries a drum on his neck and goes on dancing. Women do not hold or beat the drum.

Mandari-songs:  
 (From Gonds of Drug)

- (1) My little sister,  
 Take a little dal,  
 Cook the gruel soon, my sister.  
 It is thirty years now, big brother,  
 And I have not heard you  
 Asking me to cook gruel in haste  
 Where are you going,  
 Tell me, big brother.  
 I want to make a bargain  
 I am going to market, little sister.  
 What will you sell, big brother?  
 Unhusked *alchi* rice

- Shall I sell, my little sister.  
 How much will you take, big brother?  
 I shall take a silk-cocoonful of rice, my little sister.  
 You are going, my big brother,  
 Where shall I live, big brother?  
 You stay with our maternal uncle, my little sister.  
 My maternal aunt abuses me, big brother.  
 Go to paternal uncle's house, little sister.  
 My paternal uncle pats me,  
 But his wife abuses me, my big brother.  
 I shall come with you, big brother.  
 Listen to me, my little sister.  
 No one will know our relation there  
 They will say you are my wife, my little sister.  
 Then I shall feel ashamed,  
 So do not come, my little sister.  
 So listen to what I say, my little sister.  
 I shall come, my big brother,  
 I will not give it up, my big brother.
- (2) The maina says—'pitud kam'—  
 Whose rabbit that is?  
 The rabbit belongs to a boy  
 Of the Marai-sept.  
 It is his rabbit.  
 The rabbit smells badly.  
 From where does the rabbit come?  
 The rabbit comes from Bastar.  
 Where does the rabbit go?  
 The rabbit goes to Lanji.  
 All rabbits go there.  
 There are fields of 'handu' rice.  
 Many rabbits have come.  
 They met a river in their way,  
 But the ground became level  
 When they walked.  
 There were stones in their way  
 But they were crushed to atoms  
 When they walked.  
 They came across a village  
 And the village was looted.

*Sela or Danda dance*<sup>5</sup>:—Sela is the aboriginal name of the dance while Danda is its Hindi name. The latter name is prevalent only in Balaghat, Mandla and Chattisgarh, and to some extent in Berar. Korkus of Hoshangabad, Bhariyas of Chhindwara and Gonds in the south-eastern portion of the province call it Sela only. It is usually danced in Phag and is extremely

5. Folk-songs in the Satpura Valleys, J.V.P. VIII.

deteriorated in the Vindhyan belt of the region though Phag is still vigorous there. But the songs are still sung there, while the dance has degenerated; especially men have lost the art.

Danda songs:  
(From the Gond and Hindus in Bilaspur)  
Barmahi or the cycle of months:

In the garden of flowers of Mahakaud<sup>6</sup>  
A flower has bloomed,<sup>7</sup>  
Without a bud.  
My life, the bee wanders  
Round it.  
Oh friend, it is the month of Asadh  
The river swells,  
So says the sinner,<sup>8</sup>  
Listen to what she says.  
Savan has come.  
Oh the month of Savan is always beautiful.  
'Himik zimik' the rain falls,  
The river swells,  
So says the sinner.  
Listen to what she says.  
The month of Bhadho has come.  
The 'Kasi' flowers bloom,  
The river swells,  
So says the sinner.  
Listen to what she says.  
Oh friend, the month of Kuwar has come.  
Beautiful women celebrate it,  
What have we to do with sin?  
All my wrong-doings are pardoned,  
So says the sinner.  
Listen to what she says.  
The women celebrate  
The advent of Katik.  
(Krishna) played all day with Kubri,  
On that day in Mathura.  
All my sins are pardoned,  
So says the sinner.  
Listen to what she says.  
The month of Aghan has come.  
All the sins I had committed.  
All my wrong doings are pardoned.  
(Krishna) spends these days with Kubri.  
So says the sinner.

6. i.e., Time, Eternity.

7. i.e., Year.

8. i.e., man's soul—the prompter of evil.

Listen to what she says.  
 It is the month of Magh.  
 Nandal covers up my sins.  
 He spends the days with Kubri,  
 So says the sinner.  
 Listen to what she says.  
 It is the month of Pus.  
 It is bitter cold,  
 Nandal will pardon my sins,  
 He plays with Kubri.  
 It is the month of Phagun.  
 They play with dust.  
 All play and enjoy,  
 All make love to Nandalal.  
 So says the sinner.  
 Listen to what she says.  
 It is the month of Chait,  
 The 'tesu' flowers bloom.  
 It is the month of Vaisakh.  
 The river dries.  
 It is the month of Jeth.  
 The leaves fall down.  
 Women wear clean clothes  
 And wear ornaments,  
 So says the sinner.  
 Listen to what she says.

*Saitam dance*:—Saitam is danced by the Korku women in Hoshangabad and the Narbudda tract, by Gond women in Betul, Chindwara and Seoni and Sagour and by Bharia women in Chindwara<sup>9</sup>. A Saitam song which is not employed in marriage is given below:—

Dadara<sup>10</sup>:—

- (1) The Kalagi-plume<sup>11</sup> is made of bamboo  
 In the Kalgi let thousands of lovers swing.

*The Saitam songs*:—

The way of the mother cow is blocked  
 Oh Radha! Mohan stops the milk-maid  
 From where the milk-maid Velari comes?  
 Where does she take the milk?  
 Oh Radha, Mohan stops the milk-maid.  
 Velari is the milk-maid of Mathura  
 And to Gokul does she take the milk

9. *Folk-songs from Satpura Valleys*, J.U.B. VIII, 4.

10. In Sagour all big songs are preceded by a Dadara couplet.

11. The plume worn by dancer, means a woman.

- Oh Radha! Mohan stops the milk maid.
- (2) I shall die of my own accord  
 Why are you standing alone  
 In the wood, oh great one?  
 When the king saw Chandeli  
 He asked her fiercely:  
 Why are you standing alone  
 In the wood, oh great one?  
 In Kindalpur is the Goddess Amar.  
 To worship her I went alone.  
 Why are you standing alone  
 In the wood, oh great one?  
 No, you have won,  
 Catch me by the arm.  
 Why are you standing alone  
 In the wood, oh great one?  
 In every house is the god with the crown  
 Oh God! you shall lose your reputation.<sup>12</sup>

*The Suwa dance*:—Of all the symbolical forms of worship and dance the Suwa or parrot-dance is the most important. The symbolism in it is not dead but a product of the living culture of the people. Suwa dances and songs of the Ahir or Rawat of Chhattisgarh are famous and influence the other communities and aborigines considerably.

*The Suwa song*<sup>13</sup>.

(From the Gonds of Drug)

The king dances the parrot dance,  
 Ram, the queen's Ram,  
 Planted Ketki trees  
 And went for a bath.  
 So runs the beautiful tale.  
 Ram has made a garden which is in full bloom,  
 I love to see it.  
 Listen to my beautiful tale.  
 She (Sita) walks a kos,  
 She walks two kos,  
 Three kos walks queen Sita.  
 And at the end of the third kos,  
 She reached the bound of the sea,  
 My beautiful tale of the full-bloomed garden.

12. cf. Folk-songs from the Satpura Valleys, J.U.B. VIII, 4.

13. The song gives us an entirely different version of the story of the golden deer in Ramayana. Ram is said to be Sita's lover and her husband's younger brother. Lachman is not mentioned. Instead of that Hirsing is mentioned. However there is confusion in the song regarding their relation, she is both his queen and elder brother's wife.

She was pleased to see the full bloomed garden.  
 Loaded was the garden with flowers.  
 What deer is it? Oh! where is the deer?  
 To whom belong the flowers?  
 'Whose garden is it, that the deer is plundering?'  
 Thus thought Sita, the queen  
 On seeing the flowers.  
 'Wait oh deer! Wait my friend!  
 I shall have you caught alive  
 Since you are plundering the garden!'

When the deer heard this,  
 It jumped off the garden.  
 I shall persuade my husband's younger brother,  
 To catch you alive, Oh deer!  
 Queen Sita saw the garden,  
 Saw that it was well kept  
 And set out having bathed  
 In the Ganga and Jamuna.  
 Some birds fly before her,  
 Some after her,  
 The peacock walks by her side,  
 The procession thus started homeward,  
 She walked fast,  
 As fast as could be,  
 One 'kos'\* she walked (\* Two miles.)  
 Two 'kos' she walked,  
 At the end of the third kos,  
 My queen Sita reached the door steps,  
 She entered her palace and shouted  
 'Oh! Let it be proclaimed to my kind Ram—  
 Tell him that the deer is plundering the garden  
 Catch the deer alive!'

Thus was it proclaimed in the palace  
 A letter was sent to Gadhu!<sup>14</sup>  
 'Send Virsing and catch the deer alive  
 And bring it here.'  
 So ran the letter.  
 The letter was written and dispatched to Gadhsing.  
 'Your garden is being plundered by the deer,  
 With joined hands I fall at your feet,  
 Oh my brother-in-law.  
 Make haste and shoot the deer of the forest.'  
 Thus ran the letter addressed to Ram,  
 Brother Hirsing carried the letter.  
 One 'kos' he walked.  
 Two 'kos' he walked.  
 At the end of the third kos he reached  
 On the bed-stead Sita's brother-in-law,  
 Ram the play-mate of Sita.

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14. The name of a village.

When the letter was handed over  
 Ram looked at it.  
 Whose letter can it be?  
 He opened and read it.  
 He read it and started thinking—  
 The flowers have been plundered,  
 Whose deer can it be?  
 The king lost in thought  
 Got down from the bed  
 Sandal on feet,  
 Sword hanging down his waist,  
 A weapon in his hand,  
 Walks out the king,  
 He is furious.  
 I shall only eat my bread after shooting you,  
 I shall only rest after killing you,  
 Oh deer! My elder brother's wife  
 says I should catch you alive  
 And give you to her  
 How can I catch you alive, oh deer?'  
 Thus musing the king was walking  
 One kos he walked,  
 Two kos he walked.  
 After the third kos he reached the garden.  
 The king saw the garden loaded with flowers,  
 And also the golden deer.  
 'I shall kill you, oh deer!  
 But how can I kill you,  
 Since Sita says I must  
 Catch you alive oh deer?'  
 How shall I catch you?  
 Thus spoke Ram.  
 The golden deer heard it and thought  
 'The king shall kill me,  
 How shall I run?  
 And for the dread of life  
 The deer jumped and took to its heels.  
 Says the king, 'The deer is running, running hard'  
 And starts in pursuit  
 'How shall I catch you, oh deer?  
 How shall I catch you?  
 The deer seemed almost in the reach,  
 And again it ran away  
 The king followed it.  
 'How shall I catch you, oh deer?  
 The sandals on the feet are slipping away  
 The weapon in the hand gives way,  
 Blisters are visible on the legs,  
 The king's mouth has become dry,  
 How shall I reach you, oh deer!  
 How shall I reach you?

The deer entered a plaintain grove  
 And the king caught its leg.  
 Oh! The king caught its leg.  
 The king was dying of thirst,  
 Of hunger he was dying,  
 Spoke he to the deer,  
 'How shall I take you, oh deer?'  
 He carried it on the shoulder,  
 Tied it with his turban  
 And fastened it to his own neck.  
 Till the necks of the two came in close contact  
 'How shall I carry you, oh deer?'  
 Finally he tied the deer in a bundle  
 And carried it on his head.  
 He felt himself standing before his sister-in-law.  
 He was going to show it to Sita,  
 Ram and Sita were brother and sister-in-law  
 The two were passionately fond of each other.  
 The king took down his burden under a Kadam tree,  
 He placed the deer down  
 And sat down to rest.  
 As he was resting, he felt sleepy.  
 The golden deer served as a pillow  
 The pillow was well pressed.  
 How shall the deer run away?  
 The king fell asleep  
 Twelve years the king was sleeping.  
 The poor deer started thinking now  
 'Surely this won't do.'  
 It threw red and yellow rice on him  
 And made him a ram  
 A new turban was tied on the ram's head,  
 'A queen took the ram.  
 There stood the king, the ram of the forest,  
 With his mouth he ate leaves,  
 His neck was tied with the turban  
 She dragged him and put him in a cage.  
 She took him in the house,  
 'To my father's house shall I take you,  
 To my mother's house shall I take you,  
 I shall show you to all—' said she  
     One 'kos' she walked,  
     Two 'kos' she walked.  
 Three 'kos' she walked and reached Garhpanjar,  
 She entered the mahal—the seven-storied mahal  
 The queen Sita was sitting on her bed,  
 To the leg of the beadstead the ram was tied.  
 Queen Kawal gave ram water to drink,  
 'Drnik water, oh ram,' said she!  
 'Eat a handful of dal, oh ram,' said she,  
 And made him eat it.

Thus she mocked her Samdi (bridegroom's father).  
The king has become a ram.

*Conclusion:*—The segregation of the sexes has caused a deterioration in the variety of the dances and their territorial distribution shows how far the general culture of the province has affected the primitive Gond dances.

## II. The Charms

It is the general belief of the Hindus in Central India that the Gonds and also other aborigines are adepts in witchcraft. They are also supposed to be good herbalists. The Gond women have the reputation of being witches, especially casting the evil eye and causing illness<sup>1</sup>. The aboriginal priests, Gunias or Bhumias, are supposed to possess white-magic which counteracts the black magic of the women-witches.

However, in spite of the general belief of the Hindus about the magical pursuits of the Gond and the rest of aborigines, it appears on a closer study that there are few tribes among the primitive people of Central India whose profession is magic. The Baiga is supposed to be the most powerful of all magicians.

Conversing with the supernatural beings, assuming even animal forms, queer habits and all sorts of awe-inspiring, uncanny and mysterious practices make them the object of awe among their tribal and Hindu neighbours<sup>2</sup>. The Bhunjia are equally feared for their wild appearance, isolated living and their extreme precaution to avoid the physical contact not only of other tribes but also of daughters who are married and have left the house, and of men belonging to other septs. It is said that every Bhunjia's family has a separate hut for cooking. A married daughter or a man belonging to another sept cannot even touch it. When such 'pollution' takes place all the utensils are broken and the hut is burnt to ashes. The strong suspicion of black magic among the members of the same tribe is indeed very striking. In the south-eastern portion of the Raipur district, which is a stronghold of the Bhunjia, all sorts of stories are current about the magic spells of Bhunjia. Their hatred for the Hindus as well as for the Gond is well known. The Navagarh fort is supposed to have been a stronghold of Bhunjias in old days. It still possesses some relics of the gods of Chindaraja of Bhunjia (Though now it is a possession of the Gond and stone-relics of the ancestors especially Kachana Dhurva of Gonds are found there.) There is a legend current about an iron drum placed upside down on a big boulder on the hill, and that every year Bhunjias used to sacrifice a Brahmin before their ancestral

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1. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, I, pp. 89 ff.

2. Sterndale, Seoni, p. 304, Elwin, *The Baiga*, pp. 3308 ff. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, pp. 225 ff.

gods and peeled off the skin from his chest to fix on the drum. The drum was then beaten and the sacrifice was complete. But a Brahmin named Chingari, by the force of his superior magic, turned the drum upside down with the curse that whosoever touches the drum henceforward would die within a year. The drum as well as the implements of slaughter are still lying on the boulder untouched ever since by a human hand, with a thick coating of rust on them. Several other places are called 'Bahmnin-deota', where the sacrifice of a Brahmin was offered. There is still another sacred spot of Bhunjias on the top of a very steep and almost inaccessible hill near Manipur, in which the river Pairi (a tributary of Mahanadi) has its source. The Hindus as well as the Gond still feel terror-stricken to visit the spot. It is said to be the living source of the Bhunjia magic. The Kamar, the equally shy and secluded neighbours of the Bhunjia, in spite of their being in possession of a fair amount of indigenous magic, are very much afraid to offend the Bhunjia. The wild Bhunjia thus on account of the reputation of their dreaded magical practices are perhaps one of the most isolated tribes of the region about whom it is almost impossible to know anything definite.

Of all the parts of Central India, the south-eastern portion of the Raipur district appears to be especially disturbed and living under the perpetual dread of black magic. The Bhunjia are there, and the Kamar living in an area encircled by the citadels of the gods thirsty of the Brahmin's blood. To the extreme south are the Muria, who are jolly, very sociable, always dancing and singing, yet with the beating of their drums they can spread ill-luck and disease anywhere. The belief in the magical practices of the Muria is equally strong in Bastar. There are again the Ghasia women, known for their famous Karma dances and songs and also the most agile dancers, the Dewar women, a group of wandering tattooers, are famous for sorcery. The Dewar carry their gods in the form of huge flags of all colours wherever they go. Though the women are not supposed to touch or worship the gods themselves, by the aid of their men they can make the gods help them in their black-magic.

The Savar in Bilaspur district also command considerable reverence from their neighbours for their magical practices. Right from the centre of Madhya Pradesh, e.g., Seoni, to the eastern front of it, covering all districts in between, the Baiga rules as a magician. The social temperament of the Baiga makes him adorable to the people. His popularity as a magician is

unsurpassed in the central regions of India.

(1) The Baiga magician claims (like most of the Hindu magicians) an age-long heritage in the four great magician brothers, Daugan, Nindhan, Danantar and Madhakwar, and also the first great Baiga, called Nanga Baiga. The influence of the Nanga Baiga on the magical beliefs of the tribe is more active than that of the four original magician brothers. The blood that flew from Nanga Baiga's right side was red and a source of white-magic. The blood on the left side was black and one who would drink it would be a witch. Thus the youngest son of Nanga Baiga became the first Gunia. Kana Gondin, Sukhi Chamarin and Langri Dhobin were the first witches<sup>3</sup>.

(2) The Baiga have quite distinct grades of magicianship. The highest grade of the medicine-man is the Dewar. The Baiga Dewar is treated with greatest respect, he is competent to perform the Bidri and other agricultural rites. He can close the boundaries of villages against the man-eating tiger, he can stop earth-quakes by driving a nail into a tree<sup>4</sup>.

The Gunia 'confines his activities mainly to the war against the disease'.

'A Jan Pande is a clairvoyant. He divines by dreams and visioiss'<sup>5</sup>.

The Baiga magician is possessed of good knowledge of the most efficacious love-magic (Mohini or Mohani); he also controls the weather, brings animals under his spell, controls fertility and fights the diseases and endeavours to counteract the mischief that is caused by supernatural agencies<sup>6</sup>.

There are the Gharpagari also who know the special magic to cause rain and avoid hail-storms. The special charms of these people have not yet been investigated and studied.

The Ojha are good herbalists and their women are tattoopers. They are supposed to be the devotees of Singar-mata (goddess of toilette) in Chanda district. The goddess possesses three needles, one of gold, the other of silver and the third of iron. With the ink of the marking nut the goddess marks the bodies of young and old with her precious needles. With the golden needle she tattoos the small-pox design and with the silver needle measles, and chicken-pox. The iron needle she has given to the Ojha-women who tattoo on the body of the females various de-

3. Elwin, *The Baiga*, pp. 340-342.

4. Elwin, *op. cit.* p. 344.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 345 ff.

signs with herbal juices, to protect the limbs from evil eye and bring them immunity and strength. The profession of the Ojha women thus keeps them above the ordinary women and gives them a special prestige. In the district of Saugor also, unless there is an Ojha both to guide the ritual and defeat the evil spirits that cause illness and misfortune, the Gond feel diffident.

These are thus the tribes who have specialized in magic and witchcraft. Each tribe however, has its own medicine man, who also guides rituals. He is called the Baiga, the Gunia, Panda, among the tribes of the eastern portion of the province. He is also called the Bhumiya or Bhumka by the Korku and Gond in the north-eastern portion of the province. In Berar and Nagpur he is known as Pathari or Pujadi. The Bhariya of Chhindwara call him Bhat. Among the Kamar he is called Jhakhar. The Marias call him Perma, and so on.

It is interesting to know how the primitive magicians look upon their profession. 'Our magic, our charms are meant to protect the laymen' said a Gond magician to me. When I asked him whether he ever used his extraordinary lore to vanquish his enemies, he replied, 'Because laymen are afraid of us, they pay respect to us and they are so powerless. What harm can they do to us? Why should we form enmity with them? Our real enemies are the professionals, our rivals, the magicians. Each magician has a separate district for himself, a separate group of followers. Two magicians will never stay in the same village. They fight like dogs. I have used my magic against my rival when he tried to interfere with my work and caused me illness and misery. I had to turn back the magic against him. Now, either of us must destroy the other. But we work our way secretly, because it is a terrible fight between two magicians. Laymen cannot even bear the sight of it. Even the gods tremble. Such is our power. Our charms are different and secret. I learnt it from my father and his father taught him that. Only my eldest son will know it. My daughter shall not even hear a word. We say or see what we do. Women are not reliable. They menstruate. Things leak out of them. They only know witchcraft, a dealing with ghosts. They play a game of spoils. We do not. Men deal with gods and ancestors. I will tell you some of our obvious dealings, I cannot tell a lie about the gods' . . .

'In what way do you serve your people?' I asked him again.

'That's a simpler question', replied the clever man. 'I cure diseases with medicine and charms. I am called at every feast in marriage, birth and death in this and ten other villages. No

one knows the old songs better than I. I teach young boys and girls to dance and sing. I protect their legs and throats, lest they may be spoilt by evil eye. Even now I can by dance and songs attract young women to me. But I do not keep a hold on them now. I have no desire. I am getting old.'

Another Gond magician from the same district (Drug) I accosted was exactly the opposite of the clever-looking, confident, dignified well-to-do magician, I have referred to above. He was physically and socially a wreck. He came from a royal family. He had an instinctive liking for magic. He worshipped the gods regularly. He was the only man who could guide the most intricate details of the solemn pig-sacrifice correctly. He did not get the throne, but that did not matter. He was feared by the people. He knew medicine as well. He could do and undo things. But his children did not understand his capacity. They did not respect him. That's why they rotted in poverty. They never gave him money for a good drink. What could he do without a drink? How could he please the gods? How could he dance and sing without a drink? His children were fools; they drove him out of the house. So, he became a beggar as he could not make any offering to the gods; and they also did not fare better. It is Kali's age. Very bad. No liquor for an honourable gentleman. No respect for the sacred lore! These words he kept on repeating constantly. He was one of the worst drunkards I came across among the aborigines. Physically he was a ruin. Vice and starvation were stamped on his face. Yet people respected him for his magical abilities. He was a great man in his prime. If he drank a little less he still would have been the best. Usually a magician would face death rather than reveal a bit of his magic formulas to a stranger, but this strange little man was so much overwhelmed with his great thirst for liquor that he was prepared to sell any of the magical secrets only if his leaf-cup was constantly kept filled to the brim.

The charms I got through him are few, but they cover a good many aspects of life and serve as good specimens both of healing and destructive magic.

The text of each of the charms is obscure and often relates to an important primitive folk-tale which is now extinct. It is interesting to note that in the Agaria folk-lore viz. the references to the mighty mythical king Lohagandi and the two of their powerful deities Agyasur and Koyasur are often alluded to in these charms. So also virgin iron, a metal over which the Agaria in their occupation have a control, has a universal reputation for

magical qualities. The 'sex-element' in the iron ores also plays a very important part in primitive magic. In the former Jaypur state of Madras Presidency, the Agaria showed me two specimens of 'male' (Pharus) and 'female' (mai) iron ore. The male iron is dark, heavy, dull and cheap. The female iron is reddish, light, sparkling and costly. When the two ores are found lying side by side in one bed, it is considered very auspicious. The mixture of these two ores fetches a very high price for its lucky qualities. It is equally curious that the Agarias in Madhya Pradesh as well as in former Jeypur State and Mirzapur district<sup>7</sup> are not reckoned as magicians in spite of their occupation in virgin ore. It is only in Bengal that the Agaria, especially the women-folk, are famous for witchcraft<sup>8</sup>.

*The purpose of magical formulas*:—The charms can be employed for various good and bad purposes. The animosity between white and black magic is proverbial in the central parts of India as anywhere else. It is often the same man who possesses both the magics, though usually only women are stamped as notorious<sup>9</sup> witches. About black magic very little is known. The charms that are so far brought to light in Central India are examples of white magic only. On the whole the information regarding the magic and magicians in Central India is scanty.

The principal charms can be roughly classified as follows:—

(1) *Love Charms*:—In Central India love-charms are more resorted to by the aborigines than any other charm or magic.

(2) *Charms as cure of diseases*: The healing charms are vastly employed by the aborigines as all diseases are interpreted as a manifestation of the divine wrath.

(3) Charms to bind the Ghost.

(4) Charms to control the weather such as used by the Baiga and the Gharpagari.

(5) Charms to secure good crops.

(6) Charms to control animals.

My own collection gives specimens from the first three categories alone. I was able to procure them from the drunkard Gond Gunia and from a wandering group of the Ojha. All the charms come from the district of Drug.

7. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of N.W.P. and Oudh*, I, p. 11.

8. Crooke, *The Tribes & Castes of N.W.P. & Oudh*, I, p. 11.

9. Malkolm, *A Memoir of Central India*, II, pp. 214 ff. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, pp. 89 ff. and Crooke, *Folk-lore in N. India*, II, pp. 272 ff. Elwin, *The Baiga*, pp. 340-2, p.

The charms I have got are also few, but they are significant for the light they shed on the deities involved in primitive magic. The variety of the gods invoked in different charms is interesting to study.

*Mohani or Love-charms*:—The active and robust interest of the aborigines in love makes repulsed lovers to take the help of the magician. The most effective way of securing a person loved is to make him or her drink a potion in which the dirt from the chest of the seeker is mixed. In case of a woman, a magic can be very effective if a man secures a piece of her clothing soiled with menstrual blood<sup>10</sup>. The skull of a virgin affords a good utensil for making an efficacious love-potion<sup>31</sup>. The chief deity invoked in love charms is Mohini or Mohani. Mohini seems to be a deity of the lowest rank and malevolent, and perhaps is best propitiated by human sacrifice. The charm describes her as 'Khapardhari-mata' 'The skull-holding deity! There is not only one Mohini. The charm gives two sisters named Ohani and Mohani. There are also several Mohinis. But they do not seem to be propitiated individually. And often the singular name Mohani represents the whole group. Mohani also seems to be connected with the sixty-four deities, known as Yoginis and thus reveals a tendency to the Shakti cult.

*Charms for women*:—

(1) Istiwage is the possessor of pubic hair, his eyes are fixed on my feet, his eyes fixed on my breast, blissful Adakan-kalin and the holder of the skull, Ohani Mohani<sup>12</sup>, the two sisters, the eyes of all are fixed on my feet, my eyes on the goddess, the holder of the skull, sixty-four<sup>13</sup> may you stand there.

(2) The thread of fire, the pillar of wind, in the abode of Indra the burning rod, it remains in air, without support<sup>14</sup>, so the master of the world also, I have not given you, I give you

10. Elwin, *The Baiga*, p.

11. Mohini does not have a shrine in Central India though she is invoked in love charms all over the area. In Mirzapur and parts of Central India she is one of the village-gods. (Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India*, I, p. 94). In Orissa Mohani is invoked in love-charms but not reckoned as a village deity.

12. Khapardhari Mohani is a skull-holder—obviously the Shakti cult.

13. Probably the 'sixty-four Yoginis'. See Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India*, I, p. 94. The Charm thus strongly reveals the influence of Shaktism.

14. The beginning of the charm is obscure, the same wording occurs in the cholera-charm. The folk-tale implied in the charm is obscure.

twenty-two forts, or sister<sup>15</sup>, twenty-two forts shall be your kingdom, three worlds for Thakurain<sup>16</sup>, the master of the world<sup>17</sup>.

*Charms for men*:—Oh Siri Thakurji<sup>18</sup>, I ask for your blessing, the blessing of Siri Thakurji, Agasur's<sup>19</sup> charm, Bagasur's<sup>20</sup> charm, 'Elapath-bela<sup>21</sup>, the forcer's charm is to be got by force, the haunting charm is to be got by hunting, the sleep charm is to be got with wakefulness, the lover's charm is to be got by concentration of mind, oh, the cow eats the wild banana-leaves, drinks the water from the Ganges<sup>22</sup>, in your shadow is your calf tied, as you are released from the forest grove, oh Sun-god, you walk 'ruf-ruf<sup>23</sup>', your rule prevails, so let the four gods sit in her head.'

(2) 'Oh Siri Thakurji, I ask for your blessing, I ask for help for half an hour, the blessing of Siri Thakurji, there is Agesur's charm, there is Sotiya (sleep?) charm, I pay attention to it. Baramdeo's 'Baram-phas'<sup>24</sup>, it is made in the cow pen, the deities Sun and Moon walk 'ruf-ruf' as your deities, I tell you, you grow quickly, grow.'

*Fertility and abortion charms*:—The charms on fertility and abortions are very much alike; in many cases their text is identical. But the application varies. Child-birth is looked upon with great pride by the aborigines. Pregnancy is as much an event for rejoicing to the primitive folk as it is to their Hindu brethren! It is no wonder if fertility is enhanced both by medicinal and spiritual means. Yet abortion is much more common in the aborigines than we would possibly believe. A woman likes to get rid of the foetus (1) when the baby is illegitimate. Illegiti-

15. Can she be Mohini?

16. Thakurain is the queen, the wife of the first Gond chieftain. Probably Mohini and Thakurain are identical.

17. The latter portion of the text is also similar to the cholera charm. It may be that with little variation in word and application the charm can be used to propitiate different deities.

18. The first Gond king, may be the sun-god also.

19. Agyasur, the fire-god of the Agaria.

20. A person killed by tiger.

21. Obscure, Ela is probably a deity.

22. The Hindu influence of the cow and the Ganges. The legend is obscure.

23. Walking briskly. The Sun-god is released from the forest grove at day break and then his rule prevails.

24. There is a pun on the word 'phas', it means a 'dice' as well as a 'noose'. In the first case the dice is the universe. In the second case the noose of god Brahma is love, the creative force. The sun and moon are his steeds which he controls.

macy is condemned when a woman cohabits with a man of another caste, or with her husband's elder brother or any other 'objectionable' relation. Her connection with a cousin or a man from the same tribe is not so vehemently criticised. The husband may keep her or give her up to the other man. The baby is claimed by him and his people. But in the case of a stranger and objectionable or forbidden relation a woman mostly resorts to abortion. (2) Conception before marriage is not uncommon in the aborigines and is looked upon with contempt. (3) Some women of frivolous character do not like their sex-life to be hampered by frequent pregnancies. (4) Abortion is also brought about by black-magic in order to deprive a woman of her proud privilege of motherhood.

From the charms given below it is not possible to know the conditions precedent to abortion.

*Abortion charms:—*

(1) Oh Hingalajani!<sup>25</sup> goddess of the blow-pipe when you set to blow the blow-pipe, king Lohagandi was born, in a moment an old man, Kanchkunwar with whom shall I play, with whom shall I stay<sup>26</sup>, Sita mother Janaki knew him, oh Lachhamanji,

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25. Hingalajani is the deity residing in the blow-pipe (hingali) of the Agarias. Some say it is the winnow that is her seat. The legend about Hingalajani or Hingalajin that is prevalent in the Rewa State tells us that she was the youngest and prettiest of the seven sisters, Piri Deshahi being the eldest. Piri Deshahi was married to Murradeo of Madhogarh. Murradeo was infatuated by the beauty of Hingalajin and took her to bed. The news was reported to the Piri Desahi by her sisters who were jealous of Hingalajin. The injured wife, mad with rage, took an axe and cut off the heads of all soldiers in Murradeo's army. Later on she and her sisters travelled all over the world, spreading diseases. 'Twenty-one sisters of diseases' were born and sent out into the world by Piri Deshahi. (Elwin, *the Baiga*, pp. 363-65). What happened of Hingalajin later on we do not know.

The charm may be taken as a sequel to the above story. When Hingalajin gave birth to Lohgandi she like her six sisters and the twenty-one disease sisters seem to have the power of causing disturbance in the human body. Her son definitely has, and he is the disciple of Betal, the king of the uncanny, ghostly world. His name was Kanekkuwar Lohagandi who could change his form.

Hingalajin is worshipped in Sind and in the Colaba district of Maharashtra also. We do not know anything more about the goddess in this area. (Enthoven, *Folklore of Bombay*), p. 61, 123.

26. Sita always seems (according to the aboriginal folk-lore of Central India) going after her brother-in-law Lachhaman. Lachhaman is a celibate, 'the professor of the seed'. Hingalajani on the defeat of her son fights with him and displaces the seed of the foetus.

brother of Paramesur, this son of Hingalajani. when the earth was not on friendly terms with him, Lachhamanji became angry, Betal the guru of the former was thrown in the seven seas, fight took place, a deadly bamboo was cut, one blade was thrown in the seven seas one blade on the throne of the mother, big boulders fall in the courtyard of the sister, in the courtyard of the daughter Bidasin<sup>27</sup> and relatives, and of brother, what has taken place on the earth, a nine-storied house of Saj-wood stood there, in one floor twelve cart-loads of wood were thrown, the son stood as he was. Mother where do you go? I am going to wander, I shall overcome Lachhaman, name me, Oh mother! In the first birth king Lohgandi, in the second birth Kariyakunwar, in the third birth Bithilwa Kuwar, king Maradeo<sup>28</sup>, king Naradeo's son Kariyakuwar, let the sea get ruffled, let the earth shake, let the foetus shake.

(2) Oh! king Bijar's<sup>29</sup> son is Bhainsasur, Bhainsasur's son is Koylasur, Koylasur's son is Agyasur, Agyasur's son is Arandano, Aradano's son is Jaradano, he eats twelve fields, twelve granaries, drinks water from twelve tanks, I point my finger at me when you should eat, your belly will be filled, what shall I do, the string of bees, the locket of the string of bees has fallen, the chips of the locket fly about, now I strike with a sword, one share you eat; my guru's share is sixty two and a half cages, it orders me I understand you<sup>30</sup>.

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27. Nothing is known about Bidasin.

28. Maradeo seems to be the same as Murradeo, and Kariyakuwar or Kaneh kuwar, is his son by Hingalajin. In his previous birth he was Lohgandi.

29. Nothing is known about Bijar. Bhainsasur is a demon worshipped all over the provinces. The following are the Agariya deities. Koylasur is the coal-deity. The parenthood of him bestowed on Bhainsasur, probably furnishes the broken link of mythical records of the Agaria as well as the connection of a special tribal deity with a deity which is acknowledged by all tribes in the province.

30. Sympathetic and symbolic magic is also resorted to when the charms are exercised. These are coupled with medicinal treatment, e.g., when abortion is voluntary, the exudation of a plant (cactus) called Phondar or Phindar is placed in the hollow of a coconut and the coconut is baked in the fire of cow-dung. The pregnant woman then is made to eat a piece of it with a betel-leaf. If abortion is involuntary, the pregnant woman without her knowledge is given to eat a betel-leaf with a man's semen in it, with the idea that as the semen contains 'seed' it is bound to enter the woman's womb when she swallows it and this seed may consequently displace the one that is already settled in it. There is also a pun on the word 'Phundar' which means a genital in the colloquial vocabulary. Similarity of nomen-

*Charm to conduce health and fertility of womb after abortion:* King Maradeo, Maradeo's son Samvara Maradeo, Samvara Maradeo's son Madarait, Maradait's son Somkuvar, and daughter Somkuvvari, let the foetus shake, let the foetus fall, let the earth quake, let the sea get ruffled, the sixteen husbands you leave, Krishna Bhagvan be born in this womb<sup>31</sup>.

*The Charms of difficult labour:—*

(1) King Dasarath, mother Kosalya, king Pandav, mother Kutma, Siri Paramesur, mother Janki, Siri Paramesur, mother Rukmini, stand here Mahadeo-Parvati<sup>32</sup>, you are the saviours. You are the bringers of difficulty. How does it happen, oh stander on the ghat, move away from the passage<sup>33</sup>, five gods are standing, the cow is being killed<sup>34</sup>, Paramesurji let birth take place quick, oh Hanumanji, you should not stand here<sup>35</sup>, as Ramchand holds the earthen<sup>36</sup> pot. If his object remains unfulfilled,

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clature plays an important part in magic. The resemblance of the exudation also to semen is striking.

In case the treatment does harm to the patient, she is given a gruel of sago with black pepper, ghee, and sugar mixed in it. (From Drug.)

Other methods of conducting a miscarriage, well known in all parts of the province are (1) Drinking a mixture of gun-powder and water or liquor, trice a day. (2) Drinking a decoction of mahua-flowers, a cupful every three hours. (3) Insertion of a stick of a castor tree, which is kept on the roof of the house and also its decoction.

Similarly in Mandla and Bilaspur when a woman's fertility is to be destroyed, a living female crab is buried on her threshold and the ground is trampled with foot.

In Drug a woman is given a decoction of the root of a plant called 'amarbel' to stop menses. In order to restart menstruation flowers of 'rajgendi' (yellow dhatura) are eaten.

31. The mythological geneologies given in these charms are very puzzling and difficult to explain. They are conflicting and do not help us to rebuild the legends hinted at in the charms. It is certain that all these names are names of the disease godlings of a malevolent nature, which abound in the central provinces as in every other adjoining province. The names only help us to map out a regional distribution of the deities.

32. The names of the gods and the way they are invoked is essentially in keeping with the Hindu tradition.

33. This suggests difficult labour.

34. The cow is the woman, very typical Hindu simile.

35. Hanuman, according to the Hindu conception, is a bachelor, a woman-hater, and so he must not be present where delivery takes place, lest his presence should prevent easy birth. The only woman he should associate with is his own mother. He should touch her breast and kindle her maternal affection, make things easy for another prospective mother.

36. When labour is difficult, the Gunia goes to the well and chanting the labour-charm draws a potful of water. The earthen pot then is trans-

you go and hold the breast of your mother.

(2) Another charm in mixed Gondi and Hindi is employed by the Dhur Gonds, the wandering tattooers in Drug. The charms given above are in the local dialects of Eastern Hindi, and the rest that follow are also the same. Yet we do not find any difference in the contents. The style is more song-like. It is more Hinduised than the abortion charms.

There is doubt in the mind of all,  
The expectant mother is unconscious.  
Come, oh pot of magic water,  
With the strength of the hero.  
Mahadeo and Parvati will surely come,  
And the result will certainly be.  
The minds of all will be at rest.<sup>37</sup>

*The charms of diseases*:—The charms of diseases are extensive and of a varied nature according to the variety of the deities invoked. The disease deities are countless in Central India. According to the notion of the aborigines the root of all diseases lies in black magic, divine wrath, and displeasure of the ancestors. The Gunia divines which it is that causes illness and according to it he counteracts black-magic or propitiates the family god or the local deity as the case may be, or the infuriated ancestor. There are numerous deities that are supposed to cause illness, of which the most important are the following:—

(1) The Mother Earth and the deities connected with her. The earth receives the dead, and keeps them in her bosom. This imparts to her special destructive powers<sup>38</sup>, a partial manifestation of which is illness. Secondly, the legend of creation gives us 'twenty-one earth sisters'<sup>39</sup> as the white soil, red soil, disease soil, barren soil, etc. As the seeds of all these soils which foster life and can also destroy it, are combined in the earth, she is

ferred from one to the other in succession by the male relatives (from the husband's side) of the expectant mother, (the husband, his father and elder brother excluded) and reached to the labour-room. The Gunia then gives some water to the woman to drink and the rest is sprinkled on her body. This is supposed to set matters right.

<sup>37</sup> Symbolic magic also plays an important part in causing easy labour. The seeds of 'tiritā' plant (tiriya also means a woman in colloquial Hindi) in water. The seeds burst open and so does the womb of the woman and she delivers.

As far as the medical treatment is concerned the insertion of the castor stick in the womb is considered effective.

<sup>38</sup>. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*, p. 240.

<sup>39</sup>. See Elwin, *The Baiga*, p. 310.

supposed to be a patron of health as well as disease and decay. She gives and takes away. She nourishes the beings and demolishes them. She is manifested in several forms of the popular goddesses. All the village goddesses, especially the 'seven sisters' are connected with the disease function of the earth. The seven sisters according to the legends current in Central India, can be the 'seven sisters', the eldest of them being Piri Deshai or Deshahi Mata and the youngest the Hinglajani or Hingalajin. The creation legends also mention the seven sisters as the seven sea nymphs, the daughters of Daugan Guru who caused abdominal pain in Parvati which resulted in menstruation and pangs of child-birth in women<sup>40</sup>. In Berar also the seven Asaras<sup>41</sup> the water-nymphs are looked upon as malevolent and create diseases which are connected with water viz. urinary troubles, menstrual troubles, dropsy, chest troubles, rheumatism, fever, sore-eye, pus formation, dysentery, etc. On Bastar side, the seven Joginis are called the seven sisters who preside over diseases<sup>42</sup>. The seven sisters in the south are also looked upon as malevolent and patrons of diseases<sup>43</sup>.

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40. See p. 210.

41. *The Buldhana District Gazetteer*, pp. 110 ff. *The Amraoti District Gazetteer*, p. 118.

42. Census, 1911, X, i, p. 89.

43. The small-pox goddess, called Sitala or Mari is supposed to be the eldest and most influential. In the Telugu country 'the seven sisters' are (1) Peddama, (2) Isondamma, (3) Mareamma, (4) Ankalamma, (5) Vasukota, (6) Ellamma, (7) Nakulamma, (8) Arikamma.

In Mysore the seven sisters are called 'the Mari sisters'. They are (1) Bisal-mari (fever or hot goddess), (2) Gurrall Mari (asthma), (3) Kelmari (Earthen pot), (4) Hiri Devata (eldest sister), (5) Irugere Mari, (6) Chamundiswari, (7) Uttanhalli. Potrazu is said to be the brother or husband of these sisters.

In Coimbatore they are said to be emanating from Parvati. They are (1) Senakatchi Amman or Pidari, (2) Koli Amman, (3) Ulkirani Amman, (4) Akari Amman, (5) Vanchi Amman, (6) Selli Amman, (7) Kunthan Amman. Their brother is Iyenar.

In the South Mari is considered the eldest of the seven sisters and she is both a small-pox and cholera goddess. She is the goddess of all epidemics. She is identified with Sitala. The legend about her origin says that Nagawalli was the wife of sage Pirnu, famed for her beauty and virtue. Once the sage was away from home, the Tirmurthi (Dattatraya) came to visit her, and see whether she was beautiful and virtuous. When the three men entered the house and asked for shelter, she took them in. But afraid of the scandal it might have raised she turned the guests into children. They got angry at this offence and cursed her so that her beauty faded and her face became dotted with small-pox. When Pirnu returned home he found

There are also 'twenty-one disease sisters', the creator of whom is Piri Deshahi. They are:

- ( 1 ) Chilkin Piri who causes griping pain in the stomach.
- ( 2 ) Bai Hardalin causes yellow vomit.

his wife disfigured. He lost his temper over it and drove her out of the house and declared that she should be born a demon in the next world and cause the spread of the disease.

In memory of the change Pirnu found in her she was called Mari (changed) in the next birth.

Another legend about her says that she was the daughter of a pious Brahmin whom a learned Pariyah youth married by a trick. Later when she came to know his treachery, she killed her husband and burnt herself to death. That is why a male buffalo representing the husband is slaughtered to propitiate Mari, as the woman was called later on. (Henry Whitehead, *The Village Deities in the South*, pp. 111 ff.)

The legends thus point out that Mari is a prominent disease deity, the deadliest foe of mankind, who always needs propitiation. The legends also suggest that it is the strife between the husband and wife that has sunk her to a demon existence the sole purpose of which is the spread of disease.

Mari is thus in South India an emblem of epidemics especially small-pox as well as cholera. As we proceed northwards, Sitala (the cool one) becomes the small-pox goddess and Mari is the cholera goddess, though many a time they are combined. Sitala's cult is more pronounced in the north and even there is a change in her bearing. She is not malevolent, unless specially provoked. She is even considered a lover of children and their guardian. In the Gangetic valley she is said to be a Muslim girl who craved to be a Hindu, converted into Sitala in the next birth. (Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India, I*, pp. 125 ff.) Sitala thus exists apart from Mari who is always malevolent and destructive. Can we put forward a conjecture from this that the Sitala cult is a drift from the North which has mingled into the cult of the disease godlings of the South? The cooling things like water, fruit and flowers offered to Sitala and bloody animal sacrifices invariably offered to Mari and to Mata, the village mother, also indicate a distinct difference in the ideologies which form the bases of the complex Devi cult in India. It also seems that Sitala is of a more recent and civilized origin than the blood-thirsty vindictive, non-pleasable Mari.

What the Desahi or Jeshahi sisters are in the Eastern parts of the Central regions of India, the Mari sisters are in the South. Looking to the problem of the female deities connected with disease, and especially of a malevolent, unappeasing nature, it seems that the cult is far more prominent and of a much longer standing in the South than in the North. It is also proved from the form of animal sacrifice (especially pig-sacrifice) which is always conducted by Pariyas, or the aboriginal priests like the Baiga, Pardhan, etc., that the cult is of a non-Brahmanic origin. Yet it does not seem to be an aboriginal institution as the aborigines of Assam, the Nagas as well as the Koya Gond of Bastar and Godavari tract, the Bhunjia and Kamar (as also among the Baiga) who stay in remote parts where popular Hinduism evolved in the villages for countless centuries, of which the Devi worship with its multiple aspects forms a part, do not venerate these disease deities.

- ( 3 ) Dispiri Mata gives syphilis.
- ( 4 ) Mirgi Devi brings epilepsy.
- ( 5 ) Naikin Bai attacks the bullocks of the Lamana.
- ( 6 ) Hadphoran Marhi gives small-pox.
- ( 7 ) Kairadeshahi causes children to be still-born.
- ( 8 ) Durpatta Mata prevents child-birth.
- ( 9 ) Maura Mata gives children fits.
- (10) Ghatchindan 'catches cattles by the throat'.
- (11) and
- (12) Baihi and Bauri Devi cause madness.
- (13) Kapni Piri gives ague.
- (14) Chigan Mata 'cripples a man's hands and feet'.
- (15) Dhahu Dhukan causes pain in chest.
- (16) Raksin Mata causes itch.
- (17) Galadevi brings mumps.
- (18) Parka Undaran Mata is 'the opener of doors' and makes all vessels rattle.
- (19) Phoki Mata causes dysentery in cattle.
- (20) Churelin Mata goes to young men in their sleep.
- (21) Jappi Mata causes sleepy sickness<sup>44</sup>.

Looking to the names of the deities it is evident that they are not of a homogeneous origin and are greatly influenced by the popular Devi cult with its malevolent aspects.

There are also other disease deities (all female) like Jarhi Mata causing fever and Khokli Mata causing cough and so on. Hardul is the only male-god causing cholera. But the entire problem of the disease godling is so complex and so little explained so far that we can hardly say anything more about it than what has already been discussed.

*The charm of cholera*:—I got only one disease charm which runs thus:—"The thread of fire, pillar of wind, flames in the abode of Indra, neither on earth nor in the sky, nor in the ether is your cradle. King Maradeo is born, after him Sanvara Maradeo, after whom Desahi Mata was born. All the three worlds, sun and moon, all gods ask, what has taken place on the earth, fire has raged and the flow of water has stopped. Brahmaji consulted Veda, did not find a way<sup>45</sup>. His lotus leaf, on it a baby is playing, what has happened on earth? Sun and moon have vanished, women who went to fetch water on the ghat have sunk

44. Elwin, *The Baiga*, pp. 364-5.

45. Even Brahmadeo gets baffled when Maradeo and the rest work against his creation!

into the ghat, mother cow has stopped eating, in Patal, Rayapani<sup>46</sup>, who stays there consulted Veda, child Paramesar, his body became hot on account of burning, half an hour Paramesar became a king, in twenty-two forts, he made kings, he named them, brother Chandela, king Chauhan<sup>47</sup>, king Maradeo, Samvara Maradeo, youngest sister was born like her brothers, give me, oh brothers, pension for bodice and loin cloth, go, we have given you fifty-two forts, her belly was not filled, she returned to her brothers, my belly is not filled, give me pension, we give you a golden skull, we give you five rings of diamond and gold, you live on grams, give me a name, oh brothers, you shall be called the genuine Dhimarin<sup>48</sup>, name my residence, oh brothers, we give you seven forts, seven drummers, seven musicians we give you, oko Bahyar, koko Bahyar<sup>49</sup>, walker in the air, daughter of Sankarli<sup>50</sup> burner of Lanka Drupadi<sup>51</sup> you be called!"

*Charm to drive away ghosts*:—The popular belief is that all ailments, physical or mental are due to a person's being possessed of a ghost. The technical word for the control of the ghost is 'binding' it. It is believed that the magic formula acts as a net in which the troublesome ghost is caught and then it cannot escape. Usually, the spirits of the dead are thus 'bound' and confined to a 'spot'; it may be a tree or a spot. If it is a tree, offerings are annually kept underneath it, or when any trouble arises in the family. If it is a spot, a crude shrine is made or even a stone is marked in the name of the ghost and offerings are made as usual.

The two charms I got from the Gonds in Drug are charms different in ideology from the charms given above. The charms run thus:—

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46. Seems to be an important resident of the nether-world, well-versed in magic and counteracts the deeds of Brahma. So Brahma is forced to bestow royalty on Maradeo and the rest who probably belonged to Rayapani's fold.

47. Chandela and Chauhan are Rajput kings.

48. Fisherwoman.

49. Obscure names.

50. Obscure names.

51. The cult of Draupadi the wife of the Pandavas is widespread in the South. In Tamil districts she is likened to Pidari. (Henri Whitehead, *op. cit.* p. 113). In Cochin among the Veland she is connected with menstruation and is called Panchali. (Iyer, *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, I, p. 157). In Central India she forms a part—the body—of the physical structure of the gram-deota. (Crooke, *Folk-lore in Northern India*, I, p. 94).

- (1) The Son of wind, the hero Hanumat,<sup>52</sup>  
 Is ready with his fifty-two weapons,  
 After binding the ghost,  
 Climbs the Saj tree,<sup>53</sup>  
 The enmity of the past.<sup>54</sup>

(2) The following charm is used to bind the spirit of the dead in the cemetery only:—

“The trunk of the mango tree, wandering the whole of the earth, work goes on in the forest-grove<sup>55</sup>, on the crown of knives the corpse burns, the ashes go to demon Ratimadeo<sup>56</sup>, the son of Kanjan<sup>57</sup>, the strength of Hanuman, eighty millions approach Pir Paigum<sup>58</sup>, approach Balkum<sup>59</sup>, oh Gurunarsing<sup>60</sup>, remain awake, all ghosts and evil spirits go away, the chains of the cemetery are of iron, oh Bhavani for three nights, remain away, oh protector from harm and beating and haunting.”

*Conclusion*:—From the foregoing discussion regarding the charms of the aborigines in Central India, and their background also to a certain extent, we can say that almost all the mishaps in life are centred round the physical discomfort in man. This discomfort is manifested chiefly in sexual dissatisfaction or some illness. Disease is looked upon as a result of supernatural wrath, and hence a host of disease-godlings are propitiated every now and then, whether they belong to the aboriginal fold or not.

Another surprising thing came to my notice when I studied the legends of the origin of the diseases as well as the disease-godlings in South India, in Central India and the adjoining Orissa State. It is this. A peculiar sex-complex, viz. strife be-

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52. The name of Hanuman is connected with the control of ghosts in Hindu beliefs. His shrine is found in a Hindu cemetery in the Maratha portion of the area.

53. This is the primitive regard for the Saj tree, a resort not only of Budha-deo but of the departed souls of the tribe. When a spirit of the dead in thus bound by Hanumat's skill, he has no other way but to remain on the tree though against its own will. The other souls stay there in content and are reborn as members of the tribe and perpetuate it.

54. The enmity between the ghost and the person possessed is here said to be confined to the Saj tree now.

55. The ghost stays on the mango tree, wanders anywhere on the earth and plans mischief in the forest.

56. Ratimadeo is probably Ratmai.

57. Kanjan is probably a mistake for Anjani, mother of Hanuman.

58. The prophet Mohamed, the magical powers of Mahomedan fakirs are very much esteemed by all. The Pir is greatly feared and respected.

59. Obscure.

60. Gurunarsing is a female deity though the name is masculine.

tween the husband and wife (at least one of whom or both are looked upon as gods), seems to have resulted in the idea of disease, intense physical pain and caused the disease godlings. As for instance, both the legends of the origin of Mari, the small-pox goddess, give us an account of the final and sudden break of the matrimonial alliance. In one case the husband drives his wife out of the house and curses her to be a sponsor of small-pox, because she lost her beauty. In the other legend it is the wife who curses her husband for cheating her in marriage and breaking the sacred rule that a woman should not marry a man who belongs to a lower caste, especially a Pariyah.

In the creation legends of Central India also, and especially in the menstruation legend<sup>61</sup>, Parvati and Mahadeo are shown to be attacking each other. Parvati sends a tiger to scare her husband and he defeats the tiger by dispatching wild dogs on his trail. The struggle however is very mild and almost an affair of joke, but some sort of sex antagonism is not to be missed in the story.

In the same legend Parvati is said to have not only disobeyed her husband who forbade her to eat the red vegetable of 'seed' but also to step in the seventh room of the home where the seven Samundaria sisters, were making merry. When Parvati entered the room she suspected them to be in some intrigue with her husband and connected his long absence from home to the seven beautiful maidens. She laughed to herself when the idea struck her and the nymphs took offense at that and cursed her that she would suffer from abdominal troubles, which would cause menstruation and that pregnancy and childbirth would be a horror, not only to her but to every mother on the earth.

Another legend from the Khond also suggests a terrible strife between the god Bara Penu, the god of light, and his wife Tari, the earth, which has resulted in similar pangs of childbirth in women. The fault of Tari was that she never even scratched the back of her husband who was such a mighty god and respected everywhere. Conjugal familiarity was no excuse for such a neglect.

It also seems that though the 'seven-sisters' cult is spread widely all over India, it is more prominent in Southern India than anywhere else. In Central India also the influence of these disease sisters is weaker in the northern parts than in the southern portion which comes directly under the influence of Telugu culture.

<sup>61.</sup> vide pp. 246, ff.