

HAWABAI MUSTAFA SHAH

ABORIGINAL
TRIBES OF INDIA
AND PAKISTAN

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Aboriginal Tribes Of India And Pakistan

by Hawabai Mustafa Shah





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Preface

I could never realize how difficult it is to write encomium about a wife one loved so intensely and who reciprocated in such a large measure, her love and devotion. Hawa had all the great attributes of head and heart that a woman can be proud of and for a husband to admire. We had a great deal of exchange of views and debated, but still thought so much alike. Her intellectual capacity, administrative efficiency and literary excellence, I always admired. She helped me in selecting articles and quotations for Sind Quarterly exactly I would want. Our minds always met whether we differed seriously or not. Our logomachy always ended in smiling or in laughter. Her asthma, which she contacted when she was in England, began to bother her for a long time, when suddenly it became cardiac; and within twelve hours of this attack she died and left me for good.

She was not only a great teacher but also a consummate educational administrator. She was a marvellous combination of strength and kindness. She had taught for nearly thirty five years of her life, and gave the best of her efforts and endeavours to the profession of teaching. The great endearment she earned in her college life among both her colleagues and her students, is a tribute to her. She is remembered with affection even today.

This is a work which was sent to me after her death, by her dear friend and class-mate, Miss Venita Vanchoo from Allahabad. This is a thesis presented to the University for her Master's degree in anthropology after studying and observing the details of the life, habits and traditions of the Kolhis and the Bhils among whom she lived — a brave thing to do for a Muslim girl in 1942-43. One can only admire her simplicity and accuracy of writing. This is a real original work of research and scholarship published nearly nine years after her death. May her soul rest in peace.

After a married life of twenty two years she has left a tremendous void in my life, and with indelible memories of happiness. Literally it was my good fortune to have married her.

SAYID GHULAM MUSTAFA SHAH

Introduction

The untimely death of Prof. Mrs. H.B. Mustafa Shah has robbed us of the benefits of a lady anthropologist (already so very few in number) who, not content with the knowledge of anthropology gained from college text-books, had herself embarked on field research in the subject and has left behind a book on the Bhils and the Kolhis (aboriginal tribes of India) which would be a credit to any anthropologist of repute.

Not many, even amongst the better educated amongst us, seem to care to know the importance of anthropology.

Somehow it is thought to be somewhat of a 'remote subject', dealing mostly with 'primitives' and 'aboriginals' far removed from 'our' 'modern' 'civilization' and 'culture'.

That is not at all so.

This is the Age Of Science.

This is the Age of Observation, of Experiment and of Reason.

There is just no known limit to these three processes, now tremendously at work all the progressive world over, with breakneck speed, and in all branches of human interest and knowledge.

Anthropology is one such branch.

The Oxford Dictionary defines Anthropology as "Whole science of man, human physiology and psychology; study of man as an animal". "An animal" true; but not a mere biped; the animal who builds whole artificial worlds from the Natural resources he finds around and, now, creates things not found in nature also.

He is the most fascinating of all 'animals'. The anthropologist falls a prey to this unending fascination.

So he begins his unending study of Man as an Animal with the study of the humans who can be said to be living more near natural surroundings than those who live in far more complex artificial surroundings like towns and cities.

He tries to study Man's origins, his mental work with his physical equipment, the origins of customs and manners and all other social continuities.

So, in search of these origins, he studies the 'Primitives'.

Primitives means 'PRIME' people, not Secondaries that the rest of us happen to be. So, the term 'Primitives' is not to be used as a condescending term; but as the acknowledgement that without the "primitives" we would not have been there at all. Our debt of gratitude to them can never be repayable.

They are our ancestors in the most demonstrable sense of the term. It is they who have laid the foundations and, in many instances, the very superstructure of civilizations and culture; of language and thought and other Primary INVENTIONS.

Those whom we may, in our haughtiness and forgetfulness, derisively call Primitives are the people who have been historically outstripped, mostly through Force and Fraud by such of us, from amongst them, who through historical accidents, coincidences, and clean breakthrough of creativity and social and militant insight, subdued the rest and have reduced them to

political, social, cultural and economic helplessness and dispossession of their habitats and have left them utterly at our own pitiless mercy and heartless exploitation, not only of their bodies but, worse, also of their very minds and spirit.

The present day Bhils and Kolhis, to be found in many parts of this subcontinent, are amongst such a cowed-down, brow beaten and dispossessed people.

Perhaps no Humanist in the world can study the fate of the Red Indians, the Negros, the Eskimos, the Australians, the Movaries and Bhils and Kolhis without help-less compassion on seeing how "man eats man" in the name of civilization and culture.

Mrs. H.B. Mustafa Shah Is obviously one such Humanist who embarked upon the study and field research in anthropology of the Bhils and Kolhis, with a human heart.

And what a work of Art itself Is her study of these people! Not at all content with the usual prescribed format of students' field work for thesis requirements in the Universities, she has, as can be seen from the study of this book, gone deeper into the humanistic values 'of the purest ray serene' she found in her study of the culture of the Bhils and the Kolhis.

Ponder on one of her statements: "In the eyes of the Bhil the speaking of untruth is one of the most despicable of crimes. Whatever happens, the Bhil will always give a most correct description even when it is detrimental to himself. Even in case of homicide he has puzzled the courts of law and justice. The uneducated Bhil always confesses without restraint and his strong urge to speak the truth is by no means diminished by the knowledge that punishment may be hard".

When she points out that the uneducated Bhil speaks the truth irrespective of consequences she shows us how great he is. She echoes the statement of Robert Burns that 'an honest man, though ever so poor, is king of man for all that'.

And then see for yourself what happens to the 'civilised' Bhil: "The slightly polished Bhil," she says, "behaves differently. He uses his insufficient knowledge in such a way that any commitment of his appears distorted in his favour; he hides and conceals the truth with the express aim of sparing himself from punishment". Then she points out that because of this corruption of the very soul of man that 'civilization' causes, the aboriginal concerned with the chastity of his soul condemns any sort of education, firmly believing that the ability to read and write undermines traditions and customs and It is not astonishing that he eyes with disfavour the influence exercised by town".

How many of us can say that?

And "The uneducated Bhil Is always fond of his wife" she says..."To desert a wife, is, according to Bhil tradition, an unpardonable act".

Call THEM uncivilised?

Then Mrs. H. B. Mustafa Shah shows how, not content with having dispossessed the aboriginals of their lands, the civilised man from towns and cities, is relentlessly bent upon further exploiting them since ages on end.

The "Bhagat" or the priest from the towns and cities extracts religious tributes. And the money lender enslaves these people without any pity or mercy. "Despite the fact that the Bhils are so jealous of their personal freedom, they never attempted to counteract the Bhagat's endeavour to render the Bhil slaves of his influence... The Bhagat is the intermediary between the gods and the Bhils, and superstitious to the highest degree, no Bhil dares to contradict". And yet, "No body has already been more attacked than the Bhagat", his prestige, however, remains unshaken thanks to his own cleverness".

The book is, thus, replete, not only with pure academic objectives and above all, verifiable findings and observations, but also with that humanistic insight that makes it eminently readable for the general public also.

It is a spectrum of the life and living of the Bhils and the Kolhis. And what a social spectroscopic study of the Bhils and Kolhis life she has made, even as a student then!

The nine chapters of her study contain within themselves most easily and most interestingly stated, and above all, most humanistically written aspects of the Bhils and Kolhis life, beginning with

- a) Ancestry, history, occupation and general characteristics
- b) Death and burial customs
- c) Folk thoughts
- d) Cosmology
- e) Religion
- f) Social life
- g) Customs and manners
- h) Cultural identity
- i) Folk lore and folk songs

Throughout this book one sees that the life of the Bhils and the Kolhis is not at all isolated, in spite of the struggle for cultural identity. The more complex cultures around are relentlessly exerting their pressures.

Mrs. Shah is not at all blind to such of the features in the life of the Bhils that have remained unhelpful to them. She is critical and awake.

One of such, as she points out, is their excessive fondness for alcohol. Also, after all is said and done, at least in some respects she finds them to be less mature than, say, the Gonds and some other tribes in the subcontinent.

Going "beyond the bounds of duty", as only a strict matter-of-fact anthropologist, and wielding the cudgel of humanism and ethics, Mrs. Shah has come to the defence of the politically, socially, culturally, economically bulldozed Bhils and Kolhis and also other tribes in no uncertain terms.

Who else, at least from amongst us, but she can in their defence so forcefully plead with elegance and empathy, in these unforgettable words.

'Aborigines and their primitive culture acquired, thanks to distorted reports of explorers, who usually culminate their investigations by releasing a flood of minimising and prejudicial literature on the subject, acquired the reputation of forming the elements of the lowest possible strata of human advance and this state of affairs became an ill-used criterion applied by mankind who, only too eager to cover its own shortcomings, loves to draw attention to those inhabitants of the earth less advanced (or should one; say less shrewd) than itself.

Contempt and the cherished manner of looking down on less fortunate fellow-creatures resulted consequently in harmful misunderstanding which could so far not be drowned by the voice of a very limited number of interested and understanding investigators. Even the school books are packed with wrong and entirely misleading descriptions of the life, modes of living and cultural manifestations of aborigines and it is hardly astonishing that this type of

knowledge-once established In the receptive mind of a young brain tends to remain fixed. The mere mention of the word “Junglewallah” provokes a shudder, projecting phantastic scenes of naked tribesmen hunting In hostile virgin-forests, notions of squalor and filth, primitive life in caves and blood thirsty feasts on unspeakable repulsive kinds of food.

The press, magazines and films further corrupt the minds of children and adults by presenting the aborigines in a manner irresponsible and positively prejudicial, exploiting by this means man’s utterly regrettable inclinations to see and to hear something about hair-raising habits of some isolated and neglected tribe. The impression is created that one should be very glad to belong to a more cultured circle, apart from a deliberately fostered tendency to keep aloof from those wretched creatures the sight of which is already enough to drive anybody to fits. Did not every one of us read thrilling stories of aborigines who roast their slain opponents?

Certainly cannibalism did exist though it has long been proved that cannibalism was based on a carnal lust and cruelty, but nobody felt prevented to believe that this kind of barbaric lack of consideration that contributed so much to the rather doubtful reputation of aborigines is nothing else than a ritualistic manifestation of a certain type of culture excellent in the eyes of the adherents, but not too pleasing in the eyes of the civilised world.

Besides, the city-dweller whose whole outlook, on life is exclusively centred on appearances, make-ups, aping of superiors, fashions and super-smart chit-chat on world-reforms, brotherhood and mutual understanding etc. feels instinctively repulsed when he is compelled to contact a stray-member of an aboriginal tribe.

The Junglewallah is usually the exponent of poverty and shabbiness, his simple manners do not make him eligible to membership of dandy clubs. In addition, the tribesman unwillingly contributes to the maintenance of wrong ideas as to himself. This shy and helpless behaviour, his embarrassment apparently stress that he merely belongs to the scum of mankind.

This Impression is indeed quite wrong; some junglewallahs may be rascals, the majority, however, incorporated into the simple but pure culture of their tribes, though less civilised as they may be, positively represents a most valuable type of man.

A culture sparkling with life, simplicity, honesty and void of hypocrisy. These assets alone are worthy of any effort. Present day’s life has become so cramped an affair, complicated in all its details, dominated by greed, falsehood and hypocrisy, boredom and lack of sincerity that it is imperative to question the usefulness of so wretched a force which our lives have happened to become through our own fault.

Should we not listen to the song of aborigines peacefully relaxing in the shade of a mohur tree?

A song so free from worldly haste, so rich in sound, saturated with a melodious narrative of love, frank longing, fulfilment and happiness.

This is the language we should learn to understand and once understood, we will cease to be slaves of our own life and our self-created institutions.

Let alone the many other virtues of this book; if Mrs. Shah, as a student and teacher of anthropology over here had done nothing else than to have expressed her defence of the essential greatness and essential humanness of the maligned, scorned, exploited and culturally and spiritually brow-beaten aborigines who had done others no known wrong, even then, she deserves a niche in the temple of humanism. But she has done much more. She has tried to touch the strings of justice and mercy in the lyre of our heart with the fingers of scientific investigation of the problem of human beings, the Bhils and Kohlis.

She is no more with us. But she remains our Margret Mead.

Dr. G.M. Mehkri

Ancestry, History, Occupation, General Characteristics

The Bhils belong to the so-called aboriginals of India. This is practically all that is known about their ancestry. There was a time when they were regarded as Dravidians, closely related to the Gonds. But this opinion has been discarded. The physiognomy and the nature of the Bhils and those of the Dravidians differ too much to allow us to place them in the same racial fold. The Bhils are more primitive, more original, simply children of nature. In this respect they differ considerably even from the least developed of the Dravidians, namely the Gonds, which are their neighbours.

It is noteworthy that the Bhils also, from a linguistic point of view, differ widely from the Dravidians, their language being of Aryan origin.

Another theory has been advanced, namely that the Bhils are a Munda people, that is to say, they are closely related to the so-called Kols and Santals in Bengal, Bihar and Assam. This theory is more probable. The one who has had an opportunity to see and associate with these people cannot fail to observe a certain similarity between them and the Bhils. Here is the same primitive nature, and partly at least, the same physiognomy. But this does not settle the question, however, we are not yet in a position to make a positive and definite statement in this respect. The language may or may not be a guiding star. If, however, due regard is paid to the language it will lead us in another direction. The Munda and the Bhil dialects have very little or no organic relations. Nor does history provide us with a solution of the problem,

The question of the origin of the Bhils is thus still left unsettled. All that we can say is that they seem to belong to the aboriginals which do not seem to be so very closely related to the Dravidians. They are probably still older, pre-Dravidians.

Many attempts have been made to discover from the name of the tribe, their original status and cultural conditions if not their racial origin at the time of the Aryan invasion of their country.

Different theories have been advanced. Bhil is thus said to have been derived from the Dravidian word 'billa', a bow. In that case the name would mean a Bowman. This derivation is, however, not very likely. It is true that the Bhils are skilful archers, and were more so in days gone by, but other Indian aborigines have not been inferior to them when it comes to this skill. Thus there is no reason why they should just be called bowmen above all others. Others have derived the word Bhil from the Sanskrit word 'billa', meaning, hole, cave, etc. Should this derivation be right, the Bhil would originally have been a cave dweller. I think this conjecture, too, is wrong.

A third theory is more plausible. According to this, the word Bhil is derived from the Sanskrit word 'abhira', a cowherd. Via Prakrit, bhilla, the word has arrived at its present form, bhil. One does not require much linguistic experience to realize the possibility of a word undergoing changes in this way. In Hindi and other North Indian languages, a cowherd is still called ahir. In Cutch there lives a comparatively large group of ahirs, whose mother tongue is so closely related to the Bhili dialects that in Grierson's Linguistic survey they have been treated as one of them. And further: in Khandesh there is a Bhili dialect called Airani, which is the same as ahirani, i.e. the language of the ahirs or cowherds.

At the stage of our present knowledge there are reasons to interpret the word Bhil as a cowherd. Thus the Bhils may be supposed to have been cowherds originally, i.e. at the time of the Aryan invasion. If this interpretation is right, the Bhils must have reached a fairly high standard of civilization at that time.

In the annals of history the Bhils figure very rarely. It is, however, believed that they can be traced as far back as 2000 years ago, if not further. The great Alexandrian geographer, Klauditos Ptlomaios, who flourished in the beginning and middle of the second century mentions an Indian people called Phyllitas. There is reason to believe that this refers to the Bhils, who then, more than now, had their abode on the west coast.

In Mahabharata, the longest epic the world has ever seen and written about 200 B.C. the Bhils are referred to under the name of Pulinda as participants in the great war described in the epic. Valmiki's Ramayana which is believed to have been composed about 500 B.C. is also acquainted with the Bhils. They fought in Rama's army against Rawan, the despotic demon from Lanka (Ceylon), And Rama the seventh avatar of Vishnu, is said to have eaten berries from the hand of a Bhil woman, Sabari. If, as is generally supposed, Rama should have lived and reigned about 1600 B.C., the Bhils must have been a people known in India since the time of Moses' appearance in Egypt. Besides these two epics, other holy books of the Hindus, e.g. Panch Tantra mention the Bhils.

When we draw closer to modern times we find the Bhils mentioned more frequently on the pages of history. During the long wars waged by the Muhammedan kings and their rule over India the Bhils play a rather important role. About 1000 A.D. they were in possession of large tracts of Gujerath and Central India. By and by they were, however, expelled from their ancestral land both by the Muslims and the Rajputs and their land was occupied. But this did not take place without bloody fighting. And the Bhils were never completely subdued. In the unapproachable backwoods they continued to live an independent life.

By the Moghul rulers they are praised as a diligent and law abiding people. And previous to that time, in the eleventh century, their villages are held up as models, where industriousness and cleanliness are prevailing, law being administered, and discipline strictly applied.

In mythology the Bhil woman is glorified as being plucky, pretty and chaste. Thus, for instance, when Pravati wanted to charm Mahadev in order to make him forgo his ascetic life, she adopted the shape of a bhildi (Bhil woman). Most wonderful of all that tradition has to tell is that Valmiki, the great author of Ramayana, was a Bhil. This goes to prove that the Bhils, thousands of years ago, occupied a prominent place among the various peoples of India, and that their culture at that time had reached a high standard.

From the Marathas, which entered the scene in the beginning of the 17th century and for a couple of centuries fought with the Moghuls and the British for the supremacy of areas inhabited by the Bhils, the latter ones did not get any praise. No mercy was shown to them. No people seems to have been treated more severely by them. Even taken into account that the descriptions given by the English historians of the atrocities of the Marathas are considerably coloured, enough remains to prove that their treatment of the Bhils was unusually severe and cruel. If, for example, a man was captured in a riotous area and it was proved that he was Bhil, this was regarded as reason enough to fleece and hang him without trial or else his nose and ears were cut off and he was burnt to death in a red-hot iron chair or on a heated cannon. Every year hundreds of Bhils were hurled down the high precipice of Antur to perish in the deep abyss. On one occasion three large groups of Bhils with a letter of safe conduct had assembled in three towns in Khandesi in order to receive pardon, as had been solemnly promised, for an uproarious attempt. They were however killed, beheaded, or

shot; their women were mutilated or smoked to death, while their children were dashed against stones or rocks.

If the Bhils had already started to degenerate socially, culturally, politically and intellectually, the pace was now accelerated. It was during these hard days that they underwent the last stage of their development which brought them to the point of degeneration, which they have occupied all since.

When in 1818 the British took over the Bhil country, the Bhils, by the sad play of fate, had developed into the most canny, skilful but suspicious and unmanageable guerrilla fighters, highway men, and freebooters. It took a long time, much patience and wisdom to pacify the country and win the confidence of the Bhils. But at last this end was achieved. And during the last half of a century the Bhils have lived a very peaceful and quiet life. Only a few years ago they were however counted among the criminal tribes, who were registered with the police and had to report at fixed intervals. This system is still in vogue in several districts, although it is rare in West Khandesh.

Today the Bhil is as a rule a harmless being. If not provoked or unfairly treated, he will harm nobody. But much is not required to conjure up the old nature, innate during many generations. Then he may change into the most formidable revenger or the most cunning and merciless culprit. Several instances of that kind are encountered now and then. The leader of a gang of robbers operating in and around Bhilwada is more often than not a Bhil. And in Akrani, where there is a compact population of Bhils, and where the Swedish Alliance Mission has a station, Mandulwar, murders are so common that Mr. Rowland, a Welshman, who served in our Mission for some years, had reason to describe that area as the most criminal within the British Empire. Approximately one in a thousand is murdered there every year.

The average standard of the Bhils, socially as well as economically, is very low. The majority lives from hand to mouth. In the areas where they form a small minority of the population, they have been degraded into the servants or coolies of other people, living from day to day on what little they can earn, gathering firewood in the jungle which they carry on their heads to villages and towns where it is sold, and so on.

In places where they form a majority and a friendly government rules, they are farmers. In most cases they cultivate their land in a poor way. But there are also honourable exceptions. Personally I know Bhil farmers who are large landowners having hundreds of acres of land, which is being cultivated just as nationally as anybody else's in India.

Besides farming, the Bhil occupies himself with cutting, rough-hewing and transport of timber. With other occupation or crafts he is rarely acquainted. In every Bhil section of farmers, though, there are one or two carpenters who produce what simple farming implements are required. The smith work is generally done by artisans belonging to other tribes or castes.

Hunting and fishing, especially the last-mentioned, are occupations that are cherished by the Bhils. As a result hereof the rivers in the Bhil country are almost devoid of fish. Whole villages go a fishing to a man, not to say to a woman. Dams are built to shut in the fish. Then it is caught in hoop-nets, bucks, pots, and nets, or with the hands. Not even the smallest can get away. It is an extremely picturesque and interesting thing to see the whole male and female population of a village wade through a river catching fish.

Hunting will soon belong to the pleasures and occupations of the past. Game is continually on the decrease. And the Bhil is not allowed to carry the arms he wants; not even a large bow with iron arrows, let alone swords or spears or daggers or lances, and guns or rifles. But it

may happen that even a panther is laid down before the insistent attacks by a group of Bhils, armed with bamboos only. But it may also happen that one or more Bhils have to pay with their lives for a reckless chase on wild boar. Rabbits, antelopes, gazelles and even deer and blue-bulls may be killed with bamboo lathis after having been tired out by a wild chase. During his hunting excursions the Bhil is possessed with a fury.

Of one occupation the Bhil is a born master, viz: the distilling of liquor. Here nobody can compete with him. And the women are just as skilled as the men. As the Government authorities both in British India as well as in the Native states have monopoly of producing liquor, the whole traffic has to be carried on secretly. And in this art too the Bhil is a master. Few persons, whatever people they belong to, have such a pronounced ingenious skill of completely concealing what they want to conceal as the Bhil in general enjoys.

Speaking of occupations and crafts it should be mentioned that the Bhil builds his own house. Most Bhil dwellings are grass or straw huts. In jungles tracts, where bamboo is plentiful, the walls are made of split bamboos. The roof is thatched with straw, leaves, curry stalks or something of the kind. The walls are often made of bulrushes, maize stalks, etc. Nowadays Bhil dwellings are often found roofed with tiles, which, however, are not made by themselves. Of late quite a number of the farmer Bhils on the plain have erected for themselves big brick-houses with roofs of corrugated iron.

The Bhil is of a playful disposition, being jocular and of a comparatively lively imagination. He is in no way ungifted. On the contrary, the Bhils are probably more gifted than most of the aborigines of India. Their gift for languages is marked. It is not uncommon thing to come across Bhils who speak three or four languages fluently. In the primary schools they do just as well, if not better, than the children of other people. When it comes to higher studies they do not do so well.

Generally speaking they are children. They are therefore not to be depended upon. It is easy to extract promises from them. But if you expect these to be fulfilled you will often be deceived. Like children they forget what they have promised. Their manners are pleasant, courteous and obliging. Among the inhabitants of Khandesh they are, in the opinion of many, the most gentleman like. And so one easily learns to like them. To get into real touch with them is not easy, though. Their degradation and ignorance are great. Only four men in a thousand are literate. Among the women hardly one in ten thousand. Drunkenness knows no restraint. Men, women and children learn from childhood to use intoxicating liquor.

By Hindus, Mohammadans, and other confessors of indigenous, religions, they are looked upon with contempt, oppressed and trampled down. But they are not regarded as untouchables. Even a Brahman may take water from the hands of a Bhil. Some of them claim to be Kshatriyas, i.e. the second of the Indian castes, the warrior caste.

Going into debt is so common that it is practically impossible to come across a Bhil without debts. It almost seems as if contracting debts is looked upon as a necessity of life. When a Christian Bhil once approached me in order to borrow money from me, his strongest argument was that he had no debt before! The money-lenders therefore have a happy hunting ground among the Bhils. The lowest interest charged is 75%. Cases where the interest has amounted to 75% per month are not lacking. The most common rate seems to be 25% a month. More need not be said to explain the severity of the situation.

But the worst part of the tale is not yet told, for according to Indian custom, debts are passed on from one generation to another, endlessly. The debt may thus become of 100 years standing and simply unpayable. The Bhil becomes the slave of the usurer, practically if not nominally.

During the period of degradation the Bhil has degenerated even physically. He is dwarfed in some way. Oppression has stamped his features. Under the surface, however, a glimpse may be seen of a noble strain, something that tells you of a noble inheritance, of a happier past. And in this something lies the hope of development into something better and higher, under the influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Tribal, divisions, dispersions, and numbers.

The Bhils are not a homogeneous people. Far from that! Few people are so divided into clans, tribes and families as are the Bhils. The full number of these have never been known. Some fifty are, however, known. And these are scattered over a tremendous area. We find them from the 18th to the 28th latitude and from the 72nd to the 77th longitude, approximately the area of the size of Sweden.

A glance at the map will show that the Bhils, politically are divided between the Native States of Central India and Rajputana, Baroda, and other Native States of Gujarat, British Gujarat, Khandesh, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Poona and other districts of Maharashtra, and Hyderabad Deccan. Kachh and Thar Desert and border areas of Sind and Bahawalpur. In West Khandesh we find the densest and broadest Bhil block. Experience has also shown that the Bhils that are most gifted and capable of development are to be found here. For all practical purposes these are the Dehvali-speaking; They must however share this honour to some extent, with those who have Mowchi as their language, a dialect closely related to Dehvali.

The most prominent tribes or families within these areas are Padvi, Vasava, Valvi, Pardan Naik, and Gavti. Originally these names have stood for professions: Padvi:- rulers, officials and officers; Vasava:- bailiffs and higher village officials; Valvi:- councillors; and Gavti:- cultivators. The only Bhil princes still in existence belong to the Dehvali group. The only Bhils, so outstanding as to have become Government officials also belong to the same category. Quite recently three of their number were appointed as honorary magistrates at their respective places. Other Bhil tribes in Khandesh are: Nojri, Nihali, Pavri, Naikulli, Kajli, Kotli, Bardi, Ajrani, Kokni, Kotri, Dubli, and others.

These tribes often differ considerably as to intellectual gifts, disposition and character, social status, manners and customs and languages. The Pavri people do not even regard themselves as Bhils, boasting that they are Rajputs. It is possible that they have "royal" blood in their veins. Their posture and skin bespeak this. The Kokni people have been Hindunized and Marathaized to such an extent as to regard themselves too distinguished to be ranked among the Bhils. The Kators may not be pure Bhils. Their standard is lower than that of the Khandesh Bhils in general, and they form an inconsiderable minority in Khandesh. The Kotlis are on the whole are of a weaker character than the rest, they are also less industrious and therefore the poorest among the bigger tribes. They are of low morals. Hundred of their women are to be found as second or third wives or concubines with Mohammadans. From their ranks the army of prostitutes is being fed. Prostitution is otherwise an unknown institution among the Bhils. The Kotlis live around Nandurbar. The hill tribes i.e. Pavri, Nihali, Nojri, and some of the Valvi have the peculiarities of the hill people in a very marked way.

The Dehvali people live in the western part of Nandurbar Taluka (round Dhanora) and Taloda Taluka and in the Mewa States, which are ruled by Bhil princes. In Shahada we have the Bardi and Kajli people, which belong to the best type of Bhils. In Sindkheda there are Bardis and Airanis. In Shirpur and Dhulia we find Airanis. The latter ones have been highly enslaved by the people they live among, and more so by liquor.

The total number of Bhils in West Khandesh, including the Mewa States, was according to the Census of 1921, 233,944. Since then they have without doubt increased. They number 38% of the total population of the district. Their dispersion is very uneven. The percentage for the different Talukas is as follows: Dhulia city 3%, Dhulia Taluka 12%, Sindkheda 12%, Shirpur 12%, Shahada 37%, Nandurbar 44%, Taloda 76%, Sakri 36%, and Navapur 86%.

According to the Census 1921 the total population of the Bhils in India is 1,795,508. This figure is probably too low. In the linguistic Survey Report published in 1907, the Bhili speaking people were estimated at 2,689,109. It may be safe to assume that the Bhils number at least 2,000,000. That the returns differ is accounted for by the fact that some strongly Hindunized tribes deny their Bhil origin. In any case one sixth of the Bhils live in Khandesh.

Compared to other aborigines it will be found that the Bhils occupy the third place as far as numbers are concerned. For the Gonds number 2,902,592 and the santals 2,265,282. In importance however they do not lag behind these larger groups of aborigines.

The Family Festivals

A Bhil who is himself a married man and a father relates as follows concerning an occasion of this kind:

When symptoms appear that the days of the prospective mother are up the women of the neighbourhood are called in together with the midwife. The latter delivers her. When the child has been born, a hole is dug in one corner of the house for its bath. Close to this hole another one is dug where the placenta is thrown, where after the hole is filled with earth, which is packed. On the top of this cow dung is plastered.

The child which until now has undergone only a meagre dry-cleaning with a rag or a piece of cloth, is now laid by the midwife on a piece of board which is placed over the first hole, where it is thoroughly washed together with its mother, who also has been placed on the board. Duties thus performed the mid-wife gets a few champas of grain from the house and leaves the house.

The mother then has to do the bathing both of herself and the child. This is done twice a day over the above-mentioned hole. Her food consists of water-gruel, which is served every three hours by a woman temporarily employed. After a lapse of five days the father of the child goes to the liquor shop from where he brings a few, generally six bottles of liquor. Arrived home he sends for the mid-wife again and the elder woman of the neighbourhood, who will be there very quickly.

The first duty of the mid-wife will now be to perform "penchro punji" (the worship of the fifth day), to the honour of which deity this is done, remains her secret as a rule.

The worship having been performed, she fills up with earth the hole over which the child and her mother have been bathed. After having been packed it is plastered with cow dung, on which she draws a design of red lead and paint. Finally she sprinkles a little liquor on the top of the whole thing. Of the liquor the midwife takes a bottle with her home. What is left is divided between the women that have come and squatted down on the floor. They all help themselves liberally to it.

Naming the child

The time has now come to give the child a name. The midwife gets up, takes a piece of cloth which she gives to two women to fold so as to make a swing or cradle of it in the form of a hammock, in which the child is placed. The midwife stands in the middle swinging the hammock while singing.

Should anyone try to scare thee, be not afraid!

Should any one try to deceive thee, be not deceived!

Then she stops the hammock, takes up the child and hands it to its mother. All the women now combine to give the child a name.

The name given is so chosen as to refer to the day on which the child was born or to some characteristic features of child. Thus for example, it may be called Navapurua to denote that it was born on a Saturday: Kalia, the black one, because of its complexion, or Raltia, the crying one, because it cried vehemently on entering this world and so on. Names of animals, such as, dog and tiger, cat, rat, bullock are rather common; and so are goblin, fairy and others of that kind. An ugly name will protect the bearer against evil spirits.

When this ceremony is over, the midwife is presented with two champas of grain, one bottle of liquor and one Rupee in cash for her services. Then she leaves the family. The other women who have squatted down also leave for their homes.

After this ceremony, the confined woman, who, however, now is up and around, is considered unclean (napak, unholy) for another month and a quarter, i.e. 35 days. During this period no one may touch her, let alone, eat anything she has put her hand to or dine together with her. Her meals are served to her in a special corner.

When the five weeks prescribed have elapsed, the whole family dines together again, all "eat from her hand", that is to say, what she has cooked and is now serving. In other words, she reoccupies her position as wife and mother.

Marriage

Marriage in the Bhil country is a very complicated affair. Firstly, like many primitive people, the Bhils are exogamous. that is to say, they never marry within their **own** tribe. To do so would be regarded as incest, and the one guilty of it, would be excommunicated from his family and tribe. Secondly, it is not the young man himself that is in charge of the negotiations in connection with the proposal. It is the mother, father and brothers. Thirdly, it is expensive to secure a bride. If thus the parents and the brothers (including cousins) do not approve of an early marriage or money should be lacking, the marriageable young man may have to wait for a long-time with an aching heart, before he achieves his heart's desire.

Formerly the price of a bride was low. Fifty years ago it was fixed at Rs. 50/- or less. Nowadays it has risen to several hundred rupees. The story goes that a wealthy and prominent Bhil in the Gongtha State paid Rs. 2300/- for his bride. Under such circumstances it is no easy thing for the poor man to get married. In spite of the price to be paid for the bride it seldom or never happens that one comes across old spinsters or bachelors. Be it men or women they are practically without exception married at 20 or 25 years of age. The majority are, of course, married long before that age. As regards the marriage age, it is only during the last 50 years that child marriage has been practised. Formerly marriage was not contracted before adolescence. In the folklore of this people I have not been able to find a single instance of the hideous Hindu practice of child marriage having been followed. Nowadays it is, alas, far from uncommon.

Polygamy exists as everywhere in non-Christian countries. Most people have to be content with one wife due to the fact that the women otherwise would not suffice. It is estimated that 15% of the men have more than one wife, and out of these 1% have three or four. Although the Bhil woman does not have the same disposition as her European sister it must be admitted that polygamy often results in jealousy, quarrels, fighting, divorce and so on.

The man on his part is just as jealous as any European might be. He looks upon his wife as his property, which he or his parents have honestly purchased. Woe unto him who dares to fall in love with his wife! That may mean death. Especially this is the case in Akrani. Otherwise he may be satisfied with getting the money he has paid out for his wife so as to enable him to buy another one. Divorces of this kind are rather common among the Bhils, especially on the plains. Before anything is said about engagement and wedding rites, some other peculiarities in connection with marriage must be mentioned.

One is the so-called levirate, and the other is rather common usage of the bridegroom serving for several years with his prospective father-in-law for his bride. The levirate exists only among the Kotli tribe, as far as I know. But they regard it as proper for a younger brother to marry the widow of his deceased elder brother, whether she has any children or not by her

first husband. An elder brother, however, may not marry the widow of a younger brother. That would be incest. For the elder brothers are regarded as fathers of the younger once.

The custom of serving the prospective father-in-law for the bride is common among all tribes, clans and tribal families. This is resorted to when for instance the young man has no money whereby to pay for the bride, or when the parents of the girl do not want to be separated from her. They then persuade a young man to become their “Koh-java”, (son-in-law residing in the house.)

A “Koh-java” has to serve for about three years before he is allowed to marry the girl. During this time he works just as an ordinary servant, the only difference being that at meals he is served by the maiden of his choice. But this is the only relationship between them. Any intercourse of an intimate kind would be severely punished. It goes to the credit of the young and testifies to a strict discipline still in force that not one in ten should break this unwritten law.

Having come to the very act of the performance of the wedding I repeat what has already been said, that it is a complicated affair. There are no fewer than five stages with several subordinate ones that those concerned have to go through; or, to express it in a more dramatic way; it consists of five acts with several sense; quite a drama, then.

The first act deals with the proposal, which is played in the home of the girl by the parents and brothers of the young man. This is called “hogai” (making of one kin.) The second act contains the return visit by the girl’s parents to the village and home of the youth. This is called “Koho-herulo” (inspecting the house). The third act is “dej” (giving of dowry) or the engagement. The fourth is naturally the wedding which is called “voral” (with cerebral I). And the fifth act is “ano” (the coming). With this is meant the coming of the young wife to the family of her husband to stay there, after having paid a ceremonial visit to her parents’ home after the wedding.

Space does not admit any descriptions of the many ceremonies performed in connection with a Bhil wedding. One or two things may, however, be mentioned. All the acts, with the possible exception for the first one, are accompanied with profuse drinking, dancing and playing. Liquor is literally flowing. And all, men, women, children, drink, Liquor is the burden of a marriage tale.

Another peculiarity is that the wedding hymns are sung only by women and children, and that it is a custom in these hymns to refer disparagingly to the one who is now be taken into the family, while the one belonging to one’s own family is lauded without restraint. Thus for example the female relatives of the bridegroom tell in their singing that he is wealthy and noble, in possession of oxen, cows, buffaloes, and horses etc: in plenty, that he sits on a spirited charge with a saddle inlaid with gold and a golden saddle cloth; that he drinks finest liquor and eats the most delicious courses, and so on. About the bride, on the other hand, they sing that, by her poor parents and tribesmen, she has been bathed in the filthy urine of an ass, that she is poor as coolie, without other possessions than a donkey, which she rides on, or travels on foot, and drinks a mixture of cow-dung and water, eating pods and dross, and so on. Her girl friends and female relatives sing in like manner about the bridegroom and in the same glowing terms about the bride as did the people of the bridegroom to his honour.

This peculiar custom corresponds with the boastful disposition of the Bhil. Does the Gond lack in self-confidence, the Bhil may be said to have got a double portion. This is revealed specially when he is drunk.

Death and Burial Customs

As the wedding so has the burial five acts. There are also many scenes to each act. Liquor plays an important part here too. It flows as drink and offering, as a tribute to the deceased and in ceremonies of purification.

The first act is “dukh”, (suffering, sickness); the second “mot” (death); the third “tijajo” (burial), the fourth “kukri parulo” (chicken offering), and the fifth is “vori” (festival of remembrance with singing and dancing).

It is touching to observe the care and consideration bestowed on the deceased. He is presented with all kinds of commodities: clothes, ornaments, silver bars, money, water pitcher, pot house, liquor, tobacco and pipe, chickens, bread, spices, pulses, a cot (which has been used as a bier) etc: It is believed that he will need all these commodities in the other world, where conditions are regarded as similar to those in this world. In order to test whether the deceased has approved or not of the arrangements made, the floor of the house of mourning is strewn with ashes whereon grains of corn are thrown. This is done in the evening of the day of the burial. If, in the morning, foot-marks of rats can be seen in the ashes, this is a sign that what has been offered to and done for the deceased has met with his approval.

On the whole as in the details, the burial ceremonies present a sad spectacle without anything of inspiration. They bespeak fumbling in the dark before of death and eternity.

Languages

As has been said already there live in West Khandesh more than 250,000 Bhils. In most cases they speak their own language or rather languages. During a Linguistic Survey executed by one of our missionaries on behalf of Government, no fewer than 15 languages or dialects were noted, including those spoken on the border lines as Khandesh Bhil dialects. Several of them are so closely related that by knowing one it is possible to understand other of them. Others, on the other hand, differ in such marked way that they have to be classified as different languages.

Dehvali

The most important language is the one which is spoken in the western parts of Nandurbar and Taloda Talukas and in the Mewa States. This is called Dehvali, meaning the language of the plain. This name has been given to it because the majority of those having it as their mother tongue live on the plain.

About 80,000 Bhils and others living among them speak Dehvali. It is no literary language, though. Before S.A.M. took up work among the Bhils there was not one single line written in that language. And when, in 1917, the Mission started to pay a little attention to this question, there was in existence only a translation of the story of the Prodigal Son and a few sample pieces written for a Linguistic Commission which had been appointed to classify the languages of India. Since then the Four Gospels have been published and later the whole of the New Testament has been translated and published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. In addition a few religious pamphlets have been published.

The example of the Mission has given a push to the Hindus, who have also begun to take an interest in this language. Thus for example, a Hindu in Nandurbar Taluka has published a little book for children, containing fables and short stories.

Another one has collected a fairly large vocabulary for a dictionary. On the whole, it may be said, however, the Dehvali is still an uncultivated language. Nor is any glorious future to be expected for it. Like all similar minor languages it is doomed to extinction. This will,

however, take sometime. The major Bhil languages are bound to live for several generations yet, for the Bhil' are a conservative people, especially as regards their language.

Valvi

Up in Akrani, where Mandulwar is situated, four or five dialects of Bhili are spoken. The most important is no doubt Powri, which is spoken by the majority in this area. The Powri tribe also seems to be the most prominent of the hill tribes living here.

Mandulwar, however, is situated in a different dialectal area. The language of the people here is Valvi or Volvi. Most of the Christian Bhils in Akrani speak this dialect. The Valvi speaking tribe numbers no more than five or six thousand people. Their language is, however, understood by a smaller tribe. Moyri, whose dialect is closely related to Valvi. The Moyris can only muster half the number. The number of the Powri tribe may be estimated at 10,000 persons if those living outside Akrani are included.

In Valvi there is now available an Infant Primer, a small hymn book and a Catechism. In addition to these the New Testament has been translated and printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

All Bhili dialects belong to the large Aryan family of languages. There are, however, traces indicating that the Bhils formerly have spoken another language. These traces are few, and have not had much influence on the construction of these dialects. They come closest to Gujerathi. The Valvi and Dehvali dialects are closely related as are the people speaking these languages.

The construction of the Bhili languages is simpler than that of many other North Indian languages. They are comparatively easy to learn, provided grammars, readers, and dictionaries were compiled.

Religion

The religion of the Bhils has hitherto been regarded as gross animism. For the present, however, it is in a transitory stage, being influenced very strongly by the crude form of Hinduism. Thus for example a number of the Hindu deities are being worshipped, as Hanuman (Maruti), Mahadev, (Shiva), Kali in the form of Devi, Parvati, and Bavani (Shiva's consort) a.o. In all some ten Hindu deities are being worshipped by the Bhils.

The Bhils also celebrate the main Hindu festivals: Das-hera, Divali, Holi, a.o. although they are given a peculiar expression which is very animistic in its character. A certain caste system is being developed, which points to Hinduism. All Bhils confess to be Hindus. And since Hinduism is so comprehensive as to have room for all and sundry, it may not be correct to call the Bhils non-Hindus.

On the other hand are the peculiarities so many and so important as to mark these people as different from the Hindus. They have their own religion, which ought to be more known. The Government officials and Hindu and other religious leaders are ignorant of its contents. Not even the missionaries know in its details, although some have been permitted to peep into it. On the whole it remains a closed world.

The Deities of the Bhils

We have, however, got to know some of the superficial features. Thus we know that the Bhils have at least 25 or 30 deities of their own which they still worship, although they are not looked upon as Hindus. Hindu missionaries and reformers are trying their best to put a stop to this, but, according to their own statements, they have not succeeded. The village will be destroyed; and so they will have to call in sorcerers and diviners again and sacrificial priests in order to put everything right. And this will be too expensive, they say.

Among the Bhil deities are: the tiger, the boundary of field god, god, Hivarao, the village goddess Pandrio, the rain god Nonduro, and the hill gods, which are several in number. Hardly a month passes without the Bhils having to worship one of the 35 or 40 gods or goddesses which have been adopted. Of the latter kind I have the names of sixteen and of the former nineteen.

The very rites of worship, that is what mantras are mumbled, now the ceremonies are performed etc, are known to me. The majority of the Bhils do not know them, this is the business and secret of the sacrificial priest. But this much is known, that the worship is always connected with liquor and offerings. As regards the use of liquor only two deities are excepted, namely Mahadev and Maruti (Shiva and Hanuman), both of which are Hindu deities.

The following are among unbloody offerings: grain, coconuts, bread of wheat, cooked dumplings, rice, eggs, sweets and milk, and as has already been mentioned, liquor. As bloody sacrifices are presented: buffaloes, bulls, he-goats, and cocks,. Geldings and females are not acceptable sacrifices. The animal must be a male and without blemish, After the birth of a child, however, a hen is offered. The officiating person is then a woman, namely the midwife.

Similarly the milk that is to be offered must not be sour, nor eggs rotten. For the gods only the very best will suffice. The Bhils often eat other grain than rice and cheaper bread than wheat. But such things may not be presented as offerings to the gods. Other things required for a ceremonial sacrifice are red lead, sweet, oil and frankincense (from *Boswellia serrata*).

The latter is used for incense and the lead for smearing the image. Two to four copper coins are also needed.

Of the deities of the Bhils five have a day each set apart for them. On these days no one goes to work, neither beast nor man. All these days fall within the rainy season. They are: the rain god, the sun god, the field god, the tiger god, and the cattle god. On the day of the tiger god or on the previous evening, is also the snake worshipped. As has been seen the worship of these deities express the foremost needs of a primitive people a good crop, healthy cattle, and protection against wild animals.

The other gods have no whole day set apart for them. But their annual sacrifice is accorded to them. This must not be neglected or the people of the village will have to put up with no end of trouble.

With the exceptions of the Hindu gods, Hanuman and Mahadev the Bhil gods do not live in temples or shrines. Three of them have platforms of earth or stone. The hill gods live in the open.

Twenty-three deities are worshipped during the cold season, eight in the rainy season, and only two in the hot season. This arrangement has its natural reason. During the rains the most important gods of an agricultural and cattle tending people have to be worshipped. During the cold weather after the crops have been harvested people are in a position to afford the expenses connected with the sacrificial ceremonies. In the hot season, on the other hand, taxes and debts have to be paid. Then much is not left over for the gods.

As regards the sacrificial priests these serve their village. They are never house priests. Every house father is priest in his own house Anyone may become a sacrificial priest (Punjari). But as a rule this calling is hereditary. The secrets of the worship are not revealed to anybody, except the prospective priests, which have been chosen by the Punjaris as their successors. The duties of the priest are not performed as a profession or a calling. The Punjari is a cultivator like the rest. A Brahman is never called in as sacrificial priest or spiritual adviser.

The majority of the male population of the village are present at the sacrificial acts. The leaders may not be absent without a valid reason. The sacrificial ceremonies having been completed, the Punjari distributes part of the things offered, which may be eaten by those present, including the priest. Some religious festivals are rounded off by heavy eating and drinking bout. The expenses are paid by the whole village in common. The fees for the priest are only one anna, the coins offered, the food and liquor he has helped himself too.

Evil Spirits

In animism, an important part is played by the evil spirits, the demons, which are called 'Put' or 'Putlo'. Of these I have only got to know the names of a few. They are no doubt very numerous. The two that are most dangerous have their abode in graveyards and places for cremation. Should a person pass such a place when these demons are on their way out, he will be at their mercy and their evil influence will either cause illness or temptation to evil deeds, e.g. collecting and carrying cremation ashes with the hands and so on.

Most evil spirits live in trees, especially in hollow ones, others live in woods and on hills. One lives in Hades with the dead. Several have, however, taken up their abode with man, in his house or among his property etc. One may thus live in the bed, another one, in the bed poles, a third in the door frame, or in the door, a fourth in the threshold, a fifth in the ashes, and so on. Boldness is said to have its evil spirit, poison insanity, the bird all have their evil spirits.

While the gods are favourably disposed to men, the evil spirits are always hostile. They are the cause of bad luck. Disease and death are wrought by them. Similarly imbecility and insanity. They are always planning mischief. They have to be feared everywhere, for there is hardly a place whereof their kind does not have his rightful abode.

Among the demons or dangerous spirits are 'chural' and 'soti'. The first ones are ghosts of women which have died in confinement, after the child has been born, but before it has been named, that before the fifth day after birth. The last mentioned are ghosts of brides who have died after they have been dressed for the wedding, but before the ceremony has been performed. Both of these very dangerous spirits or ghosts have their abode in wells, brooks, swamp, more seldom in trees. Woe unto the one who runs up against a being of this kind! A soti is dangerous, especially to men, whom she will pursue, seduce and kill, should they happen to enter her sphere after dark.

A 'chural' will treat a man in about the same manner as does a 'soti'. But she prefers women. If opportunity offer she will take possession of a woman. This means illness and insanity, and, if she is not driven out, a certain death.

Fortunately a 'chural' may be identified. She always lights a torch when about to proceed on her tours; and if she is observed, several torches will be seen around her. Her feet are turned and her front side has the appearance of a fully developed woman, while her back is hollow like a trough.

Witches and Magicians

Belief in witchcraft, magic, ghosts, and sorcery.

These, especially the witches, play an important part among the Bhils. There are, of course, magicians but they are not as numerous nor is their ability so great or disposition so vicious as is the case with the witches. A 'dagan' (witch) is almost worse than a demon. All sorts of bad luck and ruin, illness and death are caused by witches. They are therefore much feared. In reality those that occupy themselves with sorcery are very few in number. Most of those that are alleged of witchcraft are probably innocent. But there are those who practice witchcraft as an occupation. Whatever may be the case, if a woman has been pointed out as one who has 'eaten' a person, she will from that moment on remain a most deplorable creature. She will be pursued, ill-treated and expelled from society.

Ghosts of people that have met with an accidental death.

If 'chural' and 'soti' may be said to represent also conceptions found in popular Hinduism, the case will be different when we come to another of spirits; ghosts of people that have died by accident. It is true that in places these are worshipped also by the lower classes of the Hindus. But, as far as I know, they do not elsewhere play such an important part as among the Bhils.

To die by accident is, curiously enough, not looked upon with horror by the Bhils. It is rather a good form of death. The one who has parted in this way — be it man, woman or child — is said to have gone to the gods. And this is a reason to perpetuate his memory on earth. He simply becomes a god. This happens in the following way:

After the burial in the ordinary graveyard, either a staff is made or a stone, three feet in length, is hewn. A picture of the deceased is carved on the wooden staff or hewn out of the stone. Over the head are drawn pictures of the sun, and the moon, and under the feet a pictorial description of his death is engraved. Thus for example, if he was drowned, the memorial will have a well or a river; if he died by falling down from a tree, from a cart, or a horse, a picture of the thing connected with his death will be formed.

When the memorial is ready and clothes, ornaments, food and liquor have been bought for the new god, for that is what it will become, and sacrificial requisites and frankincense have been secured, three or four 'bhagats' (witch doctors) are called in to perform the ceremony. This is done with secret rites, swaying, mumble of mantras and a maximum of pageantry in the presence of all the male population of the village.

Those of the women who are next of kin are also in the procession which now moves towards the house of mourning. Just outside the village the officiating priest makes a halt, causes a hole to be dug in the ground, in which the stone or the wooden staff, properly clothed, will be placed. Then it is smeared with lead diluted in oil. At the feet of it is offered liquor and the very best of food, cooked and raw. To the upper bracelets are tied.

After this dedication the priests together with the crowd of people that have been invited make a big tree in the shade of which they sit down. Here liquor and costly food are partaken of copiously. When the time comes for the priest to come home, they receive a sum of money, not less than ten rupees for their services, and everybody leaves for home.

The new god is now called 'patli' if the memorial is of wood, and 'khotro' if of stone. The god will be worshipped by the people of his family, often by others as well. Before sowing, harvesting and threshing, and winnowing, and on numerous festivals this god has to be remembered with foodstuffs of rice and wheat and liquor, which never must be lacking, and a burning oil-lamp. Every village has one or more gods of this kind placed at its boundary.

Medicine Men and Witch Priests

If magicians and witches have no enviable position among the Bhils, medicine men and witch priests (madvi, bhagat, and hovrio) are given a place of honour and are very influential men. For they are not mischievous, that is, they do not try to destroy people and cattle or eat them. Their duties are to investigate about the causes of bad luck and illness and remove them. They are also acquainted with the lives of gods, demons and other spirits and are able to teach this subject extensively. The madvi also knows how to appease the wrath of demons, ghosts and goblins and give them the kind of worship they crave. In like manner a bhagat is acquainted with the gods and knows how to fill their needs.

But these 'Benefactors' of the people are not employed but practice in a private capacity. They know how to charge their clients heavily. As a rule, they are held in high esteem. People believe in their ability to make out the whereabouts of spirits, the causes of illness etc. from water, leaves from the flame of the forest, wings of peacocks or coarse paper, or copper coins. Just as deeply rooted is their belief in their ability to cure disease, drive out evil spirits and bind them etc.

Treatment of Spirits

There exist many rules and regulations, rites and customs, with a view to avoiding the evil influence of spirits. Thus certain trees, wells, places, woods and clefts in the rocks must not be visited without company or after dark, as they are supposed to be dangerous. Amulets have to be used or else a special ring or another protective article. Even so one has every reason to be on one's guard, to be cautious, as one is surrounded on all sides by divine beings, which one may have offended unwittingly, and evil spirits, goblins, ghosts and other bad being which are always looking for an opportunity to harm a person.

The tricks of deceiving or binding the spirits are many. Only a few examples may be given. When a woman who has died in confinement is to be buried, seeds of sesame and grass are thrown on the path between the boundary of the village and the grave yard up to the grave. This is to prevent her from reaching her home when during the first five weeks she will

wander about every night trying to kill her child. This is done in the following way: Having left the grave for her old home she will stop to pick the seeds one after the other till the cock-crow. Then she will return to her grave, replacing the seeds one by one till she reaches the grave again. She will rest till the following night, when the same thing will be repeated. It is to the nature of the thing that a sufficient number of seeds are put out in order to keep the ghost more than occupied for the night. Another example. When a 'chural' has been discovered as having her abode in a woman, she will be driven out and confined to a tree by hammering several nails into the trunk of the tree.

In all their childish simplicity these examples are touching and clarify better than words the low standard of the Bhils in matters spiritual.

The Ethics of the Bhils

The ethical views of the Bhils do not range very high. Direct commandments and prohibitions, expressed in concisely formed sentences do not exist. Rules and regulations, without the attention to which a society cannot survive, are nevertheless to be found. They are theoretically imbedded in their proverbs and rather numerous tales and stories, which are encountered within every tribe. Practically they are revealed in customs and usages, the age-long authority of which none dares to oppose. This might mean death in certain cases.

Taking into consideration their highly unsatisfactory religion, it must be admitted that the Bhils are a people of a comparatively high moral standing. They compare favourably with the genuine Hindus. On the whole they are more truthful. For a primitive they are of remarkable good manners. A Bhil that has not been degenerated will scrupulously regard the right of ownership. And still he is not greedy or ungenerous. In some respects the sexual ties are very strong. That much in their favour.

The dark spots on the character of the Bhils are, however, many and big. Drunkenness is probably more common among them than with any other people in India. Quarrels and frays, which often end in murder, are horribly common, especially among the hill tribes. Adultery is also very common, often leading to divorce, when the offender after having paid to the offended man the sum fixed by the village or tribal council, will take the woman he has fallen in love with as his wife. Then his position in society may be just as honourable as anybody else's.

The belief in sorcery and witchcraft darkens the life of many. It has caused murders without number. By their profound ignorance, which is looked upon almost as a virtue, the people are kept down in poverty, weakness of mind and body, which do not admit their intellectual growth or their looking for higher ideals.

In their treatment of woman the Bhils are more advanced than the Hindus. She is freer. The widow is allowed to remarry and may choose her own husband. But her condition is not enviable. She is practically sold as a bride. In the tribal or village council she has no say. In the worship of the gods this holds also true with one exception (Cfr. Ch. iii.) If she dies as a bride or in confinement she will become an evil spirit, which is to be feared. Only if she dies by accident will she become a divine being. These details show that their reverence for a woman is deficient.

Belief in Transmigration of Soul

The Bhils and Eternal Hope

There is no eternal hope with the Bhils. It is true that they believe in immortality, but their conceptions of it are very vague. When a person has died he is said to have gone to God. It is not believed however that he will remain there for any length of time, let alone for eternity.

Within short, some say after a day, he has to return to this world being born as a different man. Nobody knows the length of this transmigration. Nor does anybody know where or within which people he will be born again. It is only known that he will be reborn as a human being.

Behind the belief in a multitude of gods and goddesses the Bhil has caught a glimpse of a supreme Being, which he calls either Bhogvano or Ponmissar. In his heart of hearts he believes in this Being. Hence the spirit of the deceased goes to him. Bhogvano means the shining one, the adorable one, the glorious one etc. Ponmissar means the Overlord, the Supreme Being, the supreme or only God.

Folk Thoughts

1. Products of Wisdom Proverbs

1. *Asamandoath, it will be done unto him.* As ye sow, so shall ye reap.
2. The father should suffer the fruit of his deeds, the son should suffer the fruit of his deeds.
3. *Come, thou stone and fall on my feet.* To invite trouble.
4. *If a blind woman succeeds in getting a husband she will be busy over the bed.* A blind person is not fit for marriage, for she can do nothing but make the bed. There is however a deeper meaning.
 - a. A person who has not the proper qualities should not be given a responsible position.
 - b. A person who is deficient, morally or intellectually, should not be given responsible position.
5. *On his wedding day a nose less person has seventeen hundred defects.* A person who is to be married is badly spoken of. A deeper or more comprehensive meaning is the following: A person who has once proved unreliable, will have the opinion against him, even if he shows signs of a better life.
6. *Even the nose less son is the offspring of the womb, and a forged coin is kept in the cloth.* Every one loves his own.
7. *The mother-in-law has two days, but the daughter-in-law has (or will also get) her day.* If the former is harsh and dominating, the latter may console herself with the hope that time will come when the old woman will be weak and helpless. Then she will be paid in her own coin. This is also applied to proud and oppressive people in influential positions. The day of reckoning cannot be evaded.
8. *The backbiter ruins the village, and the leper the water-place.*
9. *The blind man speaks and the deaf man listens.* This is said about persons who do not understand what they are talking about, also of those who have misunderstood what has been said or an order given. It is also used about false rumours.
10. *As the potter, so the pitchers as the father, so the son.* Corresponding to, Like priest, like people; and As the old cock crows, so crows the young.
11. *A learned man without virtue or ability.* Learning does not always mean a good character.
12. *As soon as he experiences erotic affections he wants to get married.* He acts on the spur of the moment in a thoughtless way.
13. *As the country, so the dress.* To do in Rome as the Roman.
14. *Stretch her she will break, blow at her, she will fly away.*
A description of especially female beauty, but also that of a child.

Some of these proverbs are international property and have probably been take over from other tribes and peoples. But others are coined by themselves. Whether borrowed or coined do they indicate to a high degree that the Bhils are in possession or moral principles, common sense and a sense of beauty.

Riddles

If the Bhil is comparatively poor as regards proverbs and sayings, it seems as if he were rich in riddles. My collection, which together with the proverbs has been published in the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay contains 127. And this is probably only one seventh of the total number in use.

Most of these riddles are so intimately connected with Indian life with its Oriental animal and vegetable life, so as to be unintelligible to those who are not acquainted with these conditions. The selection made for this article have been made from those that have a bearing on subjects known even to the Westerner, although this procedure does in no way give justice to the rather high gifts of the Bhils in this field.

1. The rope wanders, the ox is lying still? The cucumber and its tendrils.
2. A man has put on one coat after the others? An onion.
3. Under the black rock there are four small fishes. The four udders of a buffalo and a cow.
4. A fresh stick that none of us can bend? A snake.
5. When does a person drive out the cows and milk the barn? Collecting honey.
6. Who goes forward working and backwards eating? A chicken when picking for something to eat.
7. Like the Alma river, like the queen of lightening does she wander hither and thither chatting? The squirrel.
8. Two stand up, two flutter and four walk? The two horns, two ears, and four feet of the ox.
9. A roaring tiger in a well? The churn-staff in a churn.
10. A rounded bullock, digging in an ant-hill? A champa measure in measuring a heap of corn.
11. When the calf of the black cow is driven out, won't return to any of us? A bullet.
12. Having walked through the whole forest he stands on a space not larger than a small copper coin? A walking stick.
13. A man who is neither cold nor warm and has no sense, begins to dive? A spoon.
14. A tooth-pick used by two men? The axle of a cart.
15. A woman leaving the house bending hither and thither. A broom.
16. What animal drinks water with the tail? A lamp.
17. There were hunters: one fired, one looked, and one ran? The hands, eyes and feet of the hunter.
18. In a little chamber not bigger than a tumbler, there sits a talking lady? The tongue.
19. A bird sits in a corner fluttering his wing? The eye.
20. If you chew, it won't be chewed, if you cut it, it won't divide? Water.
21. While the animal is grazing its marrow is taken out of its bones and eaten; then the bones are thrown on the dung-hill, while the animal goes on grazing? The hen and her eggs.
22. A white house without doors? An egg.
23. She has neither hands nor feet, and still she goes out to work? A jacket.
24. Which is the biggest of all the musical instruments? Thunder.

25. *The red cows graze, the black cows butt, and the black calves suck?* A conflagration.

26. *From one single ear the whole barn is filled with chaff?* The wick and the light.

27. *What is the shadow of a small pipri-tree, fretted with rays of light with shall buds (or jasmine flowers) round about?* The moon and the starry sky.

28. *An eagle has 12 wings and 18 scores of eggs?* The year with its 12 months and 18 scores of days.

Whatever be the opinion as to the value of the riddles of the Bhils, it cannot be denied that they indicate powers of observation and imagination not to be despised.

2. The Bhil as Poet and Singer

As authors of poetry the Bhils do not rank high. They do not lack poetical products, it is true, but these in no way be said to be of any importance of whatever. In them we find neither any flight of imagination nor any deeper feeling. The outward form is usually trivial and flat.

As regards the subject matter it is poor. In this respect the Bhils lag behind many other aboriginal peoples in India. For instance they do not have anything that can be compared with the remarkable Lingo hymns of the Gonds. Their poetical products are confined to simple hymns for use at festivals and sacrifices, besides wedding hymns and one to two hymns to describe certain objects.

It is important, though, to get to know them, for in one way they are the key to the heart of the people. In order to give some insight into the poetical life of the people (Bhils) a few samples will be produced. First a few remarks:

Among the hills men and women never sing together. Singing is further not a part of their daily life. It is resorted to only at festivals and weddings. In the weddings only women and girls do the singing. This is also the case at holi. At dehvali, on the other hand, the singing is performed by men only. For the uninitiated it would seem as if women also partook in the singing. For many men are dressed up as women. These men may occasionally carry a baby in their arms while dancing, to make the disguise perfect.

Wedding Hymns

Waiting for the Bridegroom

In the valley of Kathi the brother is saddling his horse, heigh ho!

When the horse has been saddled, the brother will come, heigh ho!

The guns matters, the brother is coming there, heigh ho!

Hearing the sound, the bride begins to cry, heigh ho!

She cries till the eyes get swollen, heigh ho! heigh ho!

The hymn is sung by the female relatives of the bridegroom and his girl friends, when he is expected to the shamiana erected for the wedding festivities.

When the Bride is sent to the Home of her Husband. The way is so long, Oh sister, don't return alone. Oh sister,

If father-in-law gets angry, Oh sister, don't return alone. Oh sister,

If mother-in-law gets angry, Oh sister, don't return alone. Oh sister,

If sister-in-law gets angry, Oh sister, don't return alone. Oh sister,

If little sister gets angry, Oh sister, don't return alone. Oh sister,

If brother-in-law gets angry etc:

If little brother etc:

If husband etc:

Thus hymn is sung by the mother, sisters and friends of the bride when she is sent for the first time to her husband's home to live with him.

Little sister is the younger sister of the husband, little brother his younger brother.

Hymns to the Gods

Hymn of sacrifice to Holi Holi, holi keep holi for twelve months, heigh ho!

Two coconuts place at the feet of Holi, heigh ho!

Holi, holi keep holi etc:

Two garlands of sweets place at the feet of Holi, heigh ho! Holi, keep holi etc:

Two young roosters place at the feet of Holi, heigh ho!

Holi, keep holi etc:

Two he-goates place etc:

Holi, keep holi etc:

Two he-buffaloes place at the feet etc:

Holi, keep holi etc:

Holi is the spring festival of India. It is celebrated during the month of March. On this occasion passions are let loose as at no other time. To the Bhils holi does not only represent a festival, when, as among the Hindus, Krishna is being worshipped, but Holi is to them the personification of a goddess. In the above hymn Holi is presented both as a goddess and as a festival.

Hymn of praise to Kol Boari

I have come quietly dancing, Kol Boari,

I have come in a light shadow, Kol Boari,

I will build the fallen fence, Kol Boari I will give milk and butter plenty, Kol Boari,

I will fill the empty grain-bin, Kol Boari I will get many coins, Kol Boari,

I will leave laughing and dancing. Kol Boari,

I will leave dancing and jumping, Kol Boari,

I will take names of gods, Kol Boari,

I will take the name of Dehvali, Kol Boari,

I will take the name of Queen Dehvali, Kol Boari,

I will take the names of precious crowd, Kol Boari, This hymn is sung responsively at the Dehvali festival which is celebrated during the cold season, (end of November, in December, or in the beginning of January). The first verses are sung by a man disguised as a woman; and the last four by a man in his own clothes.

At Dehvali the Bhils worship many gods. The name means the festival of lights. And so it is to the Bhils. But they have personified Dehvali and made her a goddess.

Kol Boari is really the meat-offering, consecrated by the priest, of which he gives a pinch to each one of those present or those standing nearby. In reception of this they prostrate before the object of worship, offering what they have received.

In this hymn, however, Kol Boari has been personified. It is the goddess praising before the Bhil. She is going to fill all his needs in the barn, in the grain-bin, in the milk vessel, in the butter tub and in the money bag. Then there will be joy and hilarity in his house.

In the last four verses it is the Bhil, anxiously asking what divine name he is to take, that is to he called upon when she has left. Which god shall he worship? Shall he worship Dehvali? Shall he worship the “precious croyd”? The last expression refers to the numerous gods living in the mountains, cliffs and caves, and their worshippers. Kol Boari apparently approves of this, for she is silent and disappears.

This hymn, which is one of the best hymns to the gods, is undoubtedly very old. The opening word, which has been translated with I is anna. It is of Dravidian origin, corresponding to nanna and anna of the Gonds and the Tamil nan.

3. The Bhil as Story Teller

If the Bhil is a poor poet, he is a comparatively good story teller. The Bhils regard it a pleasure to sit down to listen to the tales, fables and stories, told by their bards, and which contain more humour than we should expect. Some humoresques are rather funny. The recital is done in the form of monotonous singing so common in India. In several of the tales God is presented under the names of Bhagwan (Bhogwan) or Ponmis-sar.

While reading these stories it should be kept in mind, that they are the products of a primitive aboriginal people. The knowledge of God they give evidence of, goes to show that God has revealed himself to them in some way.

The first of the stories presented is a translation from Dehvali, the second from Valvi.

The Origin of Fever

In days gone by there existed in the world of sun (on earth) neither fever, cough, pain or any other suffering among men. People used to eat, drink and live in undisturbed happiness. They had no idea about God. On account of this, God gave himself up to deep thinking. He said, ‘I have created the whole world and the whole of humanity, and nonetheless I have been forgotten. But if they be overtaken by suffering, they will remember me and call upon my name.’ Then he called the angel Lalkathio and said to him, ‘Go and call Fever, and bring him to me.’

Lalkathio made off on the spot to call Fever (Boro). He was as big as a donkey and was wallowing in the ashes of the dust heap.

Lalkathio went up to him and said, ‘Brother Fever, why do you lie here idle?’ ‘Come on God is calling for you.’

Having heard this, Fever, big as a donkey, rose with haste and shook his body. Then the whole country was darkened by the dust, that fell from him. So much ashes had stuck to him.

Then he went straight to him (God), Placed himself before him with folded hands, saying, ‘Oh God, what orders have you for me?’

God answered, ‘Well, you should go down to earth (the world of the sun) and cause man to be smitten by fever.’

No sooner had Fever heard this than he prostrated himself before the Lord, whereupon he immediately left to execute the order.

Having reached the world of the sun, he found people occupied with preparing hemp. From this work they had got such a bad kind of itch, that they were scratching themselves as if they were mad.

Seeing this, Fever began to wonder whether men had lost their mind, or what might have befallen them. They were scratching themselves all over their bodies.

Come what may, Fever said to himself, I have to execute God's orders. And so he began to approach the men.

Then came a gust of wind stirring the hemp stalks, some of which fell down on the donkey-shaped Fever. And so he too was attacked by such a bad itch that the whole of his body was affected.

This was more than he could stand. He therefore turned and ran off as fast as he could, swaying his tail. The puffs caused by the swaying of the tail struck the people, and so they were attacked by fever. Fever passed through the heavenly spheres, returning to God. Here too he continued to scratch himself, wandering about like a mad man.

Asked by God what had befallen him, he answered, 'Oh God, I have been struck by the madness of the people in the world of the sun. The Lord told him to return to his former dwelling place. He then rushed off in a hurry to the dust heap and lay down to wallow in the ashes.

After these happenings God adopted the shape of a holy man and went down to the world of the sun. There, people were lying here and there in fever. Seeing this he began to fan them softly and to give them medicine. In this way, they were cured from the fever. He also introduced worship of God and gave rules for sacrifices and worship. Having thus taught men he disappeared.

It is in this way that cough, fever, pain, and suffering have come into this world. It is worthy of note that the fever that entered the world, was only the result of the puff caused by the donkey-sized Fever swaying his tail. But even so this fever is a great suffering to bear for man. What might not have happened if the donkey-sized Fever had been allowed to remain on this earth. People would not have been able to stand it. The death of tomorrow would have taken place today.

But lo, the purpose of God was only to keep man in submittance. All power is his. But in his mercy he has sent a fever only caused by the swaying of a tail. In this he has bestowed upon us his mercy, for which we daily in the early morning ought to offer him our humble worship.

The Revenge of the Sparrow

Once upon a time there were a he-sparrow and a she-sparrow. They had both united and lived off the grains and seeds they could find and pick up. One day it so happened that the she-sparrow got it into her mind that she ought to have a pair of new shoes. She immediately asked her husband to have a pair made and give to her.

Both then went to the shoemaker, and the sparrow gave him orders to make a pair for his wife. The shoemaker answered: 'It shall be done. You may leave your wife here with me and go home. I will prepare the shoes for her and let you have them. You may come to fetch them tonight!'

The sparrow then left his wife and went home. The shoemaker then rose and killed the she-sparrow and put her out in the back-yard to die. In the evening, about the time when the cows come home, the he-sparrow came and asked, if the shoes for his wife were ready. The shoe-

maker answered, 'The skin has not dried yet, and you come here to ask for the shoes. Go and see if it has dried, and come back and tell me then.'

The sparrow went out to investigate. What he saw made him astonished, and he cried out, 'The shoemaker has killed my wife!'

Weeping and crying vehemently he went to his house.

Some time later one evening he yoked two rats to a cart and started out on a journey. Driving along the road he came across a fresh splash of cow-dung. This began to address him, saying, 'Brother, where are you going?' 'I am going to the shoemaker,' replied the sparrow. The cow-dung then asked him if she might go with him. 'Yes, you may come along,' said the sparrow.

He then sat up in the cart and both went on. After a while they met a scorpion. He too began to question the sparrow as to where he was going. The sparrow answered, 'The shoemaker has killed my wife. We are on our way to his house,' Said he, 'May I too come along?' 'yes, it is alright, come on.'

The scorpion sat up in the cart, which rolled on with the three passengers. Driving along they met a snake. As soon as the snake caught sight of them, the snake rose and addressed the sparrow, saying, 'Where do you intend to go, brother?' 'We are on our way to the shoemaker,' replied the sparrow. 'May I too come along?' the snake went on. he sparrow said, 'Why not, sit up.' And the cart rolled on again.

Proceeding they met a dove. She began to ask, 'Brother Bird, Brother Bird, where are you going?' The sparrow answered, 'The shoemaker has killed my wife. We are now going to see him.' The dove said, 'I will come along too.'

He allowed her to sit up in the cart and started off again. Within short they had reached the Shoemaker's house. Here they first took council as to the duties to be allotted to each one of them. And so a plan was made.

The cow dung sat down by the door and the scorpion on the candle-stick in the niche of the wall. The dove went to the fire-place and the snake struck the shoe-maker. The shoemaker got terrified and began to shout, 'I have been stung by a snake, I have been stung by a snake!'

His wife then went to the niche to light the lamp. But there was the fresh cow dung by the door. And she had the bad luck to step into it and down she fell. A thud was heard. She rose, however, immediately and stretched out her hand to light the lamp. Quick as lighting the scorpion gave her a sting.

She also began to shout and made for the fire-place, where she started to blow at the coals to make a fire. Instantly the dove began to flutter her wings and caused the ashes to come into her eyes, which she then began to rub. Then the shoemaker died.

The bird now yoked the rats to the cart again. His companions all went to their homes. And the sparrow returned to his home and lived there.

Social Life

To lease an improved and rational system of living on the culture of an aboriginal tribe may stimulate the less critical observer to nourish feelings of surprise. Aborigines and their primitive culture acquired - thanks to distorted reports of explorers who usually culminate their investigations by releasing a flood of minimising and prejudicial literature on the subject, acquired the reputation of forming the elements of the lowest possible strata of human advance and this stage of affairs became an ill-used criterion applied by mankind who, only too eager to cover its own shortcomings, loves to draw attention to those inhabitants of the Earth less advanced (or should one; say less shrewd) than itself. Contempt and the cherished manner of looking down on less fortunate fellow-creatures resulted consequently in harmful misunderstanding which could so far not be drowned by the voices of a very limited number of interested and understanding investigators. Even the school books are packed with wrong and entirely misleading descriptions of the life, modes of living and cultural manifestations of aborigines and it is hardly astonishing that this type of knowledge - once established in the receptive mind of a young grain-tends to remain fixed. The mere mention of the word "Junglewallah" provokes a shudder, projecting phantastic scenes of naked tribesmen hunting in hostile virgin-forests, notions of squalor and filth, primitive life in caves and blood thirsty feasts on unspeakably repulsive kinds of food. The Press, magazines and Film further corrupt the minds of children and adults by presenting the aborigines in a manner irresponsible and positively prejudicial, exploiting by this means man's utterly regrettable inclinations to see and to hear something about hair-raising habits of some isolated and neglected tribe. The impression is created that one should be very glad to belong to a more cultured circle, apart from a deliberately fostered tendency to keep aloof from those wretched creatures the sight of which is already enough to drive anybody to fits. Did not every one of us read thrilling stories of aborigines who roast their slain opponents to death? Certainly cannibalism did exist, though it has long been proved that cannibalism was based on a carnal lust and cruelty, but no-body felt prevented to believe that this kind of barbaric lack of consideration that contributed so much to the rather doubtful reputation of aborigines is nothing else than a ritualistic manifestation of a certain type of culture excellent in the eyes of the adherents, but not too pleasing in the eyes of the civilised world.

Besides, the city-dweller whose whole outlook on life is exclusively centred on appearances, make-ups, aping of superiors, fashions and super-smart chit-chat on world-reforms, brotherhood and mutual understanding etc, feels instinctively repulsed when he is compelled to contact a stray-member of an aboriginal tribe. The junglewallah is usually the exponent of poverty and shabbiness his simple manners do not make him eligible to membership of dandy-clubs and not to well-fed in addition, the tribesman unwillingly contributes to the maintenance of wrong ideas as to himself. This shy and helpless behaviour, his embarrassment apparently stress that he merely belong to the scum of mankind. The impression is indeed quite wrong; some junglewallahs maybe rascals, the majority, however, incorporated more candable elements into the simple but pure culture of their tribes, thought less civilised as they may be, the aborigine positively represents, a most valuable type of man and it is the very object of this study to analyse, to compare, to sift and to separate the characteristics of aborigines with the aim of establishing a definite programme of rejuvenation, reform and appreciation. This paper is not intended to be another ethnological treatise, though based on ethnology, it aims at the creation of a new spirit, a new attitude. Once consciousness is acquired, it will ultimately result in a new culture and mental outlook combining the best that the so-called primitive and the advanced civilizations have to offer.

Logically, only those who deeply plunged into this most fascinating subject are entitled and able to undertake such a task.

Besides, the great number of tribes makes it from the very beginning impossible to consider all the good elements of all the various tribal cultures and, consequently, the writer prefers to limit his scheme- though not lessening it in value -to a comparative study of the Bhils (Kandesh) who, after an existence in exclusion casting many centuries, have succeeded in preserving an exceedingly high culture absolutely from hampering influences from outside. A culture sparkling with life, simplicity honesty and a notable absence of hypocrisy. These assets alone are worthy of any effort. Present day's life became so cramped an affair, complicated in all its details, dominated by greed, falsehood and hypocrisy, boredom and lack of sincerity and it is imperative to question the usefulness of so wretched a force which our lives have happened to become-through our own fault. Should we not listen to the song of aborigines peacefully relaxing in the shade of a mohur tree? A song so free from worldly haste, so rich in sound, saturated with a melodious narrative of love, frank longing, fulfilment and happiness. This is the language we should learn to understand and once understood, we will cease to be slaves of our own life and our self-created institutions.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the origin of the Bhils. Many writers have stated that they inhabit their land since the dawn of history and not being able to contradict such a statement, matters are left as they are, in as much as they have no direct bearing on the aims of this publication. One circumstance, however, is noteworthy. The Bhils do not stand back in their earliest efforts to discover the great riddle that envelops the creation. The small selection of my theological accounts that follows, proves that the Bhils, despite an entire absence of any form of intercourse with any of the highly advanced - but now extinguished - peoples or nations, acquired beliefs not much unlike those the great Western Cultural movements.

Any body acquainted with the mythology of the East will not have the impression that the religious myth of the Bhils offers anything fundamentally new or distinguishable. But this is not the point; the realization that the Bhils were-despite the lack of contact with the outer world-able to develop a theory not (in principle) much different than the mythological interpretations of dominant folk groups in India and elsewhere, is witness of an advanced degree of reasoning. It is not intended to claim that the Bhils succeeded in discovering the facts that really governed the act of creating the Universe. They are positively utterly mistaken, though aiming at the proper demonstration of the great trend that characterises everything produced by the Bhils, namely simplicity and the desire to seek delight even in un-explainable happenings. Simplicity is the key-note; the unexplainable is taken for granted. For the sake of convenience, gods act in the same way as any Bhil would like to act. This very convenient attitude attributed to the Creative Powers was without hesitation applied when human problems were at stake. If everything is feasible in theory, then it should as well be feasible in practise and no worry or anxiety are not able to produce anything creative. The Bhils adopted such a simplified outlook on life as one of the main objects of their existence.

It must be stressed that it is not intended to advocate as truth the religious beliefs of the Bhils nor will it ever deem desirable to make any attempts aiming at a world-wide establishment of a new religion based on Bhil beliefs. Should, however, the introduction of a new belief result in a losing of those harassing conventions that strangle our present life, well, in such a case it would be justified to do so. The conflict that would result would, however, culminate in more damage than good and the solid points therefore to the mere acceptance of a desirable attitude and out-looks.

There is not the slightest doubt that our present civilization resulted in an unheard advance. Innumerable amenities are at our disposal, new inventions make us believe that our lives

became richer and worthwhile living, though it must be admitted that this type of advance deprived us from any chance to live in a natural way, to express ourselves freely, to act accordingly to our desires, to express our feelings in a fashion devoid of hypocrisy, man has himself completely undermined confidence in himself and his brethren are no more able to meet him on terms of mutual goodwill and understanding. Present day's life is absolutely barren of simplicity, we watch each other with fear and have to maintain an uninterrupted state of alert and the whole atmosphere in which we move seems to be saturated with poisonous vapours. This is the result of civilization.

Now, any advance that really results in an advancement of our liberties can only be sought by struggling against those powers that corrupted our very existence. There is no need to discard the good, through there is no limit, in acquiring more properties and by pointing to the culture of the Bhils, it must be understood that nobody is expected to accept without reservation any out-of-date conceptions that might still linger in the minds of the Bhils. Unconditional surrender of the whole structure of our own outlook is bound to be followed by an irrational upheaval and it is more advisable to borrow from others. We can borrow a good deal from the Bhils, though, of course, they as well have to borrow from us, but it will be demonstrated that the aboriginal has greater treasures to distribute than any member of the highly advanced races.

Cosmology

With other nations of the East the Bhils share the belief that the Universe consisted in the beginning merely of an enormous boundless sheet of water, enveloped in darkness. This state of affairs was, however, interrupted by the appearance of an enormous light which emitted a bell-like sound. This sound, gaining in volume, acquired the shape of a man who, far from being passive set out to create various parts of the

Universe by putting his hands on the sheet of water and continents appeared wherever his hands came in contact with the wet element. The stretches of water dividing the continents were conveniently called the sweet sea, the saltish sea, the chik sea, the kid sea, the black, the oily and the yellow sea. The whole Universe was thereafter in an orderly fashion divided into 9 parts though a tenth region had to be added suitable for the erection of a holy town.

As soon as it became evident that a reliable sources of light must be made available, the huge man ordered that a sun has to appear, whilst a softer light was required for the illumination of nightly sceneries. Additional arrangements caused the moon to increase and decrease which greatly aided the inhabitants of the World to determine time and seasons.

In order to animate the Earth, insects were created by God, first those that live in the water and those that live on the firm surface of the Earth. An additional blessing was added in the shape of grasses, trees, shrubs and fruits and the insects soon understood that they are meant to grow for their own maintenance and protection. God furthermore decided that the introduction of the Summer, Rainy and Winter Seasons would greatly facilitate matters and he did accordingly.

God, however, was not satisfied with the thought that His creation was merely inhabited by insects and he took thus some earth into his hands and moulded 2 human beings, a man and a woman. By the blow of his breath life was imputed to the moulds and with His blessings the two started to rule over the Earth and over every thing on it.

The first man and the first woman - called Mahadev and Parwati - became the ancestors of all mankind. Their son and daughter formed one union resulting in a vast multiplication and every one has to trace his origin back to this couple. Though the increasing number of men soon resulted in a clash of opinions and various castes and religions resulted from the quarrel, but every body was as liberty to follow his own vocation, some occupied themselves with the cultivation of their lands, others served or reared domestic animals.

Every thing went well and according to plan, but every body felt that the sky was still missing and the impassionate God created the sky covering the whole Universe, adorned by the sun and the moon. In order to prevent the sky from falling down, the sky had to be well fixed and He used for this purpose a good many nails. The nails are still to be seen; they acquired the form of stars and it is worth mentioning that God abstained from using the nails indiscriminately. The nails were placed in such a position that they represented the outline of things well known on Earth, and He omitted not to design a cot, a bird sitting on its eggs, a plough, a thief and a dog.

On the moon, so ample in space, a banyan tree was planted and on one of its spreading branches a witch was hanged as a warning to all the world. The witch is still hanging there today.

Sincere in his endeavours to maintain the world in good order. God passed orders regulating the health of man and beast. Thus, God desire that we keep our house and its surroundings clean by sweeping the refuse into gullies or watercourses. Fortunately, sweepers are available to occupy themselves with such a task, but so far as the jungles had to be cleaned themselves. The dirt of the jungle and the remains of fallen animals are eaten by other creatures and foulness and evil smell is removed. The leaves falling from the trees are swept away by the wind and deposited elsewhere till the rains burst. The torrents recondition hills and valleys, carry the dirt to the sea where it is finally consumed by insects - burdened with the task of keeping the seas transparent and clear. And by this means sun-light, air and water, insects and animals became helpers of God.

This legend, incorporating the main principles of the religious beliefs of the Bhils, underwent alterations and variations of the same theme are narrated wherever Bhils have settled down. There is, for instance, the story told of 7 sisters who, after being created by God, were ordered to descend to the bottom of the sea. The 7 sisters obeyed the command and as soon as their feet touched the sea-bottom, they set out to collect sand and earth (mud), forming with great care piles which, after assuming proper size and shape, became the continents. God was highly pleased with the excellent work done by the diligent sisters and he extended these the invitation to remain and to settle. He promised to send every year a rainy season conveying a feeling of happiness and freshness to every thing on Earth. The 7 sisters readily succumbed to this generous suggestion and since that day the arrival of the monsoon is every where expected with joy and longing.

Another legend goes a step farther. Its origin is insofar noteworthy as it clearly demonstrates that the Bhils, despite the utter primitiveness of their conceptions of the Universe, pondered the destinies of man. Fate, and the impossibility to escape from it, has apparently to a large extent occupied their mind. The sisters related to in the following legend certainly occupy the same status as an Angel of the mythology of other races. Their functions, at least, are the same.

As the time the Almighty created Mahadev and Parvati, he created simultaneously 2 sisters who were employed in the service of God. They were given the task of writing down the fate of newly born children. One of the sisters settled such items as the life in general, happiness, the various difficulties that have to be met in the course of the life and, finally death, whilst the second sister was empowered to fix by the means of notes the degree of wealth and earthly riches that fate kept in store for each individual. No power on Earth is strong enough to change or to alter the dictations bound to develop as predestined.

The Bhil's fatalistic attitude towards fate is certainly one of the reasons that led them to acquire a sense of helplessness. Lack of impulsive initiative so far as their well-being and prosperity is concerned, is one of the characteristics so inherent in Bhils that much time will be needed before a change to the better becomes noticeable.

One more legend may be added. It originated in our the desire to explain how it is possible for the Earth to resist the laws of gravity. God overcame this difficulty by placing the Earth on the head of a snake and, so that legend runs, the snake sometimes feels the heavy burden resting on her head and in an attempt to rid herself, the whole Universe is set into vibrations and the strange phenomenon becomes noticeable in the form of an earth-quake.

It is inconceivable how this strange, phantastic and rather absurd myth kept strong and alive during the centuries. It is therefore justified to say that those stories solely survived on account of the fact that bards and professional story-tellers chose them as particularly suitable. A primitive mind is attracted by glorified primitiveness and the circumstance that

the very act of creating the Universe was a deed so absolutely beyond his power of comprehension, fostered probably a feeling of appreciation of the super-natural. No part, (not even an alteration of it) of Bhil mythology was ever incorporated into his religious beliefs. On the contrary, the Bhil ponders very little over God. He merely believes that (some kind of a) God is great and powerful and his worship consists only in applying some zinc-chloride or stones and boulders, being quite satisfied that the sight of white painted stones not only pleases God, but will also stimulate future generations to remember the existence of God. Sometimes and temple is visited after having equipped themselves with a sufficient quantity of zinc-chloride which is more or less lavishly, smeared on the very next best stone in sight, being it within the temple or near by. On such occasions chappals and boots are removed, one bows slightly but not without reverence and the bow becomes obligatory when-ever the road passes a stone auspiciously shining with a coat of paint.

Now, nobody is expected to imitate the Bhils so far as the ritual of their religion is concerned. Our attention is, however, drawn to the admirable lack of complicating factors. Religion ceases to be a menace; the Bhils do not believe in any kind of hellish existence after death. One might be plagued with all kinds of devilish inconveniences during life time, but they are neither wished nor caused by God. It is God's business to be present at least somewhere in the Universe and, apart his whereabouts, He is expected to notice painted stones and show by means of some kind of benevolent manifestation that even the most insignificant efforts is highly appreciated.

Taking into consideration that religious conflicts never upset the Bhil community and that no bitter feud ever resulted from doctrinal differences opinion, one dares say that this type of extremely simplified religion possessed more merits than usually admitted. The religion as such does not matter, the resulting attitude is most remarkable and, provided that the "civilised" world desires to learn something from so primitive a tribe, many of us should consider it worth the candle to scrutinize our own response towards the religion into which we were born. Be it again stressed that no attempt is made to gain converts, it is merely desired that we should cease to make our life too burdensome by attaching great importance to trifles. Life is encrusted with a host of disputable bagatelles.

Much has been said as to religion. Religion is certainly of great educational value and one of the main pillars that supports the structure of Human Society. Unfortunately, religion acquired many grotesque forms or developed complicating ramifications which, grotesquely estranged from the principal idea that formed the initial foundation, lost their right to exist and is merely maintained for the sake of tradition. No country encouraged this trend more than India. Continuously splitting up in sections and sub-sections, the religious outlook became as confused as the sections into which man started to divide his circle or society, hardly leaving chances open to those who rather prefer to escape. 'Advanced Civilization' or its wrong interpretation is one of reasons. If mankind had remained simpler or had considered simplicity a value impossible to replace, man's craving for new variations of the existing would not have driven us so far. In some countries, it became fashionable to applaud and follow anything that is new, particularly if the new caters for those of us who believe to have finally discovered something that might satisfy their longing for sophisticated mental torture and mortification. Happiness is neither at the bottom of such distorted longings, nor any happiness ever results by rushing uninterruptedly to new ideas. The old and well-established but light-heartedly discarded religious attitude of yesterday became nearly a thing of the past though not everywhere. The Bhils, for instance, are far away from lending a hand to bigotry, they never think of expressing any doubts so far as their religion is concerned and feel perfectly happy about it. The desire to complicate existing does not exist and although the ritual of painting stones does not appeal to adherents of other religions, it still remains a fact

that the Bhils derive a certain satisfaction and consolation from doing so and, as the spirit counts and not the deed, one may justly say that we can indeed adopt the liberal idea and apply them in such a way that we free ourselves from chains which we ourselves have slung round our ankles. Bhil religion is not devoid of heathenly outlooks, but should they desire to do so, nobody should ever attempt to destroy their own beliefs not as long at least as the horizon of their happiness remains undisturbed.

First as much as the mysterious events of the creation of the Universe merely awakened the desire to marvel at it and to wrap it into a mantle of glory, in the same way religion is approached by the Bhils and they are more than satisfied that if in transit values generally attached to things by which we are influenced or surrounded - should not be clarified and codified, as nothing can be gained by it. Clarification creates problems and each problem can only be solved by creating more and such a thing is, of course, not the path on which a Bhil would like to stroll. He is not dominated by religion, it is taken partly as a necessity, partly as the cause and reason of a good number of festivals and holidays and nobody, not at least a Bhil, has ever resented a festival.

It is undoubtedly not a coincidence that even the tribes-man who has never heard of any alike aspirations of other nations made many a start in order to reveal the even greater mysteries of life after death. Nobody has so far succeeded in tearing the veil that conceals the greatest of all mysteries, though it is more than amazing that so primitive a mind came to the same conclusions as did more advanced groups. It is likely that tales, describing the dreadful things that will happen to any wicked person after death, circulated in the earliest times during which group movements and migrations took place. It can, however, not with certainly be denied that the Bhils possessed great imaginative power, combined with the desire to describe in such a manner the difficulties that await the sinner, that they represent any kind of punishment that could possibly be administered by themselves here on Earth, in case they were called upon to do so. Many things are described as wicked, for instance "driving cows from a field". A trifle in itself and extremely insignificant in the eyes of those who are not acquainted with life in village and jungle, but, alas, inferno awaits those who drive cows away, where they will be joined by those who are back-biters, cheats, liars or rogues or by departed souls of man who indulged into the following bad deeds; torturing an innocent animal, deceit, murder, intercourse with the wife of another man, unnatural intercourse or any sexual relations with sisters, sister's daughter, aunt or grand-mother etc., infanticide, seducing a woman, theft, putting obstacles into good deeds, showing the house of a butcher, setting fire to houses, destroying corn with the help of mantras, refusing water to the thirsty, insulting the sage or a monk, destroying young plants, disobedience to parents, not must one be accustomed to rapt — Well, every body who is found guilty of anyone of those offences will be required to answer for them at the gate of heaven. The road leading to heaven's gate is not an easy one; the disciples of god Yama drag the souls of the departed along a path ten times sharper than a sword, whilst those who behaved well during life-time reach Paradise with ease and comfort. Many calamities await the wicked sinner's soul; pits and ditches filled with scorpions, fire, serpents, ants and worms form a perpetual menace and only those who succeed in getting through this infernal maze ultimately manage to approach God.

As in any other religion, punishment awaits the bad. It is a kind of belief that crept into every creed; particularly useful if it is meant to influence the ignorant. It was actually, much better if fear was entirely obliterated from religion. There is no such thing like hell and infernal torture; God who created us, presented us in the same time with the ability to act wrong and as the wrong takes place during our earthly life and is so closely related to our life, any kind of wrong is punished here on this earth. Many escape punishment, others do not feel it or refuse to realize it. The threats of punishment after death are merely means of checking

uncontrolled action and serve to maintain order. The soul, if there is any, has little to do with any deeds dictated by bodily lust or physical cravings and can therefore not be punished after death.

The Bhils inclination to take things as easy as possible finds expression in all his way of life. No doubt, they could be happier as they are and it is rather essential to rid them of certain rude customs which could be achieved by introducing social reforms. Popularising social reforms faces, however difficulties due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the settlements or villages. Besides, people living in remote village are inclined to be obstinate and headstrong so far as their own social customs are concerned, though, here again, the same attitude can be observed in towns with the only difference that constant contact with strangers is bound to result in a change of the ways of viewing things and a certain progress to the better usually results in the mitigation of limited and crude aspects that, by tradition, deprive social customs of any elastic adaptability. The villager and particularly the tribesman who dwells in forest and jungle usually suffers from some kind of inferiority complex which stimulates the desire to cultivate friendship exclusively with co-members of his own society, avoiding, so far as possible, contact with the world beyond the limit of the forest outskirts, a ban to the free development of their faculties is created which, of course, resulted in backwardness. Although the Bhils are to a large extent themselves responsible for this state of affairs, many circumstances work together making it impossible to achieve the desired goal, even if a good number of Bhils had the intention to cast away certain crude customs and adopt those of more advanced clans or groups. Language is one of the chief obstacles and it should be attempted to introduce at least one common that could be understood by everybody. Only then will it be possible to bring them to the level of other advanced communities.

One question arises: Who is to be blamed? The tribesman was deliberately made to feel that he is an extremely backward and ignorant creature and no possibilities and chances were offered to him to rid himself from so wrong an exposition. Provided efforts are made, steps could soon be taken that would lead the Bhils to cultivate the desire to contact the outer world. Such a chance was so far only very sparsely offered to hill-tribes. It was, on the contrary, not even wished that a change of outlook on life overlooked; they prefer to deal with an ignorant clientele from which greater profits can be extracted. Thus, the more shrewd communities can, directly and indirectly, be made responsible for the backwardness of the Bhils who, not inclined to worry much about it, left things as they are. Lack of ambition and the complete absence of any thirst of power kept the Bhils in the background or in a kind of perpetual exile. Many traditions, customs etc. had hereby the change of being preserved and it is only too natural that they differ widely from those in use by wealthy town-folk. Town-dweller are, however, not therefore entitled to detest the primitive man. The latter has to a large extent in ancient days taken part in the gradual formation of our present social structure and it is certainly not the fault of the aboriginal that others managed to out flank him. The more intelligent man will always surpass ignorant, though ignorance has nothing in common with stupidity and the Bhils are certainly not stupid. They might be careless and easy-going, but one should take into consideration that a stay in any locality remote from the rest of the world exercises a paralysing effect. Items that seem so important elsewhere, dwindle into insignificance and instead of acquiring additional faculties, mind and body feels dragged into the claws of animalism. The whole reason of life appears futile, struggle becomes absurd and resignation invades the mind. It is from this very angle that one had to juggle the aborigines; it is preposterous to expect from them any thing with which they simply cannot be acquainted. Any body, for instance, who derives his livelihood by collecting forest-produce hardly enabling him and his family to exist, will exhibit such a passive attitude. Accustomed

to a dreary life and knowing that the lot of his forefathers did not vary in any way, does not feel induced to effect a change or, better even, he acquires the conviction that his ways of living are the best possible. In case he shares such an opinion with others, an atmosphere of happiness and contentment can be created and maintained. Not knowing the lure of refinement, he is satisfied with the available and consequently more happy than those who hastily rush from one innovation to the other, not even taking time the possibilities of one of them.

Thus, primitiveness of the aborigine is not disqualifying and primitiveness excuses a certain crudeness that slipped into his daily life, though crudeness may not be looked upon from that angle by the aborigine himself. In his eyes it is merely a lively, but natural manifestation of his own sphere. The introduction of reforms might possibly upset the equilibrium and instead of imparting benefit, the decreased pressure of handed down tradition can eventually result in a moral upheaval and uproot whatever was firm so far. It will at least happen in extreme cases. In case now if his fellow-brethren object to tribesman's being coarse and rude, in such a case it is perfectly alright to be crude, because by being crude they merely cater for the expectations of those who do not for one moment expect anything else. The introduction of refinement would only result in creating a ridiculous atmosphere of dandyism and far away from being understood, the trespasser will only feel uncomfortable and try to fall back on the old standard, or even go beyond it in order to recapture his lost position. Uplift, provided it aims at the amelioration of financial calamities, is always welcome, but every step that attempts to transform a Bhil into a student of Shakespeare's works is wrong. The aboriginals will not benefit by it and Western Civilization will not see any blessing in it. The ability to read and write their own language is much more praiseworthy and if this is achieved, the Bhils can for themselves decide if it is necessary to change their habits.

With the view to stress that foreign influence is not always beneficial a few notes will follow; notes collected in places where Bhils are living. Moreover, the contents of these notes are utterances of Bhils themselves and it will be seen that education is not at all looked upon as an asset.

Faithfulness, hospitality, strictest adherence to truth, chivalry towards women, respect for civilised person, and for the Administrator are virtues of the Bhils for generations past.

So far as faithfulness and reliability go, no un-educated Bhil has so far disappointed. If he is entrusted to take a certain sum to a certain person, he will by all means faithfully carry out the command. The educated Bhil, however, can not be relied upon; he will most certainly spend the entrusted sum somewhere and somehow for himself and refuge in all sorts of excuses in order to conceal the non-delivery of the money to a third person.

In short, faithfulness and reliability disappear as quickly as education advances. From time immemorial, the laws that govern hospitality were irrefutable. If a guest arrives at the house of the poorest man where absolutely no food is available, the host will all the same inquire if his guest wants to share a meal with him and the offered meal will be available, even it means borrowing from the neighbours. The educated Bhils who pretend that their smaller knowledge rendered them unapproachable and dignified, does not feel inclined to extend hospitality to visitors, at least not if the visitor is uneducated. This change of one of the fundamental virtues of man is, by the Bhils themselves, ascribed to the corrupting influence of education; very little seems to be gained when instruction results in the abandonment of friends and relations, only because of the latter's lack of knowledge of the ABC.

In the eyes of the Bhil, the speaking of untruth is one of the most despicable crimes. Whatever happened, the Bhil will always give a most correct description, even if it is

detrimental to himself. Even in case of homicide he has puzzled the courts of law and justice. The uneducated Bhil always confesses without restraint and his strong urge to speak the truth is by no means diminished by the knowledge that punishment may be hard. The slightly-polished Bhil behaves differently. He uses his insufficient knowledge in such a way that any commitment of his appears distorted in his favour; he hides and conceals the truth with the express aim of sparing himself from punishment. So the aborigine himself condemns any sort of education, firmly believing that the ability to read and to write undermines tradition and custom and it is not astonishing that he eyes with disfavour the influences exercised by towns. It is likely that a good number of educated Bhils still abstain from violating the laws of their clans, though they cannot escape the sinister impression they create in the eyes of their uneducated brethren by reading books of any kind.

The uneducated Bhil is always fond of his wife. The wives are not unduly petted; they are well watched by their husbands and trespassing is certainly not allowed. Should any woman supply proof to her husband that she is guilty of unfaithfulness, in such a case punishment is dealt out in the form of a good thrashing or, if it comes to that, he murders his wife straight away. The educated Bhil abandoned drastic means of this order (which is laudable) and he prefers to desert his wife. To desert a wife is, however, according to Bhil's tradition, an unpardonable act and aborigine resents his more learned brethren's inclination to neglect whatever was considered good by his forefathers.

In justice to these Bhils who still honour tradition despite the limited education that might possibly have turned their minds, one must admit, that not every one misused his contact with school in such a way that he necessarily had to become a scoundrel. The primitive man does not know that knowledge can easily be put to beneficial use and not knowing what to do with knowledge he rather prefers to consider only its bad aspects. Knowledge had no room within the framework of his daily routine; knowledge was never desired, knowledge was alien and superfluous and his antagonism is excusable.

Besides, very little use can be made of it when living in the jungle. Knowledge, once acquired, may induce a youngster to leave his homestead; he might feel attracted by a more eventful life in town and the danger exists that he will sever relations with his own family and clan resulting in an estrangement that can never be bridged again. Nevertheless, he has discovered that it is useful to go to school as it is a means to ameliorate his financial position. To free himself from the clutches of money-lenders is an art which he never understood, though realising that it can be done, his antagonistic attitude towards school and education may fade away and assist him directly to better his plight. Once he Realises that he benefits by the proper knowledge of prices, he will be able to check shrewd money lenders and thus raise his standard of living, desirable as such, provided he himself does not succumb to corruption or spend his earnings on drink.

Aborigines in general and the Bhils in particular are often blamed for excessive drinking habits. Freely drinking forms an important item of the diet of nearly every Bhil and nothing on earth exercises a greater lure on him than alcohol. Knowing only too well that the intoxicating effect of liquor is detrimental to his general well-being, an aborigine may in so far be excused as drink is not always taken for the sake of getting drunk. The Bhils distrust for any kind of modern medicine, the remoteness of his village and the non-availability of medical aid whenever he is confronted with an emergency, naturally lead him to believe that alcohol possesses the properties of a good medicine able to cure all kinds of diseases. He fancies that liquor is the best antidote against fatigue and that any kind of bodily sufferings are bound to vanish as soon as he resorts to the bottle. He is furthermore convinced that

alcohol makes the brave even braver and that he gains strength for doing all kinds of things which he ordinarily would not carry out.

In addition, alcohol is said to stimulate the appetite and as the Bhil is rather fond of eating he does not want to miss a chance and eat moderately for the good reason that he failed to create a hunger-rising condition. Thus many good and whole some properties are ascribed to alcohol and, besides, many ha hob days, celebrations and even his religious rituals could never properly be carried out without the flow of liquor.

Alcoholic drink is known from the earliest beginnings of civilization. It is logical that any intoxicating liquid became, even in earliest times, highly priced, inasmuch as its very effect could not properly be explained. The desire to be courageous, strong and healthy exists every where and no wonder that aboriginal tribes cling much to it. Their lives are only maintained by physical labour and any sign of drinking endurance it taken as an indication of approaching age, increased weakness and consequently a restriction of physical abilities. If such indication can be counter-acted by a free intake of alcohol, it may not be surprising that it is actually done. Moreover, the life of primitive men is monotonous enough; festivals may be frequent but they do not last for ever and even the merriest ceremony does not decrease or mitigate the necessity to return to the daily routine of hunting or killing. Cinemas and stage plays are unknown in the jungle, there is no distraction of any kind; alcohol is the only means of escape.

It must be admitted that the Bhils made and still make to frequent and excessive use of this kind of salvation. It constitutes, as a matter of fact, a great danger. Not that alcohol alone will cause untold harm to the physical well being of the Bhils; hill-tribesmen are usually strong enough and hard-work and continuous stay in the open air counter-balances effectively. The curse that accompanies drinking habits finds expression in poverty and a low standard of having. The Bhils can not claim that their standard of living is high in any way; they are indescribably poor. The huts in which they live are of most primitive pattern, devoid of anything that might give rise to the belief that they should like to introduce a change for the better. The intention to do so might exist in their sub consciousness, but being already poor, it is easier to spend the last rupee on liquor than to attempt to purchase an object that might be of some use somehow which, however, does not prove that one must have it. Even a little drink causes sorrows to vanish; one forgets the money-lender, his threats and vile tactics and being seen in the liquor-shop is the centre of information, one meets every body and particularly those whose state of mind is quite similar.

It is interesting to note that those who acquired some degree of liberty usually abstain from drinking or drink at least very moderately. The little bit of education which they call their own has at least liberated the sense of consciousness and very much afraid to lose reputation, the literature Bhil became able to exercise control over himself and his efforts may in the long run influence a wider circle. The foundations exist and many Bhils are quite prepared to become abstinent if they only could. Prohibition should be introduced, but the question remains open how and when the passionate longing for alcohol will find some other outlet. Every suppression of one craving, be it physical or mental, will help any other suppressed urge to develop and to act as safely valve. It remains to be seen in which way and to what extent the abstinent Bhil is going to react and if he resorts to some other vice as a compensation for the last. On the other hand, one must not forget that alcohol is needed for ceremonial purposes with a centuries old background. A prohibition would therefore be rather out of place as it interferes too much with the maintenance of social institution which forms, after all, the backbone of primitive life. Liquor is needed at the time of sowing, planting and harvesting; alcohol can not be dispensed with at marriage ceremonies and it is as

much indispensable whenever Death claims a Bhil. Alcohol is believed to influence and to appease indirectly the gods and as nobody thrives well without their blessings, it would be rather difficult for anyone to find a suitable substitute. A substitute could be found, but it may not please the gods and if anything goes wrong in the village, the tribesman will only fall back with increased vigour and consume more alcohol. He will resort to illicit distillation and take great pleasure in doing so. As nearly every effort has so far failed to convince the average Bhil that medicines supplied by dispensaries they are best possible means of curing maladies, he will stick to his own method and in case he fails to obtain alcohol in the open market, different method has to be employed. Stills will be installed in every house. The baghat or medicine-man cannot cure any body without alcohol, through him liquor is effaced to the gods and it is plausible that gods benevolent influences are entirely determined by and dependent on the amount of alcohol offered. Any restriction the free availability of liquor would therefore only result in an enormous upheaval, spreading discontent and dissatisfaction. The money saved through abstinence would be spent on other vices and, besides the poor life of the aborigine would only become poorer. As long as advanced races do not adhere strictly to prohibition, they are morally not entitled to force others to do what they themselves cannot do. Despite the misuse, the Bhils should be given the option of deciding themselves what is best for them. Their fondness of drink keeps nevertheless the door open to advance and it is astonishing why drink is really so dreadful a vice, steps were not taken centuries ago. The Bhils survived all the same and may it be said again, they are in no way unhappier than any body else. Moderation, and not Prohibition, are advisable.

Whatever has been said here with reference to drink aims only at better understanding. Primitive man has to be judged from a different angle and, more important even, he can only then be condemned when he deliberately acts in such way that his doing so really deserves to be classified as bad; as long as the primitive does not himself have the impression that he acts wrong, well in such a case, he is right. His ignorance does not disqualify. Finally we have to take into consideration that aborigines are proved to be very superstitious. The Bhils form also exception; drink is linked with superstition and superstition is one of the foundations of their society.

Whoever has lived in hilly tracts where communication is only possible by means of meandering footpaths, may have noticed that hill tribes to either like to live in village like settlements or in isolated houses dotted over the landscape. Despite their sociable inclinations, the Bhils abstains from forming any compact settlement; one prefers to live out of the way in some lonely spot. Closely attracted and attached to Nature, preference is given to a site where he can live absolutely unhampered by any conventions. Living at a distance from the houses of his brethren appeals in so far to him as close contact with neighbours in apt to lead to friction. The maintenance of peaceful relations is of paramount importance; the aborigine cannot afford to engage in perpetual quarrels that might lead to the destruction of his own happiness or culminate in a clash. Life in the jungle is based on mutual assistance and as such assistance can only too easily be forfeited, it is decided upon to keep at a respectful distance. Unnecessary gossip, the cause of much trouble, is thus avoided; every body concentrates only on those events that happen within his own circle and the neighbour is thus saved from unpleasant interference. In this respect town folk have much to learn from the Bhils. The town dweller's tendency to flock together and to create a state of congestion is the source of untold friction and inconvenience, though, unfortunately, the concentration of activities in a town necessitates as well a concentration within a certain radius of living space. The Bhils do not have to face such an evil. Agricultural occupation and the location of fields rather encourage decentralization. This attitude is even carried further. If a Bhil happens to have 4 sons of marriageable age, he will build for each one of them a hut at a spot distinctly

separated from the others. Each son is given a gift in form of cattle, fowls and some primitive implements and he will henceforth live in his own little world, quite apart from father and brothers. Family ties and personal affection do not suffer herewith; a visit-can quickly be paid and after an exchange of opinions everyone returns to his homely abode.

The huts are of a primitive pattern. Bamboo and mud are used as building material, but the huts are constructed in such a way that fresh air is permitted to circulate freely. The latter seldom takes place in a town-house. The Bhils attach great importance to fresh air and it is certainly due to this circumstance that the general state of health is superior to that prevailing in congested areas. The Bhils preference to light structures had many good reasons. Very thrifty by nature, the Bhils likes to change his habitations as often as he can which could not easily be undertaken in the case of stone buildings. A light hut is easily demolished and easily erected; it does not involve any outlay in form of costly building material. He does not feel prevented to realize a sudden craving for a change of site and climate and the ease with which his few belongings can be moved remains an inexhaustible source of happiness.

Problems do not exist; contracts must not be cancelled. The new departure means a new life and access to new hunting grounds. It becomes thus evident that primitiveness offers a large margin of freedom and it is not uncertain that the aborigine is more than wise by clinging to his freedom even at the cost of being considered a "wild man".

Despite the fact that the Bhils are so jealous of their personal freedom, they never attempted to counter-act the baghat's endeavour to render the Bhils slaves of his influence. The medicine-man's word counts every where, he is the ruler and dictator and those who disobeyed his instructions were soon taught that such high handedness has to be punished. The Baghat is the intermediary between the gods and the Bhils and superstitious to the highest degree, no Bhil dares to contradict. The Baghat blesses the field he assists at ceremonies, he helps departed souls on their way to heaven and, more important even, he is able to detect witches and know how their evil activities can be checked. Of course, the existence of a Baghat is by no means a compliment which one could extend to the Bhils; a sorcerer of his calibre is positively an anomaly and a sign of great backwardness.

Nobody has already been more attacked than the Baghat, his prestige, however, remains unshaken thanks to his own cleverness. Those who strive to curtail his powers, soon relapse into indifference out of sheer fear that the Baghat may indeed be in constant touch with gods or sinister spirits and heap misfortune on their shoulders. On the other hand the dead would run the risk of missing heaven, fatal to the dead and fatal to those who survive.

It can not be said that the very existence of a baghat and the freedom with which he exercises his powers denote that Bhils are particularly primitive. The medicine-man is an age old institution, known all over the world and it is thus not surprising that the Bhils rely on him at least as much as others do. Moreover, it is the privilege of the aborigines to employ Baghats without whom the tribe could not have developed his characteristic attitude towards life.

The Baghats activities only become objectionable when they are linked with wilful exploitation or result in loss of life and prosperity. Loss of life was often enough caused by Baghats who specialize in the detection of witches. Once a woman has been declared a witch she may by sheer luck escape torture but many so called witches were not able to remove the spell from the body of a sick person and unreservedly perished on the instigation of the Baghats.

Advanced races have since long discarded witch doctors, substituting them by charlatans of any kind. This may be explained by man's desire to probe the mystical. By not making use of moral remedies, he likes to entrust those who claim supernatural powers and as every body

hopes to escape from the unavoidable medicine-men and their colleagues are permitted to flourish. The Bhils are thus not much worse than civilised people.

A recent dealing with the many fold changes that came into being in the course of the last two decades, special attention was drawn to the Bhils who, like many other aborigines, develop a liking for western dress. It was stated that coats, long pants and hats are increasingly worn. Being decently attired certainly helps the wearer to look respectable in a way, though it is rather doubtful if the adoption of an alien form of dress is really desirable. In the first instance, it does really not fit into the landscape; the Bhil who derives his livelihood from agriculture does not need modern attire. It would only prevent him from moving freely and, besides, to consider himself better than the common lot, will have no beneficial influence on him nor on another. A simple mind becomes easily influenced and a pair of fashionable trousers is enough to make a man of his kind conceited. Coat and trousers prevent him from doing his regular work and once he has taken to wearing western clothes, he will not easily abandon such out-of-the-place habits for fear that the newly acquired dignity will leave him as soon as his babu attire is removed. Personal discomfort counts little or is bravely endured. When combined with a certain degree of literacy, the new habit may easily develop into a profound alienation. Those members of his clan who still wear the regular jungle-outfit are forced to feel inferior whilst the dandy is apt to nourish feelings of superiority. No more able and willing to attend to the work and daily routine of the village, the modern young savage feels attracted by petty jobs in nearby towns and bazaars, provided, of course, that such kind of work still permits him to wear a coat and possibly a tie. The meagre education he had regulates naturally his income and not being able to make the two ends meet, the young dandy has to resort to all kinds of uses and instead of being a help to his own community he is led to become a traitor. Grain dealers and merchants might avail themselves of his influence in the villages and induce him to act as a middle man not with the aim to assist him on his way to success, but with the intention to get a better and more ruthless hold of the villagers. The simple minded tiller of the soil will with little doubt accept the recommendations of some urbanised member of the clan and blindly believe in his suggestion. In case the bania desires to purchase a certain produce at a low rate, it is only necessary to send his special envoy to the villagers with the order to spread news beneficial to the dealer though utterly detrimental to the cultivator. A trifling commission may be paid to the modernized son of the soil, just enough to buy a new coat which, again, is a further step to the complete break with tradition.

Customs And Manners

It is, of course, not wanted that aborigines never acquire the habit of dressing themselves properly, though properly means that the national Dress privilege in the district should be preferred. A clean dhoti is certainly an aesthetic garment, it is adapted to climatical conditions, comfortable and not too expensive. A national dress fosters in addition national feelings, whilst western dress can be left to those who is by necessity had to adopt such apparel at a time when their mind and character was already firmly moulded.

The Bhils resort at present to a loin-cloth. A loin-cloth has many advantages: cheapness is the most important. Apart from easy availability, it is a most fitting garment for those who have to spend their lives in hospitable forests where physical work and hunt constitute the main sources of income. A loin-cloth, however, covers the body only to the barest minimum and despite its efficiency as a work-outfit, the loin-cloth gives the poor man an even poorer appearance and his chances decrease rapidly whenever he has to come in contact with people who do not look with favour at aborigines kind of -dress. It is therefore advisable that as primitive tribes increase they should strictly keep aloof from western styles. Nevertheless, even if aborigines prefer to wear a loin-cloth only, they have reason to do so. They themselves feel properly attired and, as long as this conviction is not shaken, it is better to allow every one of them to suite his own convenience. The whole question of dress is, admittedly, merely a matter of tradition and prejudice and happy are those who do not face the necessity of making all kinds of concessions only for the take of respectability.

After having so much said in favour of the Bhils, one should turn to the most fundamental order that governs the life of every man. Marriage and marriage customs are of great importance every where; many nations have succeeded in simplifying the matter, others incorporated a tremendous amount of complicating ritual, particularly here is India. Negotiations have to be launched, horoscopes are to be consulted, gods must be invoked and only little attention is paid to the real aim of marriage. As long as the dowry offered is considered acceptable, the bride necessarily becomes acceptable to the same degree and it matters relatively little if and how the parties concerned derive any satisfaction and happiness from such arrangements. Bride and bridegroom hardly meet personally before marriage and whenever they meet refuge is taken to hypocrisy and pretension by means of which both partners enter the matrimonial bond with wrong ideas about each other. Every body concerned hopes that things can be settled after marriage and as things seldom settle as expected, untold unhappiness results, matters did not become easier with the advance of civilization and it is worthwhile to inquire how the primitive man tries to tackle the problem. Marriage remains a problem even in backward communities though less puzzling as every body relies on a tradition that leaves little space for complications and besides, every body knows what can be expected. The Bhils, for instance do not require any young maiden to possess knowledge which can not profitably be employed. As a good house-wife and co-worker, the Bhil woman exclusively concentrates on tasks connected with such duties; she knows the limit of her capacities and she is therefore quite free from inhibitions or wrong ideas. Husband and wife know the little world in which they live and discard from the very beginning any ambitions that might possibly upset the equilibrium of the household. She knows that her husband is fond of alcohol, but nothing prevents her from taking a sip herself and, so far as the children are concerned they are at an early age offered the chance of getting acquainted with the taste of liquor and there is none in the whole family who could possibly condemn the others. Moreover, both partners know well the financial potentialities of their

holding and a Bhil woman will therefore never abandon herself to longings for objects which cannot in the normal way be acquired. In this respect they differ greatly from their sisters in towns. Town people often fail to abstain from maintaining a sober outlook; the marriage settlement is spiced with vague promises are permitted to rely on assurance that is seldom realised which nevertheless instil in their minds the desire to brave for the inaccessible. The Bhils approach matrimony from a different angle, they know life means hard work, occasionally interrupted by a holiday.

However, the human element is not absent. Mutual love brings both partners together and the alliance convenable comes most seldom into working. No partner is forced on any body. Of course, the parents still like to arrange a match, but the boy as well as the girl are at liberty to refuse without causing any offence. As a rule, the boy courts the girl and marriage takes place as soon as they discover that their love is profound enough. Any widow stands a fair chance to marry again. In cases where parents or relatives object, the young man and woman simply run away and such an act is enough to declare them properly married. In extreme case the girdhas to be kidnapped and provided the girl is in love, the use of force sanctions the deed and elopement is followed by recognition. Many girls merely join their lovers by going to houses. This is indication enough that they wish to live together and the union becomes legally sanctified.

Alike every where in the world, the Bhils often decide to run away with the wives of a neighbour. No body can prevent a man to elope any married woman with her consent; but the escaped is usually followed by a sequel based on clan traditions in order to assure that a certain compensation is paid to the deserted husband. The compensation depends on the age of the run-away wife, the amount which her first husband had to pay to her father at the time of her first marriage and the preparedness of the first husband to part with his wife. The settling of the zagada requires a lot of bargaining. The whole procedure is to some extent flattering to the unfaithful female. Sums as thousand rupees are asked for her release, but, usually her value sinks during the bargaining operations and she discovers that her second husband purchased her for the bare sum of 200 rupees. This, however, is natural course of events and she still remains recognised as a valuable acquisition. The social status of any woman of her kind remains unaffected. The payment of a compensation legalizes and sanctions (according to the laws of the clan) her transfer from one husband to fan other. Moreover, the procedure accompanying the action culminates in a feast. The judges, the parting and the newly united parties, some members of their clans and good friends join merrily the trouble-makers with the firm intention to forget the past with the help of some liquor. The newly wedded are presented with gifts and the new departure is made easy by the conviction that every thing is all right and in strict accordance with the law and custom of the tribe Disturbing gossip is hereby eliminated. Any reason to feel guilty or ashamed fades away in to oblivion, whilst the structure of the tribal society was kept intact.

The Zagada system, though condemned by many observers, incorporates one important advantage: a peaceful settlement avoiding blood-shed. To a good number of Bhils now violence is not acceptable and refuge is often too drastic measures resulting in loss of life. The unfaithful wife of the seducer runs the risk of being either beaten or murdered in extreme cases. Any union of a man with the wife of another man fails to become sanctioned by the tribe's law in case compensation is refused and the female degrades herself to the status of a concubine. As the keeping of concubines is, however, an age-old institution, the woman is nevertheless able to enjoy all the animates which her tribe can offer, in as much as the Bhils recognise the necessity of satisfying sexual urges by adoption of any accessible means and concubines are therefore spared from any humiliating attacks as her functions differ, in principle, little from those of a legally married woman.

Pre-nuptial intercourses widely spread. The general atmosphere of same contact with nature created no abhorrence for ex-marital relations despite the fact that it is well known that this state of affairs is not desirable as such. Damage is usually prepared by inviting the trespassers in a legalized union and no blame falls on a child born soon after the marriage ceremony. Illegitimate offspring enjoy the same status as any legitimate child and prejudices, so often connected with illegitimacy are either unknown or deliberately ignored.

A great number of songs demonstrate even that there is nothing objectionable in having pre-nuptial intercourse with a girl. Many love-songs concentrate on the subject, mentally describing that things could not happen differently as the girl, waylaid by her lover, simply could not resist his entreaties. Remote and silent valleys, a cluster of trees with under growth or the protected slope of a hill are pictured as a ideal meeting places. The poets of the Bhils love to see the heroine made pregnant, though matters are mitigated by the birth of a son. Love escapades are (at least in songs) seldom rewarded by the birth of a daughter, whilst a son greatly changes the situation.

All goes well if it is a matter of mutual love. Unfortunately, rape is not too uncommon and it is regrettable that girls under age fall into the category of those who are most easily victimised. The Bhils themselves consider rape a condemnable crime and evildoers are without exception handed over to the police, which, in itself, is indication enough that nothing vile or extra-ordinary is attached to prenuptial intercourse, whilst any attempts to molest a child-girl are taken at face-value as unpardonable mischief.

It is rather typical that the aborigines attitude towards any kind of problem appertaining to the question of sex and marriage is more healthy and normal than that of civilized individuals. Personal liberty (provided excessive liberty does not result in crime) are the proof around which life rotates and should personal liberty and real happiness benefit by it marriage as such could be abolished. Many Bhils, for instance, have clamoured for its destruction, but they have not shown a more excellent way, whilst a greater number defend this immemorial institution. Marriage is believed sacred and indispensable to social order, necessary in the interest of children, but, it results too often in failure and, in actual fact, develops often in a hell of torment. Without marriage humanity would perhaps have to suffer more and accepting marriage as an institution, the primitive egotism of nature's mighty urge has partly to be subdued. The aborigine, deprived of easy access to the great World, become, by nature, more profoundly and exclusively emotional and he takes consequently sex matters at once as a concession and a demand, to be shaped accordingly to his own world and outlook. He does not ponder eventual terrifying anxiety or perplexity adapting his life (and that of his female partner) to the same subject which appears to both with approximately equal force. Sexual activity, in every from this very angle that we have to judge the primitive man; his edifice, however balanced, offers him the shelter he desires, and it never dawns upon him that he is not enlightened.

It is not true that the backward tribesman is incapable of seeing the difference between sheer impulse and preservation; he always remains within his own sphere. He prefers to be normal and whatever suits him best is adopted without remorse.

Aesthetic values and personal inclinations determine the choice of the partner, the girls must be able to boast of hair as smooth as the skin of a snake, her walk must be graceful, the forehead must not be flat, so may her nose resemble a flower, voluminous buttocks, flat feet and big ears disqualify; desirable. Any young girl with hair on chest and back is declared able to develop. Lop virtues; white teeth and the absence of gossiping inclinations are as well favourable assets.

It is believed that a girl becomes particularly passionate when she indulges into sexual intercourse before reaching puberty. The experience of the jungle further taught that it is wiser to provide as soon as possible a husband for the girl or, failing to do so, she turns mad with desire. In such a state it is difficult to pacify her passion, she might even become a menace to the village and compel the very next male to devote attention to her or she dies of madness.

It becomes apparent that the Bhils do not believe in restraint and it can rally not be said that animal passion plays an important part in his life. The desolate and isolated region in which they live, and the close contact with the nature around merely fosters a straight forward attitude. Erotic pleasures are the only available distraction. After the days toil fires are lit, men and women of every age and description assemble, in order to start with the popular nocturnal dance round the fire, enlivened by obscene songs, movements and gesture everyone of which exclusively represents an erotic provocation. Demonstrations of this kind, surpassing the borderline of decency, find, thanks to the vulgar note, an echo in the primitive soul, sweeping inhibitions away and resulting in an alarmingly high degree of debauchery. The effect of the flickering flames of the fire, combines lewdness of exciting songs, is traditionally accompanied by liquor and it is really not surprising that such lusty assemblies culminate in events which, with some restraint, could have been avoided. Every one is caught by the desire to kidnap, to elope or to rape, though not too much attention is paid to it. The inability to stem the natural course of events is recognised and well-known and, every body admits, the provocation was planned by organised mass-action which, in its turn, naturally has to result in mass debauchery. It is of course regretted by many Bhils that established family-ties can so easily be loosened as a result of their dancing parties, but nothing is done that might possibly eradicate the evil.

The practice as such teaches very little that could be accepted by more advanced groups and it must be kept in mind that it is the main aim of this treating to illustrate that mankind derives only to a certain extent benefit from convention, on the one hand ample proof extent that lack of straining conventions exercise a loosening effect on the moral attitude of clans or even whole nations.

It is often said primitive tribes can only advance after being acquainted with certain fixed moral standards. There is little doubt that much could not be done in that direction, but it still remains to be questioned if the introduction, of moral standards so far alien to the primitive man really results in an increase of personal happiness. The latter counts so much in our life, is so easily jeopardised and so difficult to regain. In the case of the Bhils it can be said that only few members really desire a change, the majority is firmly convinced that a change is not at all necessary and it is therefore very doubtful if the Bhils will ever feel more contented after being more or less forced to adopt standards that might mean much to others, offering however, little to themselves. The subject has to be handled with great delicacy; and primitive man who has the impression that his customs are threatened is prone to adopt an antagonistic attitude which induces him, for the sake of the maintenance of his personal habits and inclinations, to retire to more remote corners of his jungle kingdom where an unhampered indulgence into old-established tribal life can be carried out.

Uplift work has been carried out and attempts are begin made to teach reading and writing. A man who knows to read well might be an ornament to the village and his ability to interpret the news of the daily papers might possibly stimulate others to follow his example. Literacy means as well that the obscure accounts of money lenders can easier be checked which, in return, lead to increased prosperity of the village population. Such an advantage is required by the Bhils, but little could so far be achieved in the field of tribal custom. The easy way of

living remains the foundation of the village society and, should it be possible to pay less to the creditor, the savings are by preference used to cover expenses pertaining boastfully staged celebrations which, in conformity with the degree of opulence, result and are desired to result in a fall and absolutely unrestricted outburst of gaiety crowned by a general relaxation of any moral barriers. A Bachande spiced with erotic provocation, constitutes the climax of the primitive man's life. Even the literature is unable to resist non-participation would earn him the reputation of being either conceited or even important and as nobody likes to see these attributes connected with his name, barriers are bound to fall easily. The great tenacity with which the Bhils stick to established institutions is demonstrated by his reluctance to ease believing in witchcraft. The community is ruled by the witch-doctor who, thanks to his good relations with gods and demons, is considered the only being who can avoid disaster. The witch-doctor's efficiency depends, naturally, on the remuneration offered to him, though a goat or some fowl are considered not too shabby a payment. Alcohol increases the Baghats power to summon the invisible rulers of this world; in extreme cases he feels alike to detect the source of any calamity and (in common with many witch-doctors acting all over the world) mystic currents draw him to the witch. Witches are supposed to maintain mischievous intercourse with demons and the devil in particular, though she can save her good name by admitting that she is the witch who caused illness in the neighbour's house. The witch, after many entreaties, forcibly agrees to drive the ghastly spell away by performances near the bed of the affected, sick person. She might become a great celebrity in the districts provided, of course, that the spell is removed and the neighbour's health is restored; failure to do so has torture and death in its trail Exposed to unsurpassable brutality, the witch life is slowly but painfully extinguished, whilst glamour, fame presents are kept in store for those more fortunate witches who, helped by Nature, luckily escaped from a rather unpleasant treatment. The very fact that the authorities had to take the most severe steps in order to impress he Bhils that belief in witches is more than vain, proves that it is not easy to interfere with tribal custom. The torture of witches is now prohibited, nevertheless every Bhil will probably never cease to do so. The witchdoctor's powers remain unrestricted; his medicines obtainable at Government dispensaries and it is quite likely that witches are still tortured and killed without the knowledge of the authorities. Government's decision was certainly right on humanitarian reasons, in new order. In the first instance they hold on to the conviction that witches exist and, secondly, by not being able to accuse a witch, the latter can not be induced to cure a sick person or animal and death is bound to result. Moreover, the very knowledge that is legally not possible ex-terminable witches by torture, resulted in the apprehension that many more women might feel inclined to overcome surplus and to become witches instead. As witches are now protected by law, witchdom is made easy and attractive and the Bhils feel that they run the grave risk of being overpowered by many fold sinister influences. Nobody can understand why it suddenly became necessary to break with tradition. Whilst a number of women is spared from unjust attack, the whole tribe undergoes pangs of fear and the innovation is far away from being applauded. Thus the new law, imported from the civilized world, failed to contribute to the personal happiness of the Bhils and I am afraid, the influence of the civilized world will become more and more persistent in the course of time and it is worthwhile to watch the effects. Superstition is framework of daily tasks. Apart from agriculture, hunting is one of the major occupations. Not only that hunting appeals to man in general; it is one of the source from which his livelihood is derived. A successful hunt provides meal for the whole family and it is logical that many precautions must be taken in order to ensure success. A favourable moment has to be awaited for the start; the early morning hours and late in the evening are considered particularly favourable, inasmuch as the risk of meeting people on the road is largely diminished at such a moment. By no means must the hunter betray that he intends to kill game and nothing is more harmful than a question

posed to him during his wanderings through the forest. Any question means bad luck, though he can remove the evil effects by throwing a stone in the direction of the questioner. It is, however, much wiser to resort to a more thorough methods and the spell case on his weapon is nullified by winding small branches of a wild plum tree around his hunting paraphernalia. The bow is then placed under some stones over which the hunter has to step. This procedure, when carried out with care and concentration, pacifies the demons. Great silence must reign and nothing is more unfortunate than the noise produced by the ears when a dog violently shakes his head; worse even if a deer manages to escape. The sight of a fox makes it clear to the shikari that it is futile to continue in his search for game. Matters are quite different in case the hunters happen to meet a pregnant women. As a matter of fact, the hunter can not ask for a more auspicious omen, particularly if the woman carries ajar filled with water on her head. Tikur and Lawi birds have the power to impart success to hunters enterprise, but every thing is bound to go wrong after the crowing of the pingale bird could be heard from a distance.

In desperate case the blessings of the witch-doctor are sought who, in exchange of appropriate remuneration, gently summons the gods of the forest. The observation of all these precautions is hardly necessary on the day following the 14th of January. It is the proverbial lucky day for every hunter and one way unpunished indulge into a slightly indifferent attitude towards the otherwise golden rules for hunt.

Cultural Identity

It would be a matter of great difficulty to teach the Bhils that phenomena as described have little to do with success or failure of a hunt. Of course the escape of a sambhar is an exasperating experience and every hunter will describe the event as unfortunate. In the eyes of the primitive man happenings of this kind become unlucky and once disappointed and nervous due to failure, the hunter's steadiness and keenness is easily effected and more failures are consequently not excluded. The desire not to be questioned when out setting for a hunt is explicable. The hunter feels inclined to boast that he intends to shoot so many pieces of game, whilst it might easily happen that he shoots nothing at all, His reputation as a hunter is thus exposed to criticism and ridicule and he prefers not to be questioned in advance. There is always time and opportunity enough to boast after the sambhar has been killed.

Light hunted, swift and active and fond of excitement, the Bhils possess good qualities as hunters, killing with arrow and bow every kind of creature that can possibly be killed without the use of fire weapons, steady work is loathed, it seems much more profitable to roam about, to collect some honey, grass or fuel to supplement eventual meagre results of the shikar. At particularly critical moments help is offered to bigger landlords and the few annas gained are enough to carry on for the moment. The daily diet consists of milk bread, curds, vegetables, fish and occasionally a mouthful of flesh. All these items are produced either by themselves or their little holdings or the forest supplies whatever may be lacking. Roofs and fruits grow profusely throughout the jungle. The sacrificial slaughter of Buffaloes is the crowning event of the year; on such an occasion large quantities of meat are eaten. The Bhil does in principle not object to eating the flesh of cows and his want of reverence for the life of these animals placed him rather low among Hindus, though touch does not defile. Several tribes abstain from eating beef, but all of them believe in demoniacal influences, witchcraft and omens. Their religion is one of fear and it is therefore quite natural that their whole pattern of life was and is in consequence shaped by fear and superstition. Orgies, feasts and bacchanals are the natural means of escape. A prayer uttered on one of the consecrated stones offers mental calm and satisfaction to those who do not participate in worldly orgies. A few reverence holy trees or believe in the assistance of an enchanted horse or dog.

Nature provided a fitting setting for this extraordinary kind of life. The luxuriant jungle with her ever green coat of foliage, undulating and rising to lofty heights, forms indeed the most suitable background in which the cultural life of the Bhils could develop. Rustling trees the calm of dale, the gentle roar of a waterfall and the manifold strange voices of the forest exercise an eloquent appeal pleasing to the casual traveller, but immensely laden With significance and meaning to the primitive son of the forest. The guarted tree, growing in solitude on the summit of a mound literally invites the presumption that the huge stem ever served as an abode of some powerful spirit, whilst the slight animation of the foliage, stirred by the evening breeze, logically indicates pleasure or displeasure of the demon and is it not natural that Gods prefer to dwell near running water, ever ready to listen to the playful sound of the waves? Strange meanings are attributed to strangely shaped shrubs which, when covered with blossoms, exercise alluring influences or what shall the Bhil think of the solitary giant boulder found on slope? They are manifestations of an almighty power, beyond reach, and worthy to be worshipped. Why should the strange cry of a bird not be taken as an indication of warning to abstain from approaching a silent valley where apparently, witches confer with the devil and his helpmates? Not listening to the warning spells disaster, but where lied the boundary within which the devil agitates sinister forces?

The witch-doctor, the only man able to extract the proper meaning from strange phenomena, has, by necessity to be consulted and nothing would be more dangerous and provocative than not to sacrifice a goat on a certain day, Town officials, sent from far away to the judge wilderness, have good talking, though what do they actually know? Not initiated will be secrets and love of the forest, they represent, from the point of view of the primitive man, a heretical menace. The jungle dweller does not want to get acquainted with civilization alien to his beliefs; he might appreciate his son's ability to write and to read and to settle his accounts with the bania, but this is all what is actually wanted. This very life established in its present form and shape for thousands of years, seems to him so utterly perfect and regular and what does poverty matter to him. Of course, an increase of his income does not meet with any objection, but money is easily spent. The whole matter would interest the primitive man provided it is possible to ascertain that his gods, demons and spirits fall into line and adopt themselves to the new situation. Is there any guarantee that witches are going to lose the power to trouble the village or will they at least become more docile and less aggressive? Who can prove that the witch-doctor is wrong? Hardly any body is so far willing to believe in the curative properties of modern drugs available at the dispensary; the recovery of a sick person is still ascribed to the good influences of gods who, despite the intake of outlandish medicines, benevolently pardoned those who temporarily lost faith. In the case of death blame is thrown on medicines, obtained from outside and the baghats position is only strengthened.

The Bhils cling to tradition as much as more advanced communities do and it would indeed be a great mistake to pronounce a verdict in their disfavour. No doubt, they are very backward, but in many instances the backwardness itself contributed to their well-being and happiness to such an extent that one feels really inclined to ponder over the merits of this kind of life. Natural in acting and thinking, straight forward in expression, the Bhils possess perhaps the key to happiness. Anything that makes life complicated is avoided and ambitions do not exist. Every body follows the one and only path to personal happiness and satisfaction. The means of reaching the goal may be crude, though they are crude only in the eyes of those who want to reform. On the other hand, nobody outside anyone of the tried can be forced to adopt anything that is acceptable to the Bhils only, but we should not fail to appreciate that the primitive culture of the Bhils is extremely rich though not acceptable to the civilised world. The whole structure of civilised life would collapse if any one of those institutions preferred by the Bhils were introduced, the upheaval would attain dimensions of unforeseen magnitude, without speaking of the many obstacles that have to be overcome. From a certain point of view, it is regrettable that civilized groups are already to such an extent entangled in strangling conventions that personal liberty and happiness became more and more unknown. If it would be possible to change our attitude without causing lasting harm, one should try to do so, abstain, however, from importing new ideas from utopia and fall instead back on the flow of energy still circulating in districts which we are pleased to describe as backward. The Bhils are foolish in many ways and they do not deserve to be imitated, but as they are positively happier than any civilised person, one should not entirely discard the possibility to make use of the few good ideas which they can offer and correct, as the same time, the mischief that the Bhils are just one of those wild tribes whose name alone ought to be taboo; official literature has little sympathy for the Bhils: they are described as lazy, ignorant cattle-lifters and robbers, concentrating occasionally on agriculture out of the sheer necessity to fill their stomachs. Every society is well supplied with a good number of rowdies, but this does not indicate that every one is a gangster. Many Bhils are most charming people, hospitable, sincere and ready to please and it is utterly regrettable that they are prepared to resist the claims of money-lenders and grain dealers who discovered that the Bhils are an easy prey. Incapable to appreciate material profits, they fostered themselves the belief that the every

Bhil is endowed with a great deal of stupidity which, as a matter of fact, is not the case. Simple and inoffensive in their outlook, they are inclined to take everything for granted, only in order not to disturb the peace of their lives.

It is not exactly known how many Bhils actually live in the various parts of India. An accurate census is in so far made difficult as the name Bhil is often given to wild or half wild tribes. The hilly tracts of the Bombay presidency are considered to be the original home, from which many clans spread in all directions, even as far as the plains of Gujarat and the Northern Deccan. Bhils can even be met in Rajputana and Sind; the migration to the latter districts, so contrary in climate to the original home, is probably based on necessity. Famine and an increase of difficulties drove the dweller of the forests into the scorched plains of northern India where land was available.

It is generally presumed that Bhils occupied once an honourable position. Some of their kings ruled over wide countries and exercised great power, but opposed to the advancing tide of Aryan conquest in primitive times, the opposing Bhils were unable to stem the invaders who gradually succeeded to push the Bhils back to the fastnesses of mountains and forests which they eventually occupied. As a race they were feared and hated and it is not surprising that the contemporary chronicler felt great reluctance to mention the Bhils in his scripts where the history of a fierce uncivilised, conquered or fallen race was not considered a subject sufficiently attractive to adorn the annals of more advanced races. Only on few occasions are they contemptuously spoken off as an illegitimate people. The Bhils, however, were not too much pleased by this kind of treatment and retaliated by invasions of the plain country, re-establishing their contact with dominant races (Rajputs), though their strongholds it is said could mostly be found only among the Bhils and in the forests where greater security and better means of defence were offered by nature.

Some of the neighbouring races finally overcame their reluctance and prejudices and intermarried with the Bhils, though this admixture of races was never considered particularly recommendable, in as much as the proud Rajput families carefully tried to avoid the introduction of any foreign element, whilst the Bhils showed a certain anxiety to prove that Rajput blood is, at least partly, circulating in their veins. Moreover, the Rajputs attitude is excusable; the very fact that an admixture of fair coloured races with member of less fortunate dark races usually results in particularly dark offspring, proves that some kind of a colour bar existed already in ancient times. Those Bhils who had intermarried with Rajputs etc., developed, in their turn, a high degree of snobbishness which led finally to a distinctions among the Bhils. New classes, clans, tribes and sub-tribes sprang into existence, forming the nucleus of the present order. No wonder that the Bhils differ, in their outer appearance, so much from each other. Small, light limbed, fair and active men form a contrast with stunted wild woodmen with African features who are again classified worlds apart from the well made, tall and handsome members of certain tribes. It is however, typical that the same kind of dress is in favour with all the various tribes; the loin cloth is universal. A bracelet, necklace and a pair of earrings are the ornaments worn though gold is seldom represented. The Bhils are too poor to afford costly ornaments, silver and brass became fashionable. Strings of glass and stone beads were liked since time immemorial and are still in great favour today. A few glass-bangles, cheap but colourful, are a sign of enviable prosperity. The village belle wears sometimes a nose ring, though this type of ornament is classified as extreme luxury and denotes a high degree of extravagance. The turban is an indispensable requisite of every man; the women favour embroidered bodies, completed by a never too clean a sari.

The dialects spoken are innumerable. Every village has its own dialect, every hamlet boasts of some kind of a slang not understood in places some miles away. Occasionally one comes

across some strange form of speech which seems to point to an original language now lost. The Bhils never developed a written language of their own; if anything has to be recorded refuge is taken to a script resembling Gujarati, Marathi or Hindi, according to the fluctuating nature of the dialects spoken in the very district.

Little is known about the exact number of tribe and clans. The Bhils are almost, in conformity with Hindu custom, very fond of dividing themselves in innumerable clans and groups, though the differentiation does not equal the proper Hindu caste system. It is difficult to explain why the Bhils took to so great fondness of dividing every group into countless subgroups; the historians, at least, mention that such a system was not known among the Bhils of ancient days. A strain of foreign blood, miscellaneous origin, the father's name, a favourite settlement or occupation, private pursuits and membership of tokenistic organizations support the view that many reasons existed and inspired the early Bhils to separate and differentiate. Those who eat beef have, naturally, to form a different group, the tribes concentrating on hunting keep aloof from cultivators, whilst customary differences in worship, dress, the habits of eating or preparing food, alone are inducement enough to create certain distinctions. Rituals, ceremonies and festivals are an additional cause; the pure and impure cannot mix on such occasions. Untouchability, however, is hardly known. Members of the many fold clans inter-dine, but certain restrictions are imposed on inter-marriage.

During the long centuries of decline, the spirit of the Bhils was only partly broken.

Poverty, laziness and the loss of power of resistance have hastened the down fall; original tribal life, however, remained strong. The Bhils are not degenerate nor do they foster misanthropic inclinations and it is quite possible that customs may undergo a revival which, when to some extent modernized, able to contribute to the uplift of the whole community.

Folk Lore And Folk Songs

Folk-songs, another expression of tribal culture, vividly portray the mental out-look. So far as the songs of the Bhils are concerned, dance, pleasure, love-making and sexual indulgence usually form the background; events of domestic importance and, occasionally, the life-stories of national heroes lend themselves to romantic interpretations. Whatever may be described in songs, the Bhils never venture outside their own sphere of living; the forest, the dense jungle, some tree or a colourful flower are chosen as the scene or the object of their song, by which means the strong preference to their own national locality is stressed. A few extracts may serve as an indication and illustration. The root of an old karanji tree contains a well - like cavity in which a Fir-tree was planted (probably by a god). The young Fir tree benefited by the abundance of water and grew therefore well; swinging (in the breeze) from left to right just in the same fashion as a king sways gently when sitting on his throne. One day, it happened that a girl directed her steps towards the young tree. The girl stood in its shade, lovingly admiring the forest, when a boy approached her quite suddenly. Giving sway to his passions, he caught the hands of the girl and whirling her round, caused her to fall on the grassy ground. Naturally, the youngster committed a sexual indiscretion and the girl became pregnant and, when time was ripe, a little boy was born. In the fashion of her tribe, the young mother tied a swing to the branch of a tree, keeping it moving all the time, to the delight of her child.

The song does not explain whether or not the two arranged for a marriage, though it might be presumed that the birth of a son is compensation enough, apart from the pleasure derived from her pleasant occupation which consisted in keeping the swing in swaying motion.

2. A big Kirani tree, laden with fruit, grew on the slopes of some distant bill- The fruits of the Kirani tree are sweet to eat and the young folk love to go, in groups or alone, to the sloping hill in order to gather the fruit. So, it happened that a girl, named Dhubi, went to the tree with the intention to eat some fruits. Whilst she was busy doing so, she noticed that she had been followed by a boy who, after having reached the spot where the girl was standing, made it clearly understood that he was not exclusively interested in the sweetness of the fruits. He caught the girl and raped her without remorse.

In this song it is stated that the consent of the girl was probably not obtained. The very fact that young men are in the habit of watching the movements of girls who stride alone through the forest-ought to be known to the daring beauty and it is left to the audience to decide if the girl knew all about it or if she deliberately went alone into the forest with the hope of being seen by a male. Undecided as it is, a poignant note is introduced into the song, exercising a strong appeal to the Bhils who are only too prone to act in the same way as the youngster did, though no son is born afterwards and the girls reputation is saved by saying that 'rape' had taken place and nobody can blame her for it.

3. Bitter complaints are launched by a youngster who strives in vain to gain favours from a girl named Nangi. All his entreaties prove to be futile; the girl makes it clear that she is unable to nourish feelings of affections for him. Driven to utter despair, the boy acquires a threatening attitude by asking the girl how it is possible for her to smile at a certain boy Ranja and even to have sexual intercourse with him, whilst he, the unhappy suitor, has to remain unsatisfied and disappointed.

On the one side, the girls steadfastness is stressed, but, as nobody sees any thing praiseworthy in it, the girl becomes the fascinating centrepiece of the song by the admission of certain

relations with Renja, her real lover. The disappointed suitor might be a well to-do man, though this is not enough inducement to the girl who, like every Bhils (male or female) listens exclusively to the voice of the heart and, by breaking down all barriers, goes even so far that her connections (not legalised by marriage) with her lover are permitted to be known to every body. She acquires the reputation of being natural and desirable, whilst the lover may boast of hours intimate bliss. The events described firmly express the Bhils attitude in matters of sex; one cares little in particular and even if it comes to an open scandal matters can always easily be arranged. Complications are only created by those who cannot do without it and, decidedly, the Bhils do not belong to this category.

4. A farmer who had spent many hours ploughing his fields, neglected in his tiredness, to watch the girl Chungi who had accompanied him to the fields. No wonder that the girl was glad when she was approached by one of her boy-friends. She did not hesitate to accept his invitation to follow him into the forest and once hidden from sight, she became an easy prey. The escapade, however, became known through her becoming pregnant, though the gods smiled at her and presented her with a son. The little lad was one of the prettiest babies ever born and never before had a mother with greater tenderness kept the boy's swing in motion.

Well, the farmer is to be blamed for the accident, he should not have taken his daughter to the field, or, if he had, at least employed her properly, things might have taken a different turn. But, apparently, she knew the boy better than anyone else and his coming was perhaps pre-arrange. Again we see that youngsters, who intend to make mischief, often have to hood-wink their elders who, it seems, are quite accustomed to it.

5, All kinds of fine vegetables are planted in the garden and the gardener can think of nothing better than to present his sweetheart with a basket full of greens.

The theme of this song is strikingly simple and decent. A gardener, skilful in his art, can boast of a crop of fine vegetables and one can assume that his ability to raise such good vegetables is known to a good number of girls is it not very likely that a particularly fair maiden rather likes to pass along the garden's fence when on her way to the village well? She might hesitatingly have slowed down the pace of her steps, glancing timidly over the fence or, better, even, have made encouraging remarks as to the quality of the crop grown and the abilities of the young gardener in particular. Is it so difficult for him to understand that the maiden merely pretended to be interested in his vegetables? Well, to make sure, he sends her a basket full, guessing that this friendly gesture is bound to clarify the situation. Certainly, she must be pretty too and, quite desirable and attractive or he would not have parted with his vegetables at all.

6. A boy and a girl happen to be alone in the house. This very favourable circumstance makes the boy rather bold and it is not surprising that the girl feels rather afraid, though the passionate feelings of the boy are not subdued by her fearful attitude, on the contrary, he forces the girl to quieten his emotions in the most drastic manner. In the heat of the act, it was not noticed that a neighbour was watching the struggle through half - open window. This remark terrified the boy and the girl, they tried to solve the riddle by asking each other what is going to happen, in case the neighbour spreads the story of what he has been.

So far as this song is concerned, the Bhils cannot claim to have introduced a new subject. As long as the Earth rotates, there will always be some couples who have to torture their mind by asking. What is going to happen now?

7. This song, taken from another group of songs, has as its theme the complaint of a woman who feels neglected by her husband. Although the Bhils do not attach too much importance to

little complaints of this kind, jealousy is at least permitted to figure more prominently in their songs.

I am as beautiful as the flower of the Mango tree; my eyes are radiant like a cotton flower that sways in the morning breeze, my body is more beautiful even than the leaves of the Niem-tree. So fresh, so clean, and so unsurpassably delightful. But alas, my husband fails to see that I am so attractive and, worse even, he devotes all his attention to another woman, one who really cannot claim to be as beautiful as I am. How do I know what my husband thinks of her? He behaves like a white crane and takes even to using bad language. It is certainly not possible that he has already forgotten that I am of good stock. Nothing will ever change his mind and it is really better for me to die.

The fate of the neglected beauty is quite contrary to general practice. Certainly, a good many Bhils neglect their wives, but as soon as a wife has the impression that her husband's attention is diverted in another direction, she will positively refuse to pass through all the stages of martyrdom and simply make arrangements with somebody else. A second husband is soon found and as the first husband is the only one to be blamed for the break-down of once happy matrimonial relations, the second husband benefits in so far as his finances will be less taxed, in such a case.

As said before, the Bhils delight in portraying their lives in their songs, as was demonstrated above. Many tunes devoted to the hunter and his experiences in forest and jungle, others picture insignificant events occurring when going to the bazaar.

Officials and the various public servants are spoken of in melodious form full of praise or saturated with contempt. Tax-collectors fare worse; they are said to combine their duties with rape and lust. Songs of this kind are full of mockery and are nothing else than a joyously manufactured tirade against those whose duty it is to fill the coffers of Government. The shrewd bania is not forgotten; his activities are too well known among the Bhils and it is more than natural that money-lenders etc, figure prominently in songs, just in order to take innocent, though not less biting, revenge. Songs relating to the relations of the opposite sex supply, however, the most appreciated source and form of entertainment, especially on occasion of communal dances or at moments when the crowds, in festive mood, indulge into excessive intake of alcohol. Many songs are exceedingly obscene and therefore much in favour. They are intended to create the proper atmosphere for orgies to follow. Such is life in the jungles, unswervingly heading to the point.

The stories told among the Bhils are mostly a mixture of reality and fable. Often the action is made difficult by the introduction of mystic beings or un-animated objects, nevertheless, able to speak and to understand. Some animals, for instance the fox and the snake, exhibit all the attributes of cunningness and vice, though they are sometimes allowed to make themselves useful by solving riddles and thus bring the stories or fables to a successful end. Field and forest, jungle or river site, in short the scenery to which the Bhils are accustomed, were selected as the most suitable background, by means of which a certain simplicity and naivety is imparted. May the following few examples throw some light on the foregoing introduction.

Once upon a time a man went to the jungle. It was a lovely morning in spring; the wind blew mildly and gentle over the country and the man strolled happily about, delightfully gazing at flowers and trees around him. Whilst aimlessly journeying through the thicket, he happened to come to a big tree, from one of the branches of which a giant snake was hanging. Although the serpent behaved quite well, the wanderer thought it wise to destroy the snake by setting fire to the tree. The tree caught fire within a short time and the serpent felt rather embarrassed. In her despair she appealed to the man to be merciful and to assist her in her

attempt to leave the tree. The man, however, being timid by nature, explained that he is afraid that the snake might bite him as soon as assistance is coming forth. The serpent hastened therefore to explain that she never intends to do such a vile thing and in order to make it easier for him to decide quickly, she instructed him in which way an escape could most easily be staged. Take a long stick and lean it against the branch on which I am resting and I shall be able to get down without difficulty. The man did as told and the serpent alighted. As soon as she was out of danger, she turned against her saviour and made it quite clear that she will bite him now. The man protested vehemently and only saved himself by suggesting that somebody else must be asked in order to ascertain of the snake's attitude is justified. So they went together in search of somebody or something able to speak justice. The path they crossed on their way was considered to be experienced in judging and the man addressed the path as follows: Dear Sister, I have saved the life of the serpent and now, as a bad reward for my kindness, I am threatened to be bitten without remorse. And the path answered "During all the years that I am here in the jungle, I certainly saw many strange things, but such a case as yours never happened before and, I am afraid, I feel at loss and quite unable to tell you what you should do". The snake and the man had thus to continue their search and, luckily, they met a mare that was grazing peacefully under some tree. But, alas, the mare was no wiser than the path, and could consequently not reveal any information that might settle the dispute. Whilst they were just turning away after having thanked the mare for the benevolent interest she had taken in their case, a fox strolled towards the group and he too listened politely to the story. He thoughtfully rubbed his paws against his nose, meditated for a while and then made the following utterance. "It is most difficult to judge in .so intricate a matter. None of us, whose advice is requested, was present when the snake was saved and the explanations given are not clear enough as to the order at which things are supposed to have happened, I therefore suggest that we should altogether walk back to the tree where we shall assist the serpent to regain the branch on which she was sitting before the fire started the man will again lean his stick against the branch and every phase of the escape will be re-enacted as before. Everyone agreed. The snake was flung on the branch of the tree and as soon as she tried to occupy her former position all the other members of the party ran away, leaving the snake alone in distress.

It is interesting to note that the fox seems, all over the world, to enjoy the reputation of being very shrewd. The fox, is as a matter of fact, a cautious animal, and every Bhil has indeed opportunity enough to study the creature's behaviour when hunting. On the other hand, many a story can never be brought to a happy end, without the introduction of some new and unforeseen factor, and the fox apparently happens to be, at the desired moment, always ready and prepared to save the situation. Another fable, for instance, related that a man was once asked by a tired crocodile to carry it to the pond. The crocodile admitted to feel rather exhausted as a result of a long journey it had to undertake in family-matters. The man agreed to assist the crocodile, carried it to a nearby tank, regretted, however, soon to have the vicious creature. The crocodile, disregard less of any expected gratitude, caught the man's leg and at the very moment when it intended to pull the man into the water, a fox happened to come to the tank in order to quench its thirst. The struggle between man and crocodile could therefore not escape his notice and, moreover, the fox offered to take steps that might reconcile and satisfy both adversaries. The crocodile still holding the man's leg firmly -refused to see the point, though, after being told by the fox that it would largely benefit by the procedure recommended by him, the crocodile agreed and obediently closed its eyes, as requested by the fox. As soon as the eyes were closed, the fox hurriedly bit into the tail of the crocodile, which, frightened and alarmed, released the leg of the man who, as can be expected, ran away as quick as he could.

Various wild animals play a prominent part in the fables of the Bhils. Some creatures, for instance the wild and ferocious tiger, is often represented as wise and aristocratic hero of the jungle, on other occasions extreme silliness is attributed to him. The contemptuous treatment, in the latter case, is certainly based on feelings of fear and terror; knowing only too well that the tiger is not an animal that can so easily be slain, its ferociousness is deliberately disturbed into ridicule, out of sheer spite and revenge. So it is told that a timid field-mouse once came across a sleeping tiger and being sure that her presence was not noticed by murderer of the jungle, she started, not without mischief, to eat the tigers ears who, after being deprived of his ears, was quite unable to listen to all the strange sounds and warnings of the jungle. He crawled henceforth through the forest in a fashion entirely unbecoming to a tiger and become soon the laughing stock of all the animals living near and far.

In practical life, such a thing will of course never happen, but the quantity of it is enough to delight man, who know out of experience, that it is certainly not easy to play tricks with a tiger. Snakes, of course, are not liked by any body. The nasty habit of attacking harmless hunters did never increase the serpent's lack of popularity and its place, allotted to it in fables, is decidedly not honourable.

The mute fish did not escape. A certain fable narrates of a big fish, so wise and intelligent, that it was able to teach its wisdom to others. The fishermen knew all about the scholarly fish, listened often to its lectures as they became nearly as wise as the fish. One day the fish was invited to attend a marriage ceremony in the nearby village. This, of course, was a ruse and a trap so cleverly laid that even the learned fish could not detect it. The fisher-men knew well that all their attempts to catch the big fish were again and again frustrated by the intelligence of the fish, though there could apparently be no harm in inviting the fish to come to the village. The fish accepted the invitation, and as soon as they had covered a distance far enough from the water, they caught the unsuspecting fish which, after some struggle, finally found its way into the frying-pan. It is said that the wedding - festivity became known as particularly gay and frolic. The bride, who ate the brain of the fish, gave birth to a son.

The Bhils are very fond of fish. Its flesh is considered to be a delicacy and on certain occasions fishing parties are arranged, attracting whole village populations.

This little story is, in itself, absolutely insignificant but nevertheless popular. The Bhil likes to stress that he is by no means a drowsy, unintelligent being. He knows all the little tricks of his professional occupation and it is natural that his skill, based on long experience finds somehow expression in his fables and folklore. The bulk of the popular stories are, however, so obscene that they must remain restricted amongst the Bhils. As mentioned before, sex plays an important part in the life of the Bhils. To be loose and fast is the rule of the day. Certain restrictions and moral conventions prevent the average Bhil from going farther than he already does, though in imagination, at least, the most perverse cravings are expressed in their stories, and, although it is claimed that such perversity is merely possible within the framework of already incredibly phantastic stories, it can, without hesitation, be said that the Bhil is only too willing to do exactly what his story-characters are supposed to do. Pathological inclinations, like sexual contact with animals, figure prominently in fables or semi-fables and a closer study of the intimate life of the Bhils will possibly reveal if the alleged strange habits of story -figures are also common among the population.

In matters relating to sex, nobody discusses more frankly than the Bhil. It forms every where the main subject of conversation, even in the presence of half grown children. The imaginative mind of youngsters, who are on the threshold of puberty, becomes an easy prey of those members of the community who see great fun in it. Taboos, based on sex, do not exist; every thing, as long as it can be carried out, will be carried out. It is, however, difficult

to decide, to what an extent the Bhils should be blamed for it. They do not share the opinion that they act wrongly; belief and any attempt to prohibit perversity for instance, the pillars of their social structure would be destroyed. The primitive man will, in such a case, not turn to a substitute (below in our eyes), but will indulge in greater forms of excess only harmful to him and his community. One has always to bear in mind that the dictates of the jungle are bound to be different from those of settled and civilised districts, and it must be left to the inhabitants of the jungle to shape their life according to the conditions prevailing, which means that they can indulge freely and unrestricted, in habits that are out of place elsewhere (or, let us say, are known elsewhere, but not openly). The Bhils is certainly, as a matter of fact, more praiseworthy and cleaner than the make-believe attitude of many civilised men. Corruption of thought and action is rampant in big cities and society ought to be declared bankrupt, unless one resorts to a brush-up and white - wash of the worm-eaten facade.

THE end

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