

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE

GROWTH OF POPULATION

BEFORE 1872 no regular census of the district had ever been taken though several rough attempts were made from time to time to estimate the number of inhabitants. Of these the first having any pretensions to accuracy was made in 1813-14 by Mr. W. B. Bayley, who at the time was Judge and Magistrate of the district. He succeeded in obtaining returns of the population of 98 towns and villages situated in different parts of the districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, Midnapore, Birbhum and the Jungle Mahals. Having satisfied himself of the accuracy of the returns, he deduced from them an average of eleven inhabitants to every two houses, and then proceeded to ascertain the number of houses in the district. As a result of his calculations he estimated the population of the district as then constituted at 1,444,487. The average density was approximately 602 to the square mile as compared with 610 in 1872, and the figures would seem to show that the population of the district, whatever it may have been before the outbreak of the fever epidemic of 1862, was in 1872 not much in excess of what it had been in 1814. In 1838 Mr. Adam collected certain statistics of the population to illustrate his report on the state of vernacular education, and the Kalna thana of Burdwan was one of the areas selected for the purpose. A comparison of his figures with those obtained at the census of 1872 show that the resident population was no larger in 1872 than it had been in 1838. The number of houses had increased, but the average number of persons to a house had fallen from 5 to 3.7.

CENSUS OF 1872

The first general census which in any way approximated to the truth was that of 1872. The census coincided with the

climax of the terrible epidemic of fever which ravaged the district between 1862 and 1874, and any increase that might have been expected since Mr. Bayley's time had been completely wiped out. The result of this census was to show for the district as now constituted a population of 1,486,400 persons. No figures of estimate exist showing the population of the district in 1860, immediately before the outbreak of the fever epidemic, but there can be no doubt that the mortality from the disease between 1862, when it first appeared in the Kalna subdivision, and 1872 was enormous. Dr. French in his special report on the outbreak estimated the total mortality at about one-third of the whole population, and the specific instances which he quotes show that the estimate was not extravagant. In 1869 the population of the town of Burdwan was estimated at 46,121, whereas the census of 1872 gives a population of 32,687, a decrease in three years of over 30 per cent. In seventeen villages of the Katwa subdivision containing an estimated population of 14,982 before the appearance of the disease no less than 6,243 persons, or 41.7 per cent. of the population, were reported to have died of fever between the period of the outbreak and 1872. The figures for fifty villages in the Kalna subdivision showed a similar mortality.

CENSUS OF 1881

In 1881 it was found that the population had decreased still further to 1,394,220. This decrease was entirely due to the mortality from the fever which after 1873 made no further westerly progress in Burdwan, and although still severe in the Kalna and Ausgram thanas was gradually dying out in those parts of the district where it had been first observed. In the census report of 1881 it was estimated that during the twelve years from 1862-1874 the epidemic had carried off not less than three-quarters of a million of persons.

CENSUS OF 1891

During the next decade the population remained practically stationary, the total number of persons recorded in 1891

being 1,391,880. The thanas of Kaksa, Ausgram and Bud-Bud in the west still showed a large decrease, which was undoubtedly due to the after effects of the epidemic. On the other hand, the increase in the Asansol thana, 28.9 per cent., was phenomenal, the development of the Railway works at Asansol consequent on the opening of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway and the increasing activity in the coal and iron fields having attracted a large immigrant population from Manbhum, Bankura and Behar.

CENSUS OF 1901

During the next decade conditions were generally favourable : crops were as a rule good and the district in consequence made a rapid recovery, the population recorded exceeding by more than 30,000, the number returned in 1872. The results of the census of 1901 are summarised as follows in the Bengal Census Report of that year : "The growth of the population in the Asansol thana is phenomenal : it has increased by more than 30 per cent. since 1891 and by 130 per cent. since 1872. Nearly one-third of the present inhabitants were born in other districts, and of the district-born many have doubtless migrated from other thanas. Raniganj shows an increase of 12 per cent. since 1891, which is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that its coal-mines are nearly worked out, and that the people find more remunerative employment in the new mines further west. The town of Raniganj, however, is a great trading centre, and is probably one of the busiest places in Bengal. The increase is also considerable in the Burdwan and Katwa subdivisions where there has been comparatively little immigration. It is most noticeable in the Ausgram and Galsi thanas which were mentioned in the last census report as then dorming with Kaksa the focus of the fever. Apart from the fever these thanas are naturally healthy, and the disappearance of the epidemic has been followed, as is usual in such circumstances, by a rapid recovery in the population. That the improvement is not equally marked in Kaksa is due to the poverty of the soil in that thana and to its

proximity to the coal-mines where good wages are obtainable. The only part of the district that has failed to share in the general revival are two of the three thanas of the Kalna subdivision, Kalna and Purbasthali, where the Burdwan fever first appeared forty years ago. These thanas lie along the bank of the Bhagirathi ; the soil is water-logged, and they are full of *jhils* and jungle ; they are thus more unhealthy than any other part of the district." The principal results of this census are shown in the table below :

Subdivision	Area in square miles	Number of		Population	Population per square mile	Percentage of variation in population between 1891 and 1901
		Towns	Villages			
Burdwan	1,268	1	1,688	679,412	536	+ 9.6
Asansol	618	2	811	370,988	600	+ 19.6
Katwa	404	2	465	248,806	616	+ 8.1
Kalna	399	1	698	233,269	585	+ 0.8
District Total	2,689	6	3,662	1,532,475	570	+ 10.1

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

DENSITY OF POPULATION

The density of the population in Burdwan has increased since 1872 by only 17 per cent. From 1872 to 1881 the years during which the fever epidemic reached its climax, there was an actual fall of 35 per cent., and in the succeeding decade there was no advance at all : the recovery in 1891-1901 is very marked, and the district now supports a population of 570 persons to the square mile. Speaking generally, the eastern part of the district where the soil is alluvial is much more thickly populated than the western which rests on the laterite, but the development of the coal-mines in the Asansol subdivision has led to a rapid growth of the population there, and Asansol itself, with 839 persons to the square mile, is now the most densely peopled thana in the district. On the other hand, the density is least in the Kaksa and Ausgram thanas where the laterite gradually

merges into the alluvial silt. Large tracts here are covered with *sal* jungle. There are no mines, and the soil is too poor to support a large population.

MIGRATION

The steadily increasing demand for labour in the mines and factories of Asansol and Raniganj has led to a continued flow of immigration into Burdwan. In 1901 the total number of immigrants was returned as 158,347, a larger number than was found in any district in the province with the exception of the 24-Parganas and the metropolis itself. There is a good deal of periodic and permanent immigration from the neighbouring districts of Bankura, Manbhum and the Santal Parganas, and more than two-thirds of the immigrants enumerated at the last census were found to be inhabitants of the contiguous districts; at the same time labourers for the coal-mines, iron works, paper mills, and potteries are collected in large numbers from Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, and Monghyr in Behar and from the Chota Nagpur plateau. In the eastern portion of the district there is a continual demand for Beharis and west countrymen who are employed as durwans and peons by the local land-holders, and the increasing trade of Asansol and Raniganj has drawn, a considerable number of Marwari merchants and traders to those towns.

The volume of emigration is also considerable, and the statistics of the census of 1901 show that 6.16 of the population of the district were enumerated outside it. The district sends out numerous clerks to Calcutta and labourers to Assam, and loses more than it gains by the casual migration across the boundary line dividing it from Birbhum and Hooghly. The loss in both cases is due mainly to the demand in these districts for wives born in Burdwan.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES

There are six towns—Burdwan, Kalna, Katwa, Dinhat, Raniganj and Asansol. These are all municipalities, and the total number of their inhabitants is 72,270, or 5 per cent.

of the population. The district outside the coal-mine area is almost entirely agricultural, and the towns here are unprogressive, of little commercial importance and, on the whole, distinctly rural in character. Burdwan itself, which was formerly the principal seat of trade in Western Bengal, has few special industries, and owes its position to the fact that it is the headquarters of the district and the principal seat of the Maharaja. The town really consists of 93 small villages, and the greater part of the population are engaged in agriculture. It is growing in importance as railway centre, and is fairly prosperous; but in spite of this, the population has grown but little of late years. The fine strategical position of Katwa at the confluence of the Ajay and the Bhagirathi was soon recognised by the Mahamadan invaders, and in the time of the Nawabs this town was one of the most important places in Bengal, and was regarded as the key of Murshidabad. In recent years, however, the channel of the Bhagirathi has silted up, and with the advent of the railway the trade of the place has greatly declined. Kalna, which is also situated on the Bhagirathi, was formerly an important trading centre, and was considered one of the principal ports of the district. The railway has, however, drawn most of the traffic away from it, and its prosperity has long been decreasing. Of late, the town has been extremely unhealthy, and many of the brick-built houses in the bazar are now in ruins. A considerable river-borne trade was also formerly carried on from Dainhat, but the Bhagirathi has now receded more than a mile from it, and its trade has suffered considerably in consequence.

The western portion of the district is one of the busiest industrial tracts in Bengal, and its coal and iron fields have attracted a large immigrant population. Both Raniganj and Asansol are progressive towns and are growing rapidly. Their prosperity is almost entirely due to the development of the coal-mines. Raniganj possesses large potteries and paper mills which employ a very considerable number of operatives, and the town is also a busy trading centre for coal and rice. The mines in the vicinity have been practically

worked out, and the centre of the coal industry has moved further west, but the town still continues to increase in prosperity. The headquarters of the subdivision have recently been transferred to Asansol which is situated in the centre of the coal-field and is now one of the most important railway centres in Bengal. In 1881 this town was a rural tract. In 1891 its population was returned at 11,000, and in 1901 at 14,906. There is a large European community connected with the railway, and the bazar is growing rapidly. The town is situated in the middle of the Raniganj coal-field, and since coal of a better quality is obtainable here than further east, it has practically taken the place of Raniganj as the centre of the coal industry.

The rest of the population is contained in 3,662 villages of no great size, 52 per cent. of the people living in villages containing less than 500 inhabitants. In the alluvial portion where practically the only occupation of the people is cultivation, the villages are usually situated on the higher ground between the rice swamps, and are buried in the dense foliage characteristic of Lower Bengal. The large immigrant population of Asansol and Raniganj are mainly housed in small groups of huts clustering round the various mines and factories.

LANGUAGES

The language current in the district is the dialect known as *Rarhi boli* or Western Bengali which is also spoken in Bankura, Birbhum, Manbhum, Singhbhum, and the Santal Parganas. The name means the languages spoken in Rarh, the old name for the Western Division of Bengal, the county lying to the west of the Bhagirathi and south of the Ganges.

Bengali, or Banga Bhasha, was formerly thought to be a very modern language, but Dr. Grierson has shown that this is not the case, and that the language of the fifteenth, differs very little from that of the eighteenth, century. The present literary form of the language has developed since the occupation of the country by the English, and its most marked characteristic is the wholesale adoption of Sanskrit

words in the place of words descended through the Prakrit, due at first, it is thought, to the great poverty of the original material in a country where the vast majority of the inhabitants were of non-Aryan descent. The Bengalis are unable to pronounce many of the words that have been borrowed from the Sanskrit, but they have nevertheless retained the Sanskrit spelling. "The result of this state of affairs," says Dr. Grierson, "is that, to foreigners, the great difficulty of Bengali is its pronunciation. The vocabulary of the modern literary language is almost entirely Sanskrit, and few of these words are pronounced as they are written." The book language is quite unintelligible to the uneducated masses, and as, apart from it, there is no generally recognized standard, the variations in the spoken language are very great. The well-known adage that the dialect changes every twelve *kos* applies probably with greater force to Bengali than to any other language in India.

"Bengali," Dr. Grierson writes, "has a fairly voluminous literature dating from pre-historic times. According to the latest authority its oldest literary record is the song of Manikchandra, which belongs to the days of the Buddhists, though it has no doubt been altered in the course of centuries through transmission by word of mouth. Of the well-known authors, one of the oldest and most admired is Chandi Das, who flourished about the 14th century and wrote songs of considerable merit in praise of Krishna. Since his time to the commencement of the present century, there has been a succession of writers, many of whom are directly connected with the religious revival instituted by Chaitanya."

This dialect was returned in 1901 as the language of 91.9 per cent. of the population. The number of persons returned as speaking Hindi rose from 46,000 in 1891 to 73,000 in 1901, or 4.7 per cent., and this is obviously due to the large influx of labourers from Behar and Western India which followed on the development of the coal industry. Santali is spoken by 39,428 persons and some 5,000 persons were returned as speaking Kora.¹

1. Bengal Census Report, 1901.

RELIGIONS

Altogether 1,221,027 persons, or 79.6 per cent. of the population, are Hindus ; 287,403, or 18.7 per cent. are Muhammadans ; and 21,048, or 1.3 per cent. are Animists. There are 2,960 Christians, of whom 1,061 are Europeans, 872 Eurasians and 1,072 natives of the country. Other religions are practically unrepresented, numbering only 37.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

The Church Missionary Society early fixed on Burdwan as a centre from which to carry on its missionary work. A most interesting account of the foundation of the mission is to be found in the memoir of the Revd. J. J. Weitbrecht, with whose name missionary work in this district must always be most closely associated. "The mission was commenced in 1816 by Captain Stewart, a pious and devoted servant of the East India Company, and he continued to take a deep interest in it till his death in 1833. In the first year he established two vernacular schools, and in two years the number had increased to ten, containing a thousand children, and costing 240 rupees a month. In the beginning he encountered considerable opposition ; the Brahmans circulated reports among the people that it was his design to ship all the children to England, and an instance occurred in which a parent exposed his little son to the jackals to be devoured during the night to prevent the possibility of his being educated by Captain Stewart. The introduction of printed books into the schools at first caused some alarm, the people conceiving it to be a plan for depriving them of their caste as all instruction had been previously conveyed through manuscripts : and it was remarked of the village school-masters—'If you put a printed book into their hands, they are unable to read it without great difficulty, and are still less able to understand its contents.' Besides the outlines of Geography, Astronomy and History, Captain Stewart caused instruction to be given in some few of the preambles of the East India Company's regulations, which are particularly calculated to convince the Hindus that

Government anxiously desires to promote their comfort and advantage. In these seminaries the children knew of no precedence but that which was derived from merit. The Brahman boy and his ignoble neighbour sat side by side, and if the latter excelled the former in learning, as was often the case, he stood above him." These schools became so celebrated that the Calcutta School Society sent its Superintendent for five months to Burdwan in 1819 to learn the system of Captain Stewart's schools, as he educated a greater number of children with fewer teachers and at half the expense of the old system. When Mr. W. Adam, who had been directed by Government to enquire into the state of education, visited Burdwan in 1837, he reported that Burdwan was the best educated district in Bengal. In 1819 Captain Stewart purchased a plot of ground on the Grand Trunk Road two miles north-west of Burdwan on behalf of the Church Missionary Society, and there a mission centre was gradually established with a church, orphanage, school and mission houses. The mission continued to prosper, and, under the Revd. John James Weitbrecht, who worked in Burdwan from 1830 to 1852, became one of the best organised mission churches in Bengal.

We read of 14 schools scattered over an area of 40 miles with an attendance of 1,000 boys, of a girls' school, of one of the first high schools in Bengal with a hostel for Hindu students attached to it, of an orphanage, of out-stations at Kalna since taken over by the Free Church of Scotland, and Bankura, now a flourishing mission under the Wesleyan Society, and Nadia, which has greatly outgrown the mother church with its eight churches and 6,000 Protestant Christians. Then come the dark days of the mission. Burdwan fever decimated the town, the Christian congregation was scattered, the orphanage was removed to Agarpara, the schools were gradually closed and the European staff reduced. The Church Missionary Society has never re-occupied the district as it once hoped to do, Nadia taking the place of the Burdwan district as the Society's principal field of effort. The out-stations were left undermanned and

were eventually occupied by other societies. The town of Burdwan was retained, but the institutions were transferred elsewhere. At the present time the mission is a purely evangelistic one with a small congregation consisting mainly of mission workers, whose work is to itinerate in the cold weather in the village round Burdwan. There is one European Missionary in charge who also acts as Honorary Chaplain to the European residents. Some twenty miles north of Burdwan is a church medical mission with a hospital and dispensary with three European ladies in charge, and an efficient staff of workers under the Church of England Zenana Society. This mission is the survival of a flourishing Zenana Mission in Burdwan which had to be closed for want of funds in 1900. The ladies of Mankur superintend also an elementary Hindu girls' school in Burdwan, which, with another Church school of a similar nature supported by voluntary local subscriptions, is all that is now left of English Church educational work in the district.

At Raniganj there is a Wesleyan Methodist Mission which was established in 1878. In addition to a European Superintendent and two native ordained ministers there are women workers, who visit zenanas, and evangelists in village stations. The adult congregation is about 350. An English church and three native chapels are attached to the mission, and it also manages an orphanage with an industrial class attached, a refuge for the sick and destitute, day school and a shop for the sale of Christian literature. In addition the Superintendent of the mission is entrusted with the management of the Leper Asylum maintained at Raniganj by the Mission to Lepers of which an account will be found in the following chapter.

In Asansol town there is a Roman Catholic Mission. A church was built in 1872-73, and the following year the building of a convent and schools was commenced. The building of the scholastiate for the clerical students of the Society of Jesus was finished in 1883, having been constructed by the late Archbishop Goethals. In 1889, the students were moved to Kurseong, and the building was

made over by the Archbishop to the mission. It was enlarged and became St. Patrick's school which numbers at present about 140 boarders and 50 day-scholars.

A mission has also recently been established by the Methodist Episcopal Church at Asansol. The mission had its origin in services held by itinerant preachers, but a site was eventually granted by Government in 1883, and a church was erected in the following year. The mission now consists of a boys's middle English boarding school with an attendance of about 50, and a girl's boarding school with an average attendance of 85. Many of the children are orphans, and the greater number come from the poorest classes of the population. Preaching, the distribution of literature and visiting are carried on at Asansol and the outlying villages, and the mission also manages a Leper Asylum which is supported by the Mission to Lepers in India and the East. There are out-Stations at Bolpur and Sainthia where a girl's primary school has been established. The United Free Church of Scotland Medical Mission maintains a charitable hospital at Kalna.¹

MUHAMMADANS

Muhammadans are distributed fairly evenly over the eastern portion of the district, and are found in greatest strength in the thanas lying along the Bhagirathi. The Muhammadan invaders who followed Bakhtyar Khilji soon spread over Burdwan and possessed themselves of the principal places of importance in the district. Pandua in Hooghly, Mahmudpur near Manteswar police-station, Kalna and Katwa all became Muhammadan settlements. It is probable therefore that a considerable proportion of the Muhammadan population are the descendants of the numerous soldiers of fortune and their followers who formerly found a livelihood in Bengal. The numerous *aimma* estates which are found in the district and the traditional history of the Muhammadan

1. For this account of the missions at Burdwan, Raniganj and Asansol, I am indebted to the Revd. Mr. Clarke, the Revd. Mr. Bleby, and the Revd. Mr. Koele.

settlements at Kaksa and at Churulia under Raja Narottam's fort show that grants of land to such followers were very common. At the same time there can be little doubt that local converts bulk largely in the total, and the general opinion seems to be that the lower classes of Muhammadans have been mainly recruited from such converts. Accordance to the census report for 1901, "almost the whole of the functional groups such as Jolaha and Dhunia throughout the province, and the great majority, probably nine-tenths, of the Sheikhs in Bengal Proper are of Indian origin."

The conversion of the Hindu to Islam was in most cases voluntary. The Mughals were, as a rule, tolerant in religious matters, and the Afghan rulers who preceded them did not often use force to propagate their faith. The only organized persecution of the Hindus of which there is any record in history is that of Jalal-ud-din mentioned by Dr. Wise, who is said to have offered the Koran or death, and who must have effected wholesale conversions. But although there was no general attack on the Hindu religion, there are numerous traditions of conversions on a large scale by enthusiastic freelances, such as the renowned Shah Jalal of Sylhet. In Mandaran thana in the Arambagh subdivision of Hooghly, where the Muhammadan population preponderates over the Hindu, there is a tradition that Muhammad Ismail Shah Ghazi defeated the local Raja and forcibly converted the people to Islam. These traditions are not confirmed by history, but history tells us very little of what went on in Bengal during the reigns of the independent kings, and, when even the names of some of them are known to us only from the inscriptions on their coins, while there is no record whatever of many of the local satraps, it is not to be expected that, even if forcible conversions were common, there would be any written account of them. There must doubtless, here and there, have been ruthless fanatics like the notorious Tippu Sahib of more recent times, who forcibly circumcised many of his Hindu subjects and perpetrated many acts of the grossest oppression, and the fact that many of the Muhammadan mosques, especially in this district, were often constructed

of stones taken from Hindu temples, clearly shows that, at some times in some places, the Hindus were subjected to persecution at the hands of their Musalman conquerors. In the accounts of Chaitanya's life, for instance, we read that two of his leading disciples were Brahmans who had been compelled to embrace the faith of Islam.

In spite, however, of the fact that cases of forcible conversion were by no means rare, it seems probable that very many of the ancestors of the Bengal Muhammadans voluntarily gave in their adhesion to Islam. The advantages which that religion offered to persons held in low esteem by the Hindu are sufficiently obvious, and under Muslim rule there was no lack of pious Pirs and Fakirs such as Pir Bahram of Burdwan, and Majlis and Badr Saheb of Kalna who devoted their lives to gaining converts to the faith. There were special reasons which, during the early years of the Muhammadan supremacy, made conversion comparatively easy. Although the days when Buddhism was a glowing faith had long since passed, the people of Bengal were still to a great extent Buddhistic, and when Bakhtyar Khilji conquered Behar and massacred the Buddhist monks assembled at Odontapuri, the common people, who were already lukewarm, deprived of their priests and teachers, were easily attracted from their old form of belief, some to Hinduism and others to the creed of Muhammad. The higher castes probably found their way back to Hinduism, while the non-Aryan tribes who had, in all probability, never been Hindus, preferred the greater attractions of Islam.

At present but few conversions to Islam occur, and as a rule the persons who come over from the one religion to the other do so for material and not for religious reasons, as for instance when a Muhammadan takes a Hindu widow as his second wife, or a Hindu falls in love with a Muhammadan girl and must embrace her religion before he can marry her.¹

1. Census Report, 1901.

By far the greater majority of the Muhammadans in Burdwan are Sunnis of the Hanifa sect, but in some parts of the district, more particularly in Katwa, the Wahabis have gained a large number of adherents, and the higher class Muhammadans are often Shiah. The unreformed Muhammadans of the lower and uneducated classes are deeply infected with Hindu superstitions, and their knowledge of the faith they profess seldom extends beyond the three cardinal doctrines of the unity of God, the mission of Muhammad and the truth of the Koran. The veneration of Pirs and Saints is common among them, and many pilgrims frequent the more famous shrines and make offerings of sweetmeats, etc., in order that the Pir may look with favour upon them and grant them the fulfilment of their desire. One of the most famous of such shrines is that of Pir Bahram whose tomb is shown in Burdwan. He is mentioned in the Memorandum Book of Khusgo in the following note, "Hajrat Haji Bahram Sekka was a native of Turkestan. He belonged to the Bayet sect of Musalmans"; he is also noticed in the Memorandum Book of Nudrat. Tradition relates that he was at one time a water-carrier in the streets of Mecca and Najaf. The date of his death as engraved on the tombstone is 970 Hizri. Two other famous Pirs are Badr Saheb and Majlis Saheb who are regarded by Muhammadans and Hindu alike as the patron Saints of Kalna. Their tombs stand on the river bank, and are worshipped equally by the followers of both religions, the commonest offerings being small clay horses which are supposed to signify the horse sacrifice which is so common in ancient Indian history.

ANIMISTS

The animists are almost entirely represented by the Santals, the side drift of the great immigration northwards, who are found almost entirely in the Asansol subdivision. The following brief account of their religious beliefs is condensed from that given in the Bankura Gazetteer. The religion of the Santals is of a primitive nature, its main feature being sacrifices made to a number of village and

household deities. The village deities are usually supposed to reside in trees. The household deities reside in a little apartment reserved for them in every house, however small. Grain and other articles are stored here, but it is a sacred spot; all the household sacrifices being made at the entrance to it, and no female from any other house may even enter it. The names of the household deities are kept secret and are known only to the head of the family. Generally among the village deities the spirit of the founder of the village, and, among the family deities, those of departed ancestors, are worshipped. Chickens, goats and sometimes even cows are sacrificed; the flesh of the animals is consumed by the sacrificers and the friends, and the feast is almost invariably accompanied by drinking and dancing.

A strong belief in witchcraft is firmly established, and the Jan, or witch doctor, whose aid in cases of misfortune is always invoked, is a person of great importance and power. The Jan also has the power of divining from *sal* leaves, but the secret of his greatness lies in the fact that he is spirit medium and that his pronouncements are made when he is under intense spiritual influence. He is often resorted to not only by Santals, but also by low-caste Hindus, many of whom firmly believe in his power of casting out the demon of cholera from any village that may be attacked.

HINDUISM

Burdwan, with its large contingent of high caste Brahmans, has from pre-historic times been a stronghold of Hinduism. But the pure and lofty faith of the Aryan invaders here, as elsewhere in the lower valley, has been corrupted by the superstitions of the animistic races whom they conquered, and the popular religion exhibits in consequence a marked mixture of the Animism of the aboriginals and the Monotheism of the higher race. Much of the demon worship and of that propitiation of malignant power which is now so marked a feature of the worship of Siva and

Kali was undoubtedly borrowed from the aboriginals, and, as Hunter has pointed out, whatever mythology Siva or Rudra may originally have belonged to, there can be no doubt that Siva worship as performed by the lower classes in Lower Bengal is the reverse of the Aryan spirit of devotion, and represents the superstition of the black races. Yet this is the only form of religion which has now any hold on the lower classes, and it is Siva and his more terrible wife Kali who are invoked by the people in all times of trouble or necessity.

SAKTISM

Siva-worship or Saktism (Sanskrit Sakti), the worship of power or energy, is based on the worship of the active-producing principle (Prakriti) as manifested in one or other of the goddess wives of Siva (Durga, Kali, Parvati), the female energy of Sakti of the primordial male, Purusha or Siva. The object of the worship is the acquisition of magical and supernatural powers through the help of the goddess or the destruction of enemies through her co-operation. In this cult the various forces of nature are deified under separate personalities, which are known as the divine mothers or Matrigan. The ritual to be observed, the sacrifices to be offered, and the *mantras*, or magic texts, to be uttered, in order to secure the efficacy of the worship and to procure the fulfilment of the worshipper's desire, are laid down in a series of religious writings known as Tantras. The central idea of these books is to identify all force with the female principle in nature, and to inculcate the exclusive admiration of Siva's wife as the source of every kind of supernatural faculty and mystery. The cult is supposed to have originated in East Bengal or Assam about the fifth century. Kali is said to be the same as Durga, but she can assume any number of forms at the same time. The characteristic of Durga is beneficence, while Kali is terrific and blood-thirsty, as the following translation from one of the sacred books of this cult will show. "A Kaulika (i.e., a Sakta) should worship Kali who lives amongst dead bodies : who is terrible and has fearful jaws :

who has uncombed hair and a glowing tongue ; who constantly drinks blood ; who stands over her husband Maha-Kala and wears a garland of skulls on her blood-besmeared throat ; who has prominent breasts ; who is waited on by all the Siddhas as well as by the Siddhis."¹

In the Kalika Puran the immolation of human beings is recommended, and numerous animals are enumerated as suitable for sacrifice. At the present time pigeons, goats and more rarely, buffaloes, are the usual victims at the shrine of the goddess. The ceremony commences with the adoration of the sacrificial axe ; various *mantras* are recited, and the animal is then decapitated at one stroke. As soon as the head falls to the ground, the votaries rush forward and smear their foreheads with the blood of the victim. The great occasion for these sacrifices is during the three days of the Durga Puja. The opposition between Saktism and Vedic Hinduism is expressly stated in the Mahanirvana Tantra where it is said that the *mantras* contained in the Vedas are now devoid of all energy and resemble snakes deprived of their venom. In the Satya and other ages they were effective, but in the Kali Yuga they are, as it were, dead.²

VAISHNAVISM

Modern Vaishnavism, as preached by Chaitanya, represents a revulsion against the gross and debasing religion of the Tantras. Chaitanya was a Baidik Brahman and was born in Nabadwip (Nadia) in 1484 or 1485, some two years before Luther. His father was an orthodox Brahman named Jagannath Misra. Various legends have grown up about his birth and childhood. He was thirteen months in the womb. Soon after his birth a number of holy men, including Advaita, his future disciple, arrived at the house of his parents to do homage to the child, and to present him with offerings. In his childhood, like the young

1. Monier Williams' Religious Life and Thought in India.

2. Bengal Census Report, 1901

Krishna, he took part in all boyish sports and yet rapidly acquired a complete knowledge of Sanskrit puranas and literature. His favourite study was the Bhagavata-purana and the Bhagavad-gita. He married twice, his first wife having died from snake-bite, and at the age of twenty-five resolved to abandon all worldly connections and give himself up to a religious life. Accordingly he commenced a series of pilgrimages. His travels occupied six years and he is known to have visited the most celebrated shrines of India, including Benares, Gaya, Mathura, Srirangam, and ultimately the temple of Jagannath at Puri. Having thus prepared himself for his mission he addressed himself to the work of preaching and propagating his own idea of the Vaishnava creed and, after making many converts, appointed his two disciples Advaita and Nityananda to preside over his disciples, living for the rest of his life at Puri. He preached mainly in Central Bengal and Orissa, the towns of Katwa and Kalna in this district being particularly favoured by him. His doctrines found ready acceptance amongst large numbers of the people, especially amongst those who were still, or had only recently been, Buddhists. This was due mainly to that fact that he ignored caste and drew his followers from all sources, so much so that even Muhammadans followed him. The first principle he inculcated was that all the faithful worshippers were to be treated as equals. "The mercy of God," said Chaitanya, "regards neither tribe nor family." He preached vehemently against the immolation of animals in sacrifice and the use of animal food and stimulants, and taught that the true road to salvation lay in Bhakti, or fervent devotion to God. "He recommended Radha worship and taught that the love felt by her for Krishna was the best form of devotion. 'Thou art dear to my heart, thou art part of my soul,' said a young man to his loved one, 'I love thee, but why I know not.' So ought the worshipper to love Krishna and worship him for his sake only. Let him offer all to God and expect no remuneration. He acts like a trader who asks for a return." Such are the words of a modern exponent of Chaitanya's teaching. The

acceptable offerings are flowers, money and the like, but the great form of worship is that of the *sankirtan* or procession of worshippers playing and singing. A peculiarity of Chaitanya's cult is that the post of spiritual guides or Gosain is not confined to Brahmans, and several of the best known belong to the Baidya caste. They are all of them descended from the leading men of Chaitanya's immediate entourage. The holy places of the cult are Nabadvip, Chaitanya's birth-place, and, in a still greater degree, Brindaban, the scene of Krishna's sports with the milk-maids, which Chaitanya and his disciples reclaimed from jungle, and where he personally identified the various sacred spots, on which great shrines have now been erected. At Nabadvip the most important shrines are in the keeping of Brahmans who are themselves staunch Saktas.

In course of time the followers of Chaitanya split into two bodies, those who retained, and those who rejected caste. The latter, who are also known as Jat Baishtams or Bairagis, consist of recruits from all castes, who profess to intermarry freely amongst themselves. Except for the fact that outsiders are still admitted, they form a community very similar to the ordinary Hindu caste. Its reputation at the present day is tarnished by the fact that most of its new recruits have joined owing to love intrigues, or because they have been turned out of their own caste, or for some other sordid motive. Those who have retained their caste and are merely Vaishnavas by sect are, of course, in no way connected with the Jat Baishtams just described, and their religion is, on the whole, a far purer one than that of the Saktas. The stricter Vaishnavas will have nothing to do with Saktism and are vegetarians, but amongst the Bagdis and other low classes, many of the professed followers of the sect will freely eat animal food and follow in the Durga procession, though they will not on any account be present when the sacrifices are offered up.¹

1. Monier Williams' Religious Life and Thought in India. Bengal Census Report, 1901.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE LOWER CASTES

The largest aboriginal substratum of the population consists of the Bagdis and Bauris, of whom the former have been admitted within the pale of Hinduism, while the latter are still outside it and are regarded by all orthodox Hindus as unmitigated *chuars*. The Bagdis worship Siva, Vishnu, Dharmaraj, Durga, the Saktis and the myriad names of the modern Hindu Pantheon in a more or less intelligent fashion under the guidance of degraded (patit) Brahmans. But together with these greater gods we find the Santal Goddess, Gosain Era and Barapahari, "the great mountain" (Marang Buru) of the same tribe. According to the Bagdis themselves their favourite and characteristic deity is Manasa, the sister of the snake king Vasuki, the wife of Jarat Karu and mother of Astika, whose intervention saved the human race from destruction by Janmejaya.

The Bauris profess to be Hindus of the Sakta sect, but in Western Bengal, at any rate, their connection with Hinduism is of the slenderest kind, and their favourite objects of worship are Manasa, Bhadu, Mansingh, Barapahari, Dharmaraj and Kudrasini. Goats are sacrificed to Mansingh, and fowls to Barapahari. Pigs, fowls, rice, sugar and *ghi* are offered to Kudrasini on Saturdays at the *akhra*, or dancing place, of the village through the medium of a Bauri priest, who abstains from flesh or fish on the day preceding the sacrifice. The priest gets as his fee the fowls that are offered and the head or leg of the pig; the worshippers eat the rest. In Western Bengal Bauris have not yet attained to the dignity of having Brahmans of their own. Their priests are men of their own caste, termed Lava or Degharia, some of whom hold land rent-free, or at a nominal rent, as remuneration for their services. The headman of the village (paramanik) may also officiate as priest.

MANASA

Of all the snake godlings, Manasa, the snake goddess, in Bengal Proper at least, holds the foremost place, and her

worship is conducted with great pomp and circumstance by both Bagdis and Bauris who claim that it secures immunity from snake-bite. Popular tradition makes her the mother of Astika Muni, the sister of the snake king Vasuki and the wife of Jarat Karu Muni, but she is also known as Bishahari and is worshipped by Hindus of all castes in order to secure immunity from snake-bite. It is said that if her worship is neglected some one in the family is certain to die of snake-bite. She is worshipped in various forms. Sometimes a simple earthen pot is marked with vermilion and placed under a tree, where clay snakes are arranged round it and a trident is driven into the ground; sometimes the plant called after her is taken as her emblem, and sometimes an image of a small four-armed female of yellow colour, her feet resting on a goose, a cobra in each hand and a tiara of snakes upon her head. Rams and he-goats are sacrificed in her honour, and rice, sweet-meats, fruit and flowers are also offered. Most families have a shrine dedicated to her in their homes, and sometimes a separate room is set apart for her. On the Dasahara day a twig of the Manasa plant (*Euphorbia ligularia*) is planted in the courtyard and worshipped on the fifth day of the moon, the Nagpanchami day. It is thrown into the water when the image of Durga is immersed at the Durga Puja. Manasa is also worshipped on the last day of the solar month of Sraban and Bhadra. Songs about the goddess are sung, especially those recounting her dealings with Chand Sadagar, a merchant of Gandhabanik caste, which are said to be based on a legend found in the Padma Puran. Amongst the higher castes the worship is performed by Brahmans, but the Haris, Bauris and Doms perform the ceremony themselves.

The following account of the origin of this worship is given by Mr. R.C. Dutt: "The semi-Hinduized aborigines may take to themselves the credit of having added some godheads to the Hindu Pantheon, and the goddess of Manasa is perhaps the most remarkable instance. Hindu gods are rather revered and venerated even by the advanced semi-aboriginals than actually worshipped; but Manasa is

universally worshipped by the most backward as well as the advanced semi-aborigines of Western Bengal, and the worship is continued for days together, and is attended with much pomp and rejoicing, and singing in the streets. The fact of the introduction of this aboriginal worship among Hindus is crystalized in the story of Chand Saudagar, and is handed down from generation to generation. It is said that the Saudagar refused to worship that goddess till his trade was ruined and his dearest child was killed by snake-bite on his marriage day; then, and then only was the merchant compelled to recognize the power of the snake goddess. It is significant, too, that the place which is pointed out as the site of this occurrence is near the Damodar river, which may be considered as the boundary line between the first Hindu settlers of Bengal and the aborigines. At what period the worship of Manasa crossed their boundary line and spread among the Hindus cannot be ascertained; but up to the present day the worship of this goddess among Hindus is tame, compared to the universal rejoicing and enthusiasm with which she is worshipped by her ancient followers, the present semi-Hinduized aborigines."¹

DHARMARAJ

Both Bagdis and Bauris worship Dharmaraj, but the cult is not confined to them and his shrines are common all over West Bengal. By some Dharmaraj is regarded as Yama and by others as the Sun. Some again consider him to be the god of snakes, and some a form of Siva or Vishnu. He is usually worshipped by a low caste priest, often a Dom or a Bagdi. As a rule, he is represented by a shapeless stone daubed with vermilion and placed under a tree, but he is sometimes worshipped in the form of a tortoise. He is frequently believed to possess certain curative powers and his priests administer medicines as specifics for various diseases. Hogs, fowls and ducks are sacrificed

1. The Aboriginal Element in the Population of Bengal, *Calcutta Review*, 1882.

before him, and offerings are made of rice, flowers, milk and *pachwai*. The worship takes place in the months of Baisakh, Jaishta and Asarh, on the day of the full moon, and in some places on the last day of Bhadra. All castes, even Brahmans, make offerings through the medium of the officiating priest.

The worship of Dharma is believed by Mahamahopadhyaya Hara Prasad Sastri to be a corrupt form of Buddhism. The writers of Tantrik compilations among the Hindus, he says, incorporated as many of the Tantrik Buddhist divinities as they could possibly do without jeopardizing their reputation for orthodoxy. But there were still divinities, to whom even with their wonderful power of adaptation, they could not venture to give a place in the Pantheon, and one of these is Dharma. Originally Dharma was the second person in the Buddhist Trinity, but the term came to be applied to the worship of stupas, the visible emblem of Buddhism to the ignorant multitude. "Dharma worship remained confined to the lowest classes of the people—the dirtiest, meanest and most illiterate classes. All the lowest forms of worship rejected by the Brahmans gradually rallied round Dharma, and his priests throughout Bengal enjoy a certain consideration which often excites the envy of their highly-placed rivals the Brahmans, who, though hating them with a genuine hatred, yet covet their earnings wherever these are considerable; and there are instances in which the worship of Dharma has passed into Brahman hands, and has been, by them, transformed into a manifestation either of Siva or of Vishnu."

After recapitulating the arguments by which he identifies Dharma worship as a survival of Buddhism, the Pandit goes on to say: "The Dharma worshippers are fully aware that Dharma is not an inferior deity, he is higher than Vishnu, higher than Siva, higher than Brahma and even higher than Parvati. His position is, indeed, as exalted as that of Brahma in Hindu philosophy. In fact, one of the books in honour of Dharma gives an obscure

hint that the work has been written with the object of establishing the Brahmahood of Dharma. The representation of Dharma in many places is a tortoise. Now a tortoise is a miniature representation of a stupa with five niches for five Dhyani Buddhas. At salda in Bankura an image of Buddha in meditative posture is still actually worshipped as Dharma. The worshippers of Dharma are unconscious of the fact that they are the survivors of a mighty race of men, and that they have inherited their religion from a glorious past.”¹ To this it may be added that at the present day the image of Dharma is generally found in the houses of low-caste people, and that a popular saying is *Dharma nichaydmi*, i.e., Dharma favours the low. At the same time Dharma is offered cooked food even by a Brahman.

THE GRAMYA DEVATA

The worship of the village and household gods is very prevalent among the lower classes. These are called the Gramya Devata and are worshipped on the occasion of every religious ceremony, and also on special occasions, for instance when disease breaks out or a newly-built house is occupied for the first time. The landlord of the village celebrates *puja* usually under a pipal or banyan tree, while each ryot performs his own ceremony at home. Sometimes a Brahman officiates, but frequently the people conduct the worship themselves.

“On the plains, the village god has ever been an object of veneration with the low castes of mixed descent, rather than of the Brahmans, and in many places the worship has altogether died out among the higher ranks. At the beginning of this century, however, Buchanan found it existing everywhere throughout the north-western districts of Lower Bengal. ‘The vulgar,’ he says, ‘have never been entirely able to abandon the worship of the village deities, and imitate their ancestors either by making such offerings as before

1. Bengal Census Report, 1901.

mentioned (betel, red-lead, rice, water) to an anonymous deity, under whose protection they suppose their village to be, or call by that name various ghosts that have become objects of worship, or various of the Hindu Devatas. The ghosts, in fact, and the others called village deities, seem to be the gods most usually applied to in cases of danger by all ranks, and their favour is courted with bloody sacrifices and other offerings. They are not in general represented by images, nor have they temples; but the deity is represented by a lump of clay, sometimes placed under a tree, and provided with a priest of some low tribe.’ Several of these village gods are older than the Aryan settlement, being deified personages sprung from the aboriginal tribes, whose distinctive nationality has been forgotten for ages in the districts where their representative men are still worshipped. Everywhere the ceremonies bear the stamp of the old superstitious terrors, and the carnivorous, gluttonous habits of the black races. Indeed, Buchanan well describes them as ‘sacrifices made partly from fear, and partly to gratify the appetite for flesh’. The fierce aboriginal instincts, even in the mixed castes, who approach nearest to the Aryans, and accept in a greater degree than their neighbours the restraints of Hinduism, break loose on such festivals; and cowherds have been seen to feed voraciously on swine-flesh, which at all other times they regard with abhorrence.”¹

CASTES AND TRIBES

The marginal table shows the strength of the different tribes and castes, numbering over 50,000. Ethnically there is a wide difference between the Asansol subdivision and the rest of the district. In Asansol the lowest stratum of the population to be found are the Bauris, but even within the last century this tract was an unpeopled wilderness, the haunt of thieves and banditti, and it is only since the

Bagdi	...	197,000
Bauri	...	113,000
Brahman	...	109,000
Sadgop	...	106,000
Goala	...	70,000
Aguri	...	66,000

1. Hunter's "Annals of Rural Bengal."

discoveries of coal that it has become settled country. The deltaic portion of the district was perhaps the seat of the oldest civilization in Bengal; the aboriginal element here is represented by the Bagdis who, according to Mr. Oldham, are descended from the Malli and were once the ruling race. Of the various castes noted above it is unnecessary to give any further special description of the Goalas. The Brahmans of Burdwan, however, and the Sadgop and Aguri castes, which are peculiar to the district, deserve further mention, while the Bagdis and Bauris as representing the aboriginal element in the population are also interesting.

BRAHMANS

The Rarhi Brahmans derive their name from Rarh, the high-lying alluvial tract on the west bank of the river Bhagirathi. Their claim to be of comparatively pure Aryan descent is to some extent borne out by the results of anthropometric enquiries. According to current traditions Adisura, or Adisvara, king of Bengal, early in the eleventh century A.D., finding the Brahmans then settled in Bengal too ignorant to perform for him certain Vedic ceremonies, applied to the Raja of Kanauj for priests thoroughly conversant with the sacred ritual of the Aryans. In answer to this request five Brahmans of Kanauj were sent to him: Bhatta Narayana of the Sandilya section or *gotra*; Daksha of the Kasyapa *gotra*; Vedagarva or Vidagarbha of the Vatsa *gotra*, or as other accounts say, from the family of Bhrigu; Chandra or Chhandara of the Savarna *gotra*, and Sriharsa of the Bharadwaja *gotra*. They brought with them their wives, their sacred fire and their sacrificial implements. It is said that Adisura was at first disposed to treat them with scanty respect, but he was soon compelled to acknowledge his mistake and to beg the Brahmans to forgive him. He then made over to them five populous villages, where they lived for a year. Although the immigrant Brahmans brought their wives with them, tradition says that they contracted second marriages with the women of Bengal, and that their children by the latter were the ancestors of the Barendra Brahmans.

By the middle of the eleventh century, when Ballal Sen, the second of the Sen kings of Bengal, instituted his famous enquiry into the personal endowments of the Rarhi Brahmans, their numbers seem to have increased greatly. They are represented as divided into 56 *gains*, or headships of villages, which were reserved for them, and might not be encroached upon by Brahmans of other orders. Tradition is silent concerning the precise method in which Ballal Sen carried out his somewhat inquisitorial measures. It seems, however, to be certain that some kind of inquiry into the nine characteristic qualities was held under his orders, and that the *kul* or social and ceremonial standing of each family was determined accordingly. Some say that twenty-two *gains* were raised to the highest distinction. Lakshmana Sen discarded fourteen *gains* on account of their misconduct, and they become *gauna Kulins*, an order which has now disappeared. Nineteen families belonging to the other eight *gains* were made Kulins. The other families of these eight *gains* were lost sight of. Thus two classes of grades of sacerdotal virtue were formed:—(1) the *kulin*, being those who had observed the entire nine counsels of perfection; (2) the *srotriya*, who, though regular students of the Vedas, had lost *avritti* by intermarrying with families of inferior birth. The Srotriya were again subdivided into Siddha or perfect, Sadhya or capable of attaining purity, and Kashta or difficult. The last named group was also called Ari, or enemy, because a Kulin marrying a daughter of that group was disgraced. The relations of these three classes in respect of marriage were regulated by the principle laid down in the Institutes of Manu for members of the three twice-born castes, a principle now generally known as *hypergamy*. This singular and artificial organization deranged the natural balance of the sexes, and set up a vigorous competition for husbands among the women of the higher groups.

The invasion of Bengal by the Muhammadans and the instant collapse of the Hindu kingdom was not without its effect upon the matrimonial organization of the Rarhi Brahmans. Ballal Sen's reforms had been imposed upon

the caste by the order of Hindu ruler, and their observance depended upon the maintenance of his supervising authority. When this check was removed, the system could no longer hold together, and soon showed signs of breaking up completely. Artificial restrictions had been introduced; the natural balance of the sexes had been disturbed, and a disastrous competition for husbands had set in among the three original groups. New and inferior groups had sprung up, and their natural ambitions still further swelled the demand for Kulin husbands. The pressure of necessity soon showed itself too strong for the rules. Poor Kulins sold their family rank and honour for the bridegroom-price, which had taken the place of the bride-price of earlier times; they added to the number of their wives without regard to the respectability of the families from which they came; and they raised their prices as the supply of suitable husbands diminished, and competition ran higher for a Kulin bridegroom.

The reforms undertaken in the fourteenth century by Devi Vara, a *ghatak* or genealogist of Jessore, extended only to the Kulins. These were divided into three grades—(i) Swabhava or original Kulins, (ii) Bhanga, (iii) Bansaja. The Swabhava grade was further subdivided into 36 *mels*, or endogamous groups, each bearing the name of the original ancestor of the clan or of his village. This restriction of the marriages of Kulins to their own *mel* was the leading feature of Devi Vara's reform. Its principle was adopted and extended, it is believed, by the Kulins themselves, in the singular arrangement known as Palti-Prakriti, or preservation of the type, by which families of equal rank were formed into triple groups, as it were, for matrimonial purposes, and bound to observe a sort of reciprocity.

Meantime the rush of competition for Kulin husbands on the part of Bhanga, Bansaja and Srotriya classes was as strong as before, while the proportionate number of pure Kulins had been reduced by the loss of those who had become Bhangas and Bansajas. In order to dispose of

the surplus of women in the higher groups, polygamy was introduced, and was resorted to on a very large scale. It was popular with the Kulins because it enabled them to make a handsome income by the accident of their birth; and it was accepted by the parents of the girls concerned as offering the only means of complying with the requirements of the Hindu religion. Tempted by a *pan*, or premium, which often reached the sum of two thousand rupees, Swabhava Kulins made light of their *kul* and its obligations, and married Bansaja girls, whom they left after the ceremony to be taken care of by their parents. Matrimonay became a sort of profession, and the honour of marrying a daughter to a Bhanga Kulin is said to have been so highly valued in Eastern Bengal that as soon as a boy was ten years old his friends began to discuss his matrimonial prospects, and before he was twenty he had become the husband of many wives of ages varying from five to fifty.¹

With the spread of education among the upper classes of Bengal an advance in social morality has been made and the grosser forms of polygamy have fallen into disrepute. But the artificial organization of the caste still presses hard on a Kulin father who is unlucky enough to have a large family of daughters. These must be married before they attain puberty, or disgrace will fall on the family, and three generations of ancestors will be dishonoured. But a Kulin Bridegroom can only be obtained by paying a heavy premium, many of the *mels* instituted by Devi Vara have died out, and in such cases, reciprocal marriage being no longer possible, the son of a family left without a corresponding *mel* must marry the only daughter of a widow; while the daughter of a Kulin widow, for whom no husband of equal birth can be procured, may be married to a srotriya, and a premium accepted without endangering the family prestige.¹

1. Risley's Tribes and Castes of Bengal.

SADGOPS

As has already been noticed in Chapter II, Gopbhum, the furthest headland of the promontory from Central India which juts into the district, was formerly the seat of a Sadgop dynasty of which some traces are still extant. According to Mr. John Boxwell, "Sadgop" is nearly pure Sanskrit, a *totsama*, and probably a modern name it meanse "good cowhard". The Sadgops are supposed to have separated from the *goalas* by abandoning pastoral pursuits and taking exclusively to agriculture, and their separation into two sub-castes—Paschim Kuliga and Purba Kuliga living to the west and east of the Bhagirathi—is referred by tradition to the time of Ballal Sen. It is doubtful, however, whether this theory of their origin is correct. The Sadgops are undoubtedly a modern caste, and their realm Gopbhum could not have been ancient. They have no counterpart in Hindustan; they are not widely diffused and all the scattered members of the caste refer back to Gopbhum. They now utterly repudiate connection with the *goala*, and with the profession of cow-herding or milking. Though they must have been Gops before they were Sadgop, and though Gopbhum is more pastoral than agricultural, they assert that they were the lords, not the attendants, of cattle, and the only profession they acknowledge for themselves is agriculture. They actually stand at the head of the Bengal agricultural castes, but their pretension to head the Nebasakh, or nine chief Sudra castes, who interchange the *hukah* is contested by the Telis. The Sadgop, nevertheless, pretend to rank with the Kayastha, and, like them, take the surname Ghosh, which is borne, too, by some *goalas*. They have not yet, however, like some of the Bengal Kayasthas, claimed Kshatriyahood in the sense that it is now being claimed, as merely the next rank to the Brahmans. Nor can they be thought quite analogous to the Kayasthas in view of the infinitely wider diffusion, purer Aryan blood, and known antiquity of the latter. The Closest actual analogy that can be found to them are the Aguri, whose formation and recentness are known. But the conclusion that the Brahmans have had

much to do with the Sadgop is irresistible. In no other way can the large mixture of Aryan blood as shown by the occurrence among the Sadgop of so many individuals with the large bones, fine frames, aquiline features and carriage of the Brahmans, be accounted for. The only Aryans in the small locality concerned must have been the Brahmans or the Kayastha. If the latter, we can know from other instances that the status of the Sadgop could not be so high as it is. In a country like Gopbhum, the largest class of servants and attendants on the conquering Brahmans must have been cowherds and milkmen. The conjecture that the Sadgop have sprung from the Brahmans and the earlier *goalas* would account for all the peculiarities to be noticed among them—their Aryan blood and their high social position, their position in Gopbhum as a dynasty, and their name. Their repudiation of all connection with the modern *goala* would be further accounted for by the very humble or degraded position of the latter. The Sadgop do not claim to represent even the legendary Gops and Gopis. Whether their genesis was actually in Gopbhum or Gopbhum took its name from them, is immaterial.

One curious custom of the caste may be noticed. Sadgops will not eat pumpkin (*lau*) and *dal* in the month of Asarh, and by way of accounting for this prohibition tell the absurd story that they are descended from one Kalu Ghosh, who, being appointed by one of the gods to look after his cattle, killed and ate the sacred animals. Oddly enough, instead of being punished for his sacrilege, his descendants, who thenceforth applied themselves to cultivation, were permitted to rank above the children of the other brother, Murari Ghosh, who faithfully discharged his trust.

AGURIS

The Aguri caste is peculiar to this district, and its chief settlement is the old deltaic soil between the great line of marshes to the west of the Bhagirathi and the present boundary of Gopbhum, in which the Sadgops are still the

most prominent caste. The tract is now the pargana Azmatashahi, a name which indicates that it was formed by the Mughals, and the prevalence of the Aguris in it points to its having formed part of the kingdom to Gopbhum. As usual, the unmixed section of the race is found clinging to the wild and uncultivated portion of its country. For the Aguris, by their own admission, are the product of unions between the Khetris of the house of Burdwan and the Sadgops of the Gopbhum dynasty, and the caste arose within the last two hundred years, if not within a still shorter period. Two hundred years ago was the era of the Burdwan Khetris first assuming prominence. True to the policy of the old Aryan invaders, or mere acquirers of the soldier caste, they began to form alliances with the members of the royal race (it matters not whether purely aboriginal or semi or wholly Aryan, provided it was royal) with which they came in contact. The Khetris, however, had scarcely risen to the state of Rajas themselves when a combination of circumstances, which at this moment are influencing them, induced them to assert their exclusive character as an immigrant people from either Oudh or the Punjab, and not as settled inhabitants of Bengal. They have, throughout the last two hundred years, shown this anxiety to keep up by this means their connection with the other Khetris who are scattered throughout India. The consequence was that the Aguri caste, though esteemed highly respectable, has never attained the full status of the Kshatriya, as it would have done, to judge from other examples, had its origin been less recent. Though its name Aguri is contracted from Ugraha-Khetri, or "the fierce khetris" (probably in allusion to its semi-barbarous ancestors, the Sadgops of wild Gopbhum), it is a distinctly cultivating caste. Its members, at least those of one section of the caste, wear the sacred thread, and assert their superiority over the Sadgops from whom they have in part sprung, a pretension which, though scorned by the Sadgops, is practically admitted by other Hindus.¹

1. Oldham. Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwan district.

The Aguris are popularly believed to be the modern representatives of the Ugra or Ugra Kshatriyas mentioned in Manu: "from a Kshatriya by a Sudra girl is born a creature called an Ugra (cruel) which has a nature partaking both of Kshatriya and of Sudra and finds its pleasure in savage conduct." According to the same authority, their occupation is "catching and killing animals that live in holes." They are distinctly, however, a cultivating class: many of them hold estates and tenures of various grades, and the bulk of the caste are fairly prosperous cultivators. In 1872 they were almost peculiar to the territories of the Burdwan Raj, and it is clear that the Burdwan Khetri could have been the only Kshatriya concerned in a development which appeared in single estate in Bengal, though the text which accounts for it is over 1,800 years old, and refers to the Punjab. The Burdwan Brahmans readily found the text when it was necessary to assign a particular status to these new families. If popular rumour is to be credited, the Aguris still "find their pleasure in savage conduct," for they are said to be extraordinarily short-tempered, and the criminal records of the district seem to show that in proportion to the number of the caste an unusual number of crimes of violence are laid to their charge.

BAURIS

The Bauris are a low aboriginal caste who work as cultivators, agricultural labourers and *palki*-bearers. Traces of totemism still survive in their reverence for the red-backed heron and the dog, and perhaps in their strong objection to touching horse-dung. The heron is looked upon as the emblems of the tribe, and may not be killed or molested on pain of expulsion from the caste. Dogs also are sacred, so much so that a Bauri will on no account kill a dog or touch a dead dog's body, and the water of a tank in which a dead dog has been drowned cannot be used until an entire rainy season has washed the impurity away. They themselves account for this custom by the ridiculous story that they thought it necessary that their

caste should have some animal which should be as sacred to them as the cow is to the Brahman, and they selected the dog as it was a useful animal when alive and not very nice to eat when dead !

Bauris admit into their caste members of any caste higher than themselves in social standing. No regular ceremony is appointed for such occasions : the new member merely pays to the caste *ponchayat* a sum of money, varying from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 to be spent on a feast, at which, for the first time, he openly eats with his adopted caste brethren. The origin of this singular practice is perhaps to be sought in the lax views of the Bauris on the subject of sexual morality. In other castes a woman who has an intrigue with an outsider is punished by expulsion from the caste ; but Bauris not only allow their women to live openly with men of other castes, but receive those men in their own community when, as frequently happens, they are outcasted by their own people for eating rice cooked by their mistresses. Divorce is easily obtained, and divorced wives may always marry again.

The Bauris are addicted to strong drink, and, with few exceptions, are indifferent to the nice scruples regarding food which have so important a bearing on the status of the average Hindus ; for they eat beef, pork, fowls, all kinds of fish, and rats. Nevertheless they pride themselves on not eating snakes and lizards ; and it may be that this is connected in some way with the worship of the snake-goddess Manasa, who is supposed to preserve her worshippers from snake-bite.

BAGDIS

The Bagdis are a caste of non-Aryan origin, who account for their genesis by a number of legends. One of these is to the effect that they originally came from Cooch Behar and were the offspring of Siva and Parvati. Bagdis practise both infant and adult marriage indifferently. In the case of girls who are not married in infancy, sexual license before marriage is virtually tolerated, it being understood that if

a girl becomes pregnant, she will find some one to marry her. Like the Bauris, the Bagdis admit members of any higher caste into their circle, and the process of initiation is like that already described in the case of the Bauris, except that a man admitted into the Dulia sub-caste has to take the palanquin or *duli* on his shoulder as a sign of his acceptance of their hereditary occupation. Most of the Bagdis are to some extent engaged in agriculture, usually as *korfa* or under-raiyats, and comparatively few have attained the more respectable position of occupancy tenants. Large numbers work as landless day labourers, paid in cash or kind, or as nomadic cultivators, tilling other men's lands on the *bhag-jot* system, under which they are remunerated by a share of the produce. Their social rank is very low, and they are usually classed with Bauris and Bhuiyas as dwellers on the outskirts of Hinduism. Some Bagdis eat beef and pork, and most indulge freely in flesh of other kinds, and are greatly addicted to drink. Tentulia Bagdis, however, will not eat beef, and many members of this sub-caste have become Vaishnavas and abstain from all sorts of flesh. A very full account of both Bagdis and Bauris may be found in the Gazetteer of the Bankura district.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

A hundred years ago the undulating rocky country to the west was a vast wilderness, sparsely inhabited by savage and aboriginal tribes, whose constant inroads upon the settled country to the east were with difficulty kept in check by lines of forts along the Ajay and Damodar rivers. This country is now one of the busiest industrial tracts in India. The discovery of coal and iron, and the consequent rapid development of the factories at Raniganj, Barakar, Andal and Durgapur, and of the great railway centre at Asansol have called into existence an entirely new set of conditions, and the interdependence between capital and labour is here as fully established as in any of the manufacturing or mining centres of Europe. The largest

land-owner in the Asansol sub-division at present is the Bengal Coal Company, and the great mass of the population depend for their livelihood on the collieries and factories which are dotted over the country.

In the eastern or deltaic portion of the district social conditions have altered little of recent years. The railway has replaced the rivers as the great thoroughfare for trade, and the prosperity of such towns as Katwa and Kalna, which were formerly regarded as the ports of the district, has declined greatly in consequence. The population is still almost entirely agricultural. The district has always been regarded as one of the most fertile and prosperous in Bengal, and, although it suffered severely from the terrible epidemic of fever between 1863 and 1873 and the famine of 1866, the recovery had been rapid and complete. The wealth of the district centres in the Maharaja of Burdwan, who is the proprietor of the greater portion of the land and who also owns extensive estates in other parts of Bengal. There are no other great land-owners, and the under-tenure-holders such as *patnidars* and *darpatnidars*, who hold their lands under a perpetual lease and without liability to enhancement of rent, are as a rule far wealthier than the superior landlords.

VILLAGE LIFE

An excellent description of a typical Burdwan village may be found in "Bengal Peasant Life"¹ by the Revd. Lal Behari Day.

"Kanchanpur is a large and prosperous village. There is a considerable Brahman population, the great majority of whom are of the Srotriya order. The Kayasthas, or the writer caste, are comparatively few in number. Ugra-Kshatriyas, or Aguris, as they are called in common parlance, who are all engaged in agricultural pursuits, though less numerous than the Sadgopas, are an influential

class in the village; while there is the usual complement of the medical caste, of blacksmiths, barbers, weavers, spice-sellers, oilmen, bagdis, domes, hadis and the rest.

"Kanchanpur, like most villages in Bengal, has four divisions agreeably to the four cardinal points of the compass—the northern, the southern, the eastern and the western. The village lies north and south, and the northern and southern divisions are much larger than the eastern and western. A large street runs north and south, straight as the crow flies, on which abut smaller streets and lanes form the eastern and western division. The bulk of the house are mud cottages thatched with the straw of paddy, though there is considerable number of brick houses, owned, for the most part, by the Kayasthas and the banker caste. The principal street is lined on both sides by ranges of houses, either of brick or of mud, each having a compound, with at least a tree or two, such as the plum, mango, guava, lime or papaya, and the invariable plantain. Outside the village, the main street is extended nearly a quarter of a mile at each end, with rows on either side of the magnificent *asvatha*, the *ficus religiosa* of botanists. In the centre of the village are two temples of Siva, facing each other; one of them has a large colonnade, or rather polystyle, as there are no less than four rows of columns; and the intervening space between the two temples is planted with the *asvatha*. There are other temples of Siva in other parts of the villages, but there is nothing about them worthy of remark. In the central part of each of the four divisions of the village there is a *vakula* tree, the foot of which is built round with solid masonry, raised three or four feet above the ground in the form of a circle, in the centre of which stands the graceful trunk. As the diameter of this circle is seldom less than twelve feet, a good number of people can easily sit on it, and you meet there, of an afternoon, the gentry of the village, squatting on mats or carpets, engaged in discussing village politics, or in playing at cards, dice or the royal game of chess.

1. Macmillan & Co. London, 1902.

There are not more than half-a-dozen shops in the village in these are sold rice, salt, mustard-oil, tobacco and other necessities of Bengal life. The villagers, however, are supplied with vegetables, clothes, cutley, spices and a thousand knick knacks, twice a week, from a *hat*, or fair, which is held on Tuesdays and Saturdays, on a plain on the south-western side."

From the same authority is taken the following description of the ordinary well-to-do peasant's house :

"You enter Badan's house with your face to the east, through a small door of mango wood on the street, and you go at once to the *uthan*, or open yard, which is indispensable to the house of every peasant in the country. On the west side of the yard stands the *bara ghar*, or the big hut. Its walls, which are of mud, are of great thickness and the thatch, which is of the straw of paddy, is more than a cubit deep. The hut is about sixteen cubits long and twelve cubits broad, including the verandah, which faces the yard, and which is supported by props of palmyra. It is divided into two compartments of unequal size, the bigger one being Badan's sleeping-room, and the smaller one being the store-room of the family, containing a number of *handis*, or earthen vessels, filled with provisions. The verandah is the parlour or the drawing-room of the family. Their friends and acquaintances sit on mats. In Badan's sleeping-room are kept the brass vessels of the house and other valuables. There is no *khat* or bedstead in it, for Badan sleeps on the mud floor, a mat and a quilt stuffed with cotton interposing between his body and mother earth. There is not much light in the room, for the thatch of the verandah prevents its admission, while there is but one small window high up on the wall towards the street. I need scarcely add that there is no furniture in the room—notable, no chairs, no stools, no almirah, no wardrobe, no benches ; there is only in one corner a solitary wooden box.

"On the south side of the yard is a smaller hut which is used as a lumber-room, or rather as a tool-room, for

keeping the implements of husbandary. In the verandah of this little hut is placed the *dhenki*, or the rice-husking pedal. From this circumstance the little hut is called *dhenkisala* (pedal-house), or more familiarly *dhenskal*.

"In the south-east corner of the yard is another living hut the verandah of which serves the purpose of a kitchen. From this later circumstance it is called *paksala* (cooking-house), but Badan and his family always called it by the more familiar name of *rannaghar*. The only other hut on the premises is the cow-house, called *gosala*, or more familiarly *goal*. Several large earthen tubs, called *nands*, which serve the purposes of troughs, are put on the floor, half buried in small mounds of earth, near which are stuck in the ground tether-posts of bamboo. In one corner is a sort of fire-place, where every night a fire, or rather smoke, of cow-dung cakes is made, chiefly for the purpose of saving the bovine inmates from the bite of mosquitoes and fleas. The eastern side of the premises opens on a tank which supplies the family of Badan, as it does other families in the neighbourhood, with water, not, indeed, for drinking, but for every other purpose ; the drinking water being obtained from one of the big tanks which are situated on the outskirts of the village.

"About the middle of the *uthan*, or yard, and near the cow-house, is the granary of paddy, called *gola* in other parts of the country, but in the Burdwan district invariably called *marai*. It is cylindrical in shape, made entirely of ropes of twisted straw, with a circular thatch on the top. It contains a quantity of paddy sufficient for the consumption of the family from one harvest to another. Not far from the granary is the *palui*, or straw stack, which is an immense pile of paddy-straw kept in the open air, to serve as fodder for cows and oxen for a whole year.

"Behind the kitchen, and near the tank, is the *sarkuda*, or the dust-heap of the family, which is a large hole, not very deep, into which the sweepings of the yard, the ashes of the kitchen, the refuse of the cow-house, and all sorts

of vegetable matter, are thrown. This dust-heap though somewhat hurtful in a sanitary point of view, is essentially necessary to our raiyat, as it supplies him with manure for his fields."

VILLAGE OFFICIALS

The principal village official met with in the district is the *mat gumashta*, a revenue officer appointed by the zamindar to collect rents and grant receipts. He is usually paid by a money salary and is sometimes assisted by a *faujdari gumashta* whose duty it is to look after any case in which the landlord's interests are involved. The *mandal*, sometimes called *mukhya*, is the hereditary headman of the village. Formerly the *mandal* was a person of great importance, and in old Sanskrit writings he is spoken of as the village king, but the respect now shown to him is a mere shadow of what it formerly was. His authority, however, is still recognized by offerings of betel and sweetmeats at pujas, and by the present of a piece of cloth from the zamindar at the *punya*, or first rent-day of the year. Petty local disputes are decided by the *mandal*, and intercourse with the police is carried on through him. He may belong to any caste; and he is often a very illiterate man. In some large villages there exist *chaudhries* whose business is to decide questions of price-currents, fix rates for cart-hire, etc., in return for which they received an allowance from the shopkeepers; formerly both *mandals* and *chaudhries* received fees from his zamindar.

Under the old municipal system of the Hindus a large number of watchmen were employed by each village for the protection of the persons and property of the community. Village *simandars* and *halshands* were charged with the protection of the village crops and boundaries; *pharidars* and *piyadas*, with the watch and guard of roads; *ghatwals*, with the care of roads and passes in the hills. All these officials were remunerated by grants of rent-free lands. These lands have now been resumed and the village watch has been transformed into a subordinate rural police.

The other conspicuous personages in village life are: The *purohit*, or priest, who is usually paid by gifts of money, called *dakshina*, for each ceremony performed by him, and also by a portion of the offerings made to the idols; the *acharjya*, or fortune-teller, who prepares horoscopes, and predicts the destiny of infants according to the planets under whose influence they were born; the *napit*, or barber, who also performs certain ceremonies at births, marriages, etc., and the *mahajan*, or village usurer and grain merchant. The *Kamar*, or blacksmith; the *chhutar*, or carpenter; and the *mali*, or gardener, who prepares garlands for festivals, are all generally paid in money by the job, according to the services rendered by them. The *dhobi*, or village washerman, is remunerated either in money or in kind. All these persons, however, who in the old Hindu village had lands assigned for their maintenance by the community, ceased to exist as village officials long ago, and are now merely artisans or servants, carrying on their caste occupations and remunerated by those who employ them.

FOOD

The ordinary food of all classes of the people consists principally of rice, pulses (*dal*), fish, milk and vegetables, and the general practice is to take two meals—one in the day between 10 A.M. and 12 noon and the other at night between 8 and 9 P.M. Sweetmeats are very largely consumed by the higher and middle classes, and the confectioners of Burdwan and Mankur are famous for their '*ola*', '*khaja*', and '*kadma*'. Among the peasantry, however, the only sweetmeat consumed, besides treacle in its raw unmanufactured state, is '*mudki*', i.e., parched and husked paddy dipped in treacle and on high days and holidays '*patali*'.

CLOTHING

The ordinary clothing of a gentleman appearing at a social gathering in the cold weather consists of a *dhuti*, or

waistcloth of cotton, a shirt and coat, a shawl and a pair of stockings and shoes. In other seasons of the year a *dhuti*, shirt or coat, a *chadar* and shoes are worn. When appearing at office, the clothing consists of pantaloons, a shirt, a *chapkan*, a *chadar*, and a pair of stockings and shoes ; persons of somewhat higher position use *chagas*, or loose overcoats, instead of *chadars*. The ordinary clothing of a man of the middle classes consists of a *dhuti*, *chadar* and a pair of shoes or slippers ; shirts and coats are also occasionally used. A cultivator wears merely a coarse *dhuti* and a scarf (*gamcha*) thrown over the shoulders or wrapped around the waist. Men of the lower classes have a coarse *dhuti* only. In the cold weather shawls and various wrappers are used, such as the *banats* made of serge or broadcloth, the *dhusa* and *balaposh* made of cotton and cloth, the *garbhasuti* woven with *tasar* and cotton thread, and the *gilap* or *pachhuri*, which is a double *chadar* made of coarse cloth. The dress of the women generally consists of a *sari* only, but in rich families the use of bodices and wrappers in the winter has been introduced. As a rule, females, with the exception of prostitutes, do not use shoes, shawls, or other garments used by the males.

AMUSEMENTS

The amusements of the people consist chiefly of the *jatra*, a theatrical entertainment given in the open air, *baithaki* songs, i.e., songs in the *baithak* or general sitting room, and dancing. In all of these both vocal and instrumental music is employed. Men of all classes attend *jatras*, but the mass of the people amuse themselves with *Harisankirtan*, in which they sing and dance in the name of *Hari* (God). Sometimes *Harisankirtan* continues without intermission for several days and nights, and is called, according to its duration, *ahoratra* (one day and night), *chabbisprahar* (three days and nights), *pancharatra* (five days and nights) and *nabaratra* (nine days and nights). The people of the *Rarh desh* are famous *jatra* performers, and almost every village has its theatrical society.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

The population is a mixed one, including pure Hindu castes of Aryan descent, semi-aboriginals recently admitted in the pale of Hinduism, and pure aboriginal tribes. The following account of the general conditions prevailing is quoted from an article by Mr. R. C. Dutt "The Aboriginal Element in the Population of Bengal" (*Calcutta Review*, 1882) which is especially applicable to Burdwan : "Living in the same district, and often in the same village, the Hindu and the semi-Hinduized aboriginal nevertheless present differences in their habits and ways of living which cannot but strike even the most careless observer. Belief in a highly developed religion and an elaborate superstition has made the Hindu even of the lower castes timid and contemplative ; a higher civilization has made him calculating, thoughtful and frugal, and a long training in the arts of peace has made him regular in his habits, industrious in his toil, peaceful in his disposition. The semi-aboriginal, on the other hand, presents us with a striking contrast in character in all these respects. He is of an excitable disposition and seeks for strong excitement and pleasure ; he is incapable of forethought, and consumes his earnings without a thought for the future ; he is incapable of sustained toil, and, therefore, oftener works as a field labourer than as a cultivator. Simple, merry in his disposition, excitable by nature, without forethought or frugality, and given to drunkenness, the semi-aboriginal of Bengal brings to his civilised home many of the virtues and vices of the savage aboriginal life which his forefathers lived. In every villages where semi-aboriginals live, a separate portion of the village is reserved for them, and the most careless observer will be struck with the difference between neatness and tidiness, the well-swept, well-washed and well-thatched huts of the Hindu neighbourhood, and the miserable, dirty, ill-thatched huts of the Bauri *Para* or the Hari *Para*. If a cow or a pig dies in the village, it is flayed, and the meat carried home by the Muchis or Bauris, while the Hindus turn aside their face and stop their nose in disgust when passing near such scenes. If there is an outstill in the village, it is in the Bagdi *Para* or in the

Bauri *Para*; it is thronged by people of these castes, who spend their miserable earnings here, regardless of their ill-thatched huts and their ill-fed children.

"The mass of the Hindu population are dead against drink and drunkenness; their thrift and habitual forethought, their naturally sober and contemplative turn of mind, as well as their religious feelings, keep them quite safe from contracting intemperate habits. A few educated young men and a larger number of the upper classes may be addicted to drink, but the mass of working classes, the frugal and calculating shop-keeper, the patient and hard-working Sadgop or Goala, the humble and laborious Kaibartta, all keep away from drink. The boisterous merriment that is caused by drunkenness is foreign to their quiet, sober nature, and if a very few of them drink, they drink quietly at home before they retire at night. Far different is the case with the semi-Hinduized aborigines. Barbarians hanker after strong excitements and boisterous joys, and nowhere is drunkenness so universal as among barbarians. The Bauris, the Bagdis, the Muchis have enough of their old nature in them to feel a craving for drink, and the outstill system with the cheapening of spirits has been a boon to them. When spirit was dear, they made themselves merry over their *pachwai*; and now that spirit is cheaper, they take to it naturally in preference to *pachwai*. Of the numerous outstills and *Pachwai* shops in Burdwan and Bankura that we have visited, we have not seen one which did not mainly depend for its revenue on semi-aboriginal consumers. We never saw one single Hindu among the crowds of people assembled in liquor or *pachwai* shops; when the Hindu does drink, he sends for the drink and consumes it at home.

"The distinction between the Hindus and the semi-Hinduized aborigines is no less marked in the position of their women, nowhere, except in towns, are Hindu women kept in that absolute seclusion which Musalman women delight in. In villages the wives and daughters of the most respectable and high caste Hindus walk with perfect freedom from house to house, or to the tank or river-side for their ablutions. Respectable women go veiled, while

those of the lower classes go without veil, or only half veiled. No respectable women will speak to, or can be accosted by a stranger, while even among the lower class Hindu women, except when verging on old age, few will often speak to strangers. Those restrictions entirely disappear in the case of the semi-Hinduized aborigines. Their women have the perfect freedom of women in Europe. Young wives, as well as elderly widows walk without the apology of a veil through the streets or the village bazar; they will talk to any one when necessary; and being naturally of merry, lively dispositions, they chat and laugh gaily as they pass through the most crowded streets. The young Tanti or Chhutar woman, the Kumhar or the Kamar's wife, will often stand aside when a stranger is passing by the same road, but custom imposes no such rule of modesty on the women of the Bauris. But, if the semi-aboriginal women enjoy the perfect freedom of European women, they have often to pay dear for their liberty. Household work is the lot of Hindu women, but the semi-aboriginal women must do out-door work also. Wives as well as widows, mothers and daughters, are all expected to work in the field, or at the village tank or road, and so eke out the miserable incomes of their husbands, sons or fathers. When a road is constructed by Government, or a tank excavated by a village *zamindar*, Bauri men and women work together, the men using the spades and the women carrying the earth in baskets. Wives often carry things for sale to the village market, while husbands work in the fields. For the rest, the lot of these semi-aboriginal women is not a hard one, to judge from their healthy appearance and their merry faces, but when the husbands get drunk, as they do as often as they can, the wives, we fancy, have a bad time of it, and wife-beating is very much worse among the semi-aboriginal castes than among Hindus.

"In their social and religious ceremonies the semi-Hinduized aborigines are every day being drawn closer to Hinduism. The more respectable and advanced among them may indeed be said to have adopted Hinduism in all its main features, while even the most backward castes have adopted some Hindu customs."