

## CHAPTER III THE PEOPLE

### GROWTH OF POPULATION

THE first census was taken in 1872, and the result was to shew, for the district as now constituted, a population of 968,597 persons. During the next decade there was an increase of 7.5 per cent, the number of inhabitants in 1881 being returned at 1,041,752. The advance during the next ten years was not so marked, owing to the prevalence of disease, but by 1891 the population had risen to 1,069,668, the increase being only 2.7 per cent. The succeeding decade was, on the whole, a healthy one, the great epidemic of fever known as Burdwān fever having died out; and the census of 1901 showed a total population of 1,116,411, representing an increase of 4.37 per cent.

On a general survey of the growth of population during the 30 years over which the census figures extend, it is noticeable that between 1872 and 1891 the population of the headquarters subdivision increased by 21 per cent, while that of the Bishnupur subdivision declined by more than 8 per cent. At first sight, this result appears somewhat surprising, for the headquarters subdivision is an undulating tract of rocky, often barren soil, whereas the Bishnupur subdivision is a fertile alluvial plain. The difference in the rate of progress is probably due to climatic conditions; for in the headquarters subdivision the undulating uplands are well-drained and the people suffer little from malarial affections, while the Bishnupur subdivision is a low-lying tract with an unhealthy and malarial climate. The latter subdivision, moreover, suffered between 1872 and 1891 from the Burdwān fever, which was introduced from the adjoining thanas of Galsi and Khandghosh in Burdwān and caused a very heavy mortality; whereas its westward course was checked on reaching the high ground in the west. The ravages of Burdwān fever have now ceased; and the result is that in 1901, for the first time since census operations were introduced, the Bishnupur subdivision showed an increase of population.

### CENSUS OF 1901

The results of the census of 1901 are summarized as follows in the Bengal Census Report of 1901. "The Bishnupur subdivision has increased by 7 per cent, so that it has now nearly recovered the combined losses of the two previous decades, but the headquarters subdivision has added less than 3 per cent to its population. This is due to the movements of the people. The immigrants from outside the district are fewer by about 13,000 than they were ten years ago, while emigrants have increased by more than 38,000. The emigrants are for the most part hardy aborigines from the south and east of the district, who find the high pay obtainable on the coal-fields of Asansol or the distant tea gardens of Assam a more attractive prospect than a penurious livelihood laboriously extracted from the unwilling soil of their native uplands. There is also a considerable amount of temporary migration on the part of the semi-Hinduized tribes in the south and west of the district, who supplement their scanty harvests by working as labourers in the metropolitan districts, when they have no crops to look after. They leave home in December after the winter rice has been reaped, and do not return till the monsoon breaks. This temporary emigration was greatly stimulated in the cold weather, when the census was taken, by the short harvest of that year, and this accounts to a great extent for the falling off in the population of Raipur and the very small increase in other thanas in the south of the district. But for these movements of the people, the growth of the population would have been two or two-and-a-half times as great as that recorded at the census."

The principal statistics of this census are shown in the table below:

SUBDIVISION	Area in square miles	NUMBER OF		Popula- tion	Popula- tion per square mile	Percentage of variation in population between 1891 and 1901
		Towns	Villages			
Bānkurā	1,921	1	4,069	712,055	371	+2.85
Bishnupur	700	2	1,523	404,356	578	+7.17
DISTRICT TOTAL	2,621	3	5,592	1,116,411	426	+4.37

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

## DENSITY OF POPULATION

Bānkurā is the most thinly populated district in the Burdwān division, supporting a population of only 426 persons to the square mile. The density of population is greatest in the Bishnupur subdivision, where it rises to 727 persons to the square mile in the Kotalpur thana and to 664 per square mile in the Indās thana; both these tracts are alluvial flats almost entirely under cultivation. The Bānkurā subdivision supports only 371 persons to the square mile, and the population is very sparse in the western tracts, which are of a hilly undulating character with large areas under jungle.

## MIGRATION

Emigration is unusually active in Bānkurā. The statistics of the Census of 1901 show that no less than 13 per cent of the population of the district were enumerated outside it. Nowhere in Bengal, except in the Rānchi district, is the proportion of emigrants so great: in fact, it is estimated that the increase of 4.37 per cent recorded at the last census represents less than half of what would have been registered but for the volume of emigration. This exodus is partly permanent and partly periodic or semi-permanent, the inhabitants seeking a hospitable home elsewhere or going to eke out their earnings in the metropolitan districts during the cold weather months. The southern part of the district has suffered most by the exodus of the people; and it is reported that in the extreme south it has not only retarded progress, but actually reduced the population. The labouring classes, especially those of aboriginal or semi-aboriginal descent, are chiefly attracted to the eastern districts by the high wages offered there, but their absence from home is mostly temporary. After securing their little stock of grain, they leave home in the latter end of December and proceed to the eastern districts (*Nāmāl*\*) in search of employment, and generally return with their savings before the rains set in to meet the local demand for agricultural labour. Large numbers are attracted to the docks near Calcutta, the mills along the

\* The term *Nāmāl* means lowlands in contradistinction to the highland districts. It is used by the labouring classes with special reference to the districts of Hooghly and Howrah and the eastern portion of the Burdwān district.

Hooghly, and the mines in Burdwān and Mānbhūm. There is also a certain amount of emigration to the Assam tea gardens, which will be dealt with in Chapter XI.

The volume of immigration is small, only 2.6 per cent of the population being returned as immigrants at the last census. Unlike the adjoining districts of Burdwān and Mānbhūm, there are no mining centres, the few small coal mines that exist being worked by local labour and in no way affecting the population. Most of the immigrants are inhabitants of the neighbouring districts; and the immigrants from distant places are mainly Bihāris, who are employed as peons, *darwāns*, etc.

## TOWNS AND VILLAGES

The district is almost entirely agricultural, and there are only three towns, Bānkurā, Bishnupur and Sonāmukhi, with an aggregate population of 53,275 or 5 per cent of the total population. These towns are unprogressive, of little commercial importance, and on the whole distinctly rural in character. The remainder of the population is contained in 5,592 villages, most of which are of small size, 68 per cent of the rural population living in villages containing less than 500 inhabitants. The character of the villages differs considerably in the east and west of the district. In the east, where much of the land is rich loam, able to support a numerous population, we find the closely packed villages of Bengal, surrounded by picturesque groves of trees. In the undulating tract to the west, where the ridges afford healthy sites for villages and the inhabitants are to a large extent Sāntāls, Bāgdīs and Bāuris, the closely packed hog-backed huts of the Bengalis give place to the mud walls and straight roofs characteristic of Sāntāl clearings; while in the hilly broken country bordering on Chotā Nāgpur nothing is seen but small scattered hamlets.

## LANGUAGE

The language current in the district is the dialect known as *Rārhi boli*, or western Bengali, which is also spoken in Burdwān, Birbhūm, Mānbhūm, Singhbhūm and 24-Parganas. *Rārhi boli*, it may be explained, means the language spoken in Rārhi, i.e., the country lying to the west of the Bhāgīrathī river and south of the Ganges. This dialect was returned in 1901 as the language

of 90.7 per cent of the population. Sāntāli was spoken by nearly 9 per cent, and as the Sāntāls account for 9.5 per cent of the population, it would appear that they still nearly all retain their tribal language. Mundāri was also returned as the language of a few Korās.

#### RELIGIONS

Altogether 975,746 persons or 87.4 per cent of the population are Hindus. 89,157 or 8 per cent are Animists, and 51,114 or 5.6 per cent are Muhammadans. Other religions have only a few representatives, there being 363 Christians according to the census of 1901, while the followers of all other religions number only 31.

#### CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

The first Christian missionary who worked in the district was the Rev. Mr. Weitbrecht of the Church Missionary Society, who used to visit the town of Bānkurā from Burdwān as far back as 1840. He never resided in the town, but established some schools, the chief of which subsequently became the Zilā School. The Wesleyan Mission began work at Bānkurā in 1870, and has now several stations in the district, of which an account is given below. The only other mission in the district is one carried on by some American missionaries who, some years ago, opened an orphanage in the neighbourhood of Mejiā, called the Premānanda Orphanage, which is said to contain about 75 children.

#### WESLEYAN MISSION

The Rev. J. Mitchell, Principal of the Bānkura Wesleyan College, has kindly furnished the following account of the work of the Mission, of which there are three branches—educational, evangelistic and social.

#### EDUCATIONAL WORK

In the year 1870 the Rev. John Richards opened a school at Kuchkuchiā in Bānkurā, and this institution has continued with varying fortunes up to the present time. In 1889 a High School department was added to the existing Middle School, and these

two departments worked side by side until 1899, when the Middle School was abolished and the school was converted into a High School recognized by the University and aided by Government. Both educationally and financially the High School has been a great success, for year after year the percentage of passes in the Entrance Examination has been higher than in most of the schools in the district, and numerically the school has stood easily first during the last three years: at the end of the year 1906 there were 330 names on the roll. Owing partly to the continued success of the Kuchkuchiā High School, but more particularly to the demand for higher education in the district, college classes were commenced in the High School building in June 1903; but the number rose so rapidly that it was soon found impossible to continue the work in the school building, and the classes were transferred to the Central Hall, a spacious building belonging to the Mission, which stands in a fine position in the middle of the town. From its inception the college has been most successful, and though owing to the reorganisation of the University, it had to wait four years for affiliation, the percentage of passes in the First Arts Examination has been remarkably high, 61 students having passed that examination up to date (1907). In order to meet the requirements of the University, it has been found necessary to make preparations for the erection of a separate college building, and several other buildings will be necessary in connection with the college scheme. A fine site of 115 *bighās* has been obtained, on which it is intended to erect the new college, a hostel for Hindu students, a Christian hostel, a house for the Principal, and other buildings when needed. Much progress has already been made. The Principal's house is complete; the foundation of the college has been laid; and a fine recreation ground of nearly 10 *bighās* has been prepared. The college is now affiliated up to the B.A. Examination in Arts, and the University has been asked to grant permission for teaching Chemistry; to this end, provision is being made in the new building, so that the students may have both theoretical and practical teaching.

In addition to higher education, attention is being paid to primary education both among boys and girls. In the Mission compound there is a well-built and well-equipped boarding school for Christian girls. The teaching is carried on up to the Middle

Vernacular standard, and there is also a teachers' training department. This school has had a most successful career, and trained teachers are being turned out year after year to carry on the work in the various girls' schools in the district. Though the boarders are all Christians, Hindu girls are also admitted as day students. The Mission has also under its care three girls' schools in the town with Christian teachers in charge. At Ondā, a large village 10 miles south of Bānkurā, there is another girls' school, and at Bishnupur, where the Mission has a Mission House and a fine property, there are five girls' schools. There is also a flourishing Middle English school at Ondā in charge of a catechist, who is directly under a European missionary, the latter also supervising the work carried on in the neighbourhood of Bishnupur. This school receives a grant from the District Board, and a considerable sum of money is being spent on the building to make it better adapted for modern requirements.

There are several Primary schools under the care of the Mission; and in the Bānkurā Mission compound there is a Middle Vernacular school, at which boys are taught up to the Middle Vernacular standard and also receive practical instruction in carpentry, cane and bamboo work, or shoe-making. There is one difficulty in connection with this school, and that is, to induce students to take up the technical side. With Christian boys there is no difficulty, but Hindu boys, whether high caste or low caste, do not take kindly to work that does not fall within the scope of their caste. One branch of technical work that is being carried on amongst the girls and women of the Mission should be specially mentioned, viz., drawn-thread work. The work was commenced about 2 years ago in order to find employment for the female portion of the community, and has proved most successful. Many of the girls and women already do exquisite work, and some of them can earn as much as Rs. 7 a month in this way. There is a ready sale for the work in England, and the prices obtained are such that this department is self-supporting.

#### EVANGELISTIC WORK

Systematic evangelistic work was commenced in Bānkurā by the Rev. J.R. Broadhead in the year 1877, but as far back as 1840, the station was visited by Mr. Weitbrecht of the Church

Missionary Society from Burdwān. The work is carried on in the town of Bānkurā and the surrounding villages by a staff of native workers under European supervision, and at present the Christian community numbers about 400. The Mission staff in Bānkurā consists of three European missionaries, one native minister, four catechists and a number of other workers.

In the south-west corner of the district there is another branch of the Wesleyan Mission with its headquarters at Sārengā near Raipur, where for the last 8 years educational and evangelistic work has been vigorously carried on by the Rev. G.E. Woodford; the Christian community there now numbers over 300. In the Mission compound there is a flourishing boys boarding school with about 40 boys, most of whom are Sāntāl Christians, but non-Christian Sāntāl and Hindu boys are also admitted. Teaching is given up to the Middle Vernacular standard, and the school has an excellent record, a large number of scholarships having been won. Specially promising boys are sent to the Bānkurā Mission High School, and one Sāntāl Christian boy has passed the Entrance examination. In addition to the boys' school, there is a girls' school in the compound, at which about 50 girls study under the care of a trained Christian teacher from the Bānkurā Female Training School. The Upper Primary examination is the standard of this school, but particularly bright girls continue their education in the Bānkurā girls' school. There are also several Primary schools scattered throughout the south-west of the district.

An interesting feature of this branch of the mission is that a considerable area of land has been acquired, on which a number of Christian families have been settled. Not many years back the male members of these families were the terror of the neighbourhood, but a great change has come over them. They are now settling down most satisfactorily, earning an honest livelihood, and becoming respected members of the community.

#### SOCIAL WORK

The social work of the Mission is carried on in connection with the Leper Asylum, which is under the supervision of members of the Mission. An account of this Asylum will be found in the next chapter.

## MUHAMMADANS

Muhammadans are found in greatest strength in the Bishnupur subdivision, and especially in the thanas bordering on Burdwān, viz., Kotalpur and Indās, which account for nearly one-half of the total number. They are Sunnis belonging to the Hānifi sect, and the majority are believed to be descendants of local converts. Of the total number no less than 43,603 are Sheikhs, and the number of Mughals and Pathāns is very few.

The veneration of Pirs or saints is common among the local Muhammadans, who frequent their shrines and make offerings of sweetmeats, in order that the Pirs may look with favour upon them and grant them the fulfilment of their desires. It is reported that many Hindus have the same belief in the supernatural powers of Pirs, and also make offerings at their shrines. The following are reported to be the shrines of the Pirs who hold the highest place in popular esteem: In the Indās thana there are no less than eight shrines, viz., that the Shāh Madār in Rol, Bandegi Shāh Mustaphā in Chichingā, Saiyad Muhammad Husain and Shāh Kabīr in Karisundā, Satya Pīr in a field south of Hayātnagar, Bura Pīr in Chak Sukur, Shāh Bandegi in Bihār, and Shāh Ismail Ganj Lashkar in Lakhipur. There are also shrines of the Pīr last named at Pātharchatī in the Kotalpur thāna, and at Pīrpuskarni Fakīrbera in the Gangājālgāhī thana; and in the town of Bishnupur there is a shrine of a Pīr called Shāh Kaubān Alī.

## ANIMISTS

The Animists are almost entirely represented by the Sāntāls, whose religious beliefs have been so exhaustively treated elsewhere [see pp. 85-86. Ed]. that it is unnecessary to recapitulate them here.

## SOME ASPECTS OF HINDUISM

In Bānkura, lying, as it does, between the highlands of Chotā Nāgpur, the home of Animistic races, and the civilized Gangetic valley inhabited by Hindus, the Hinduism of the lower classes exhibits a marked mixture of the Animism of the aboriginal races and the higher monotheism of the Aryan Hindus. A very large proportion, moreover, of the population consists of semi-Hinduized aboriginals, such as the Bāgdīs and Bāuris, whose

religion is compounded of elements borrowed from orthodox Hinduism and survivals from the mingled Animism and Nature-worship of the pure aboriginals.

The Bāgdīs worship Siva, Vishnu, Dharmarāj, Durgā, the Saktis, and the myriad names of the modern Hindu Pantheon, in a more or less intelligent fashion, under the guidance of degraded (*patit*) Brāhmans. But together with these greater gods we find the Sāntāl goddess Gosain Era and Barapahāri, which is merely another name for the "great mountain" (*Marang Buru*) of the Sāntāls; while the Bāgdīs themselves say that their favourite deity is Manasā or the snake goddess. Similarly, the connection of the Bāuris with Hinduism is of a slender kind. Their favourite objects of worship are Manasā, Bhādu, Mānsingh, Barapahāri, Dharamrāj, and Kudrāsini. Goats are sacrificed to Mānsingh, and fowls to Barapahāri; pigs, fowls, rice, sugar and *ghi* are offered to Kudrāsini on Saturdays and Sundays at the *ākhrā*, or dancing place of the village, through the medium of a Bāuri priest, who abstains from flesh and fish on the day preceding the sacrifice. The priest gets as his fee the fowls that are offered and the leg of the pig; the worshippers eat the rest. Unlike the Bāgdīs, who have degraded Brāhmans to look after their spiritual welfare, the Bāuris have not yet attained to the dignity of having Brāhmans to serve them, but their priests are men of their own caste, called Lāvā or Deghariā.

These two races account for one-fifth of the total population, and their favourite deities are Manasā and Bhādu, whose worship calls for a more detailed mention.

## WORSHIP OF MANASĀ

The worship of Manasā, the snake goddess, is conducted with great pomp and circumstance by both Bāgdīs and Bāuris, who claim that it secures them immunity from snake bite. On the 5th and 20th of Asār, Srāban, Bhādra and Aswin, i.e., the four rainy months lasting from the middle of June to the middle of October, rams and he-goats are sacrificed, and rice, sweetmeats, fruit and flowers are offered. On the Nāgpanchamī, i.e., the 5th of the light half of Srāban (at the end of August), a four-armed effigy of the goddess, crowned by a tiara of snakes, grasping a cobra in each hand, and with her feet resting on a goose, is carried round the village with much discordant music, and is finally thrown into a tank.

The following account of the origin of this worship is given by Mr. R. C. Dutta: "The semi-Hinduized aborigines may take to themselves the credit of having added some godheads to the Hindu Pantheon, and the goddess of Manasā is perhaps the most remarkable instance. Hindu gods are rather revered and venerated even by the advanced semi-aboriginals than actually worshipped; but Manasā 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 crystallized in the story of Chānd Saudāgar, and is handed down from generation to generation. It is said that the Saudāgar 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 recognise 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 Dāmodar 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 Manasā 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."\*

#### WORSHIP OF BHĀDU

Bhādu, according to one account, was the favourite daughter of a former Rājā of Pānchet, who died a virgin for the good of the people. In commemoration of her death, the Bāgdis and Bāuris carry, in procession, an effigy representing her, on the last day of Bhādra, i.e., in the middle of September. The worship consists of songs and wild dances in which men, women and children take part. A local correspondent gives a somewhat different account of the origin of the Bhādu *pūjā*, viz, that some 50 years ago the beautiful daughter of the Rājā of Kasipur

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

(in Mānbhūm) died, and to commemorate her memory the Rājā instituted an annual festival, at which an image of his daughter was exhibited. This has been kept up, though its origin has been perhaps forgotten; and the Rājā's daughter has now been deified by the low castes, who, on the last night of Bhādra, hawk about a gorgeous image of her from house to house. Dancing goes on the whole night, and on the third day the image is thrown into a tank.

Regarding this worship, Mr. R. C. Dutt writes: "The worship of Bhādu (in the month of Bhādra) is said to have been recently introduced into Bānkurā from Mānbhūm and other western districts. The worship is a purely aboriginal one, and the goddess Bhādu is not recognized by the Hindus, nor has she yet obtained any Hindu worshippers. She is imagined to be a princess of excessive goodness and beauty, who took pity on the condition of the poor Bāuris, and died at an early age. The Bāuris have no priests, and so the women and children of each family chant songs day after day before this idol, which they deck with flowers. For some days villages and streets resound with the singing of women and the merry shouts of boys. The last day of Bhādra is the last and most important day of this primitive *pūjā*, and the worshippers forget all work and all cares in their loud and boisterous worship of Bhādu. There can be no doubt the worship is connected in some way with the early rice harvest, which commences in Bhādra. This is the time of national rejoicings all over Bengal, and Hindus worship Durgā, Lakshmi, and a succession of deities as this harvest goes on."\*

#### WORSHIP OF DHARMARĀJ

It has already been mentioned that both Bāgdis and Bāuris worship Dharmarāj, but this cult is not confined to them and is common throughout the district. There are many deities known by the name of Dharmarāj in various parts of Bānkurā, but the most ancient is said to be Briddhāksha, who is enshrined at Sānkāripārā in the town of Bishnupur. The name Briddhāksha means "the old-eyed one," and the god, who is also commonly known as Bura Dharmā, is represented by a piece of stone covered with vermilion and having metal eyes. The priests are

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

a family of Karmakārs or blacksmiths known as *Dharma pandits*, and the offerings consist of unboiled rice and sugar; such offerings are made even by Brāhmans. It is said that the worship of this deity goes back to the days before the establishment of the Bishnupur Rāj, i.e., over 1,100 years, and that the ancient Rājās of Mallabhūm gave the idol endowments of lands, some of which are still held by the priests.

Other representations of Dharmarāj of some celebrity are the following. Bānkurā Rai of Indās is represented by a piece of stone with some carvings interpreted as the signs representing the ten incarnations of Vishnu. This idol is in the house of a Sūtradhar or carpenter, who acts as priest, and all the Hindu festivals are observed, the Rath Jātrā and Makar Sankrānti festivals being performed on a lavish scale; on the latter occasion cooked food, known as *khichuri bhog*, is prepared by Brāhmans and offered to the deity. The idol of Rūp Nārāyan of Mangalpur in thana Indās is a piece of stone emblematical of the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu; this idol is in the house of a Tānti or weaver, who acts as priest. Swarūp Nārāyan of Gābpur in thana Indās has a stone emblem also regarded as the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu; this is in the house of a Kotāl, who acts as priest. Nabajīban of Bālsi in the Indās thana, a similar stone emblem, is enshrined in the house of a Kāmār or blacksmith, who acts as priest. The chief festival at which the three gods last named are worshipped is the Makar Sankrānti, at which *khichuri bhog* is offered. Rantak Rai of Pankhai near Bansi Chāndpur on the Dhalkisor is a stone emblem, also regarded as the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu, in the house of an Aguri, but the priest is a Brāhman. The chief festival in honour of this idol takes place on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiyā, on which day *khichuri bhogis* offered. Kālāchānd or Bansīdhar of Siās in thana Kotalpur is another tortoise emblem in the house of a Nāpit or barber, who acts as priest; the Makar Sankrānti festival is celebrated with *khichuri bhog*. Bānkurā Rai of Baital in thana Kotalpur, Panchānan of Parsā in the same thāna, Adharkuli of Adhākuli in the Jaypur outpost and Kānkrā Bichhā of Gopālpur are also Dharma Thākurs of some celebrity. The origin of the names of the deities is unknown, but it has been suggested that they were originally the names of persons who inaugurated or popularized the worship of Dharma.

The worship of Dharma is believed by Mahāmahopādhyāya Hara Prasād Sāstri to be a corrupt form of Buddhism. The writers of Tāntrik compilations among the Hindus, he says, incorporated as many of the Tāntrik 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 stūpas, 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 Brāhmans gradually rallied round Dharma, and his priests throughout Bengal enjoy a certain consideration which often excites the envy of their highly placed rivals, the Brāhmans, who, though hating them with a genuine hatred, yet cover their earnings wherever these are considerable; and there are instances in which the worship of Dharma has passed into Brāhman 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 Brahmā, and even higher than Pārvati. His position is, indeed, as exalted as that of Brahmā 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 stūpa with five niches for five Dhyāni Buddhas. At Saldā in Bānkurā 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."\* 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

\* *Bengal Census Report of 1901, Part 1, p. 204.*

a popular saying is *Dharma nichagāmi*, i.e., Dharma favours the low. At the same time, Dharma is offered cooked food even by a Brāhman.

## HOOK SWINGING

Hook-swinging, once so familiar a part of the *Charak Pūjā* in some parts of Bengal, is still occasionally practised in Bānkurā by Sāntāls in the more remote tracts, in spite of the efforts made to suppress it. The following account of the ceremony, as witnessed at Sārengā, is quoted from an article, "From the heart of Bengal—Hook-swinging and other diversions," published in the *Indian Methodist Times*, June 1900. "Our attention is drawn towards a mighty structure in course of erection. A long stout pole, 35 feet in height, has been erected. Balanced on the top of this is another pole, 30 feet long and so arranged that it can move both in a vertical as well as in a horizontal plane. On one side is a rude platform erected 30 feet high, so that by standing on the top of this one can just reach the end of the cross bar or lever. What is it all for? We plant our cameras down and wait. There are hurried consultations among the leading worshippers. At length a deputation approaches us. Will the *sāhibs* give them permission to swing? An explanation is given, and then we discover that this apparatus is for the famous "Hook-swinging," which has been illegal for more than 35 years; illegal, but yet we are informed that it is practised every year in these isolated districts. But what can we do? The people are excited, they say it is their custom, and they do not wish to be disappointed. We expostulate with them; we speak of the debasing and cruel nature of the custom; we keep our incriminating cameras pointed towards the apparatus, but it is all in vain. The people say they will swing and risk the consequences.

"A young man of nineteen declares his intention to swing. He pays his pice to the priest in charge, kneels at the foot of the pole, and then awaits the fixing of the hooks in his back. A man approaches with two hooks, about 3 inches in length, with a stout rope attached to the end of each. Standing behind the devotee, he catches hold of a lump of flesh on one side of his back, and in a skilful manner forces the hook through. At the same time, an attendant slaps the devotee on the mouth

to hide any expression of pain from coming forth. Another hook is fixed in the same way, but on the other side of the back, and the victim is now ready for swinging. Strange to say, there is little or no blood, and the performer does not seem to be in much pain. Again he prays, and then mounts the platform or scaffold. He is received by several attendants, who fasten the ropes securely to the swinging-beam. When all is ready, and the beam is properly balanced by a number of men holding a rope from the other end, a signal is given, and away he goes 35 to 40 feet above the ground, suspended merely by the hooks in his flesh without any safeguard whatever, so that if the hooks were to break, or the flesh give way, he would be dashed to pieces on the hard ground below. Round and round he goes, while the people below gaze in rapture.

"At first, the swinging devotee stretches out his arms and clasps the beam, so as to take as much weight as possible off the hooks, but soon he gathers courage and, bringing his arms round in front of him, he unites his hands in the attitude of prayer. Then he grows bolder; with one hand he begins to scatter flowers, which he extracts from his *dhuti*, whilst with the other he plays on some instrument or produces a gurgling sound with his mouth by slapping it with his hand. All these various performances excite great approval from the admiring throng around. The swing ceases. He descends from the scaffold with the hooks still in his flesh. These are quickly extracted without a groan passing through his lips. Again he kneels at the foot of the pole, then the women throng around him with holy water, sweetmeats and all kinds of tempting tit-bits, as a reward for his devotion and as a mark of their approval.

"Not only young men, but middle-aged men and even boys go through the whole performance. There is no waiting. At least hundred people, mostly Hindus, must have swung during the day. Some of these we question and find that many do it for the mere fun of the thing, others because they wish to return thanks for benefits received, and a few out of pure devotion to Siva. One old man has swung seven times, and the marks in his back, which he is proud to exhibit, bear testimony to the truth of his statement. One little boy fainted as he was being taken down. He said the pain was very great, and that he would not do it again, but later he said he had made a vow to swing every year."



Another curious ceremony which took place at the same place is thus described by the same writer. "Two poles are firmly fixed in the ground, six feet apart. A cross bar rests on the top of these. On this cross bar are two loops, eight feet from the ground. Below, a fire of charcoal is glowing, and by its side a priest is kneeling, and ever and anon he casts incense into the burning embers. A worshipper comes along; with a spring he catches hold of the cross bar and puts his feet into the loops and hangs down with his head just above the smoking incense. The priest mutters some mysterious *mantras*, and then the attendants begin to swing him backwards and forwards over the fire, while the devotee, placing his hands together, remains in the attitude of devout worship. The swinging ceases, he is assisted to the ground, and he goes away with added virtue to his credit. No sooner is he down, than another devotee is swinging. There is no waiting, and this goes on throughout the whole day."

#### CASTES AND TRIBES

Ethnically, Bānkurā may be described as a border district lying between Chotā Nāgpur, the home of aboriginal races, and the Gangetic delta with its old Hindu population. Even within the district itself there is a notable difference between the Bānkurā subdivision to the west and the Bishnupur subdivision to the east. In the former aboriginal races, such as Sāntāls, Bāuris and Bāgdīs, predominate, while in the latter pure Hindu castes, such as Brāhmins, are found in greatest strength. Taking the district as a whole, castes and tribes of aboriginals or semi-aboriginals are most numerous, the Sāntāls, Bāuris and Bāgdīs alone accounting for over one-fourth of the total population.

The marginal table [the table below. Ed.] shows the strength of the different castes and tribes numbering over 50,000. As regards these castes, no special description is needed of the Brāhmins, Goālās and Telis, who resemble their fellow castemen in other parts of Bengal in their manner of living and caste structure. The Telis, however, it may be mentioned, are now no longer oil-pressers but cultivators; the actual oil-pressers are Kalus, but they prefer to call themselves Telis. A fuller description is required of the Bāuris, Sāntāls and Bāgdīs, which may be regarded as the characteristic tribes of Bānkurā.

Bauri	...	113,325
Sāntāl	...	105,682
Brāhman	...	93,443
Bāgdī	...	90,868
Teli	...	73,596
Goālā	...	65,784

#### BĀURIS

The Bāuris are a low aboriginal caste who work as cultivators, agricultural labourers and *pālki*-bearers. They are divided into the following nine sub-castes: (1) Mallabhumiā, (2) Sikhariā or Gobariā, (3) Panchakoti, (4) Molā or Mulo, (5) Dhuliā or Dhulo, (6) Maluā or Māluā, (7) Jhātiā or Jhetiā, (8) Kāhuriā, and (9) Pāhuriā. Some of these sub-castes appear to have been originally territorial subdivisions. The Mallabhumiā and Maluā, and perhaps also the Molā, were residents of Mallabhūm, i.e., the eastern and central portions of the district; the Sikhariā were originally Bāuris who lived in Sikharbhūm, i.e., the tract between the Kāsai and Barākar rivers; the Dhuliā sub-caste is supposed to come from Dhalbhūm, which in this district includes the Khātrā thana; while Panchakoti refers to the central portion of the Pānchet (Pachet) estate to the west. The name Gobariā is said to refer to a domestic custom of clearing up the remnants of a meal with cowdung, and Jhātiā is explained as denoting a group who simply sweep away the fragments of a meal without washing the place where it has been spread.

Many of them held substantial tenures on terms of police service—a fact which lends colour to the view that they are among the earliest settlers in this part of the country. 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 emblem 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 Bāuri will on no account kill a dog or touch a dead dog's body, and the water of a tank in which a dog has been drowned cannot be used until an entire rainy season has washed the impurity away.

Bāuris 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 *panchāyat* a sum of money, varying from Rs. 10 to 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 Bāuris 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 Bāuris 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. It is effected by the husband taking away from his wife the iron ring which every married woman wears and proclaiming to the *panchāyat* the fact of his having divorced her. Divorced wives may always marry again.

The Bāuris 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 *Manasā*, who is supposed to preserve her worshippers from snake-bite. In most districts the Bāuris now burn their dead, as Hindus do, but in Bānkurā they bury the corpse with the head to the north and the face downward, believing that it prevents the spirit from getting out to give trouble to the relations and fellow castemen of the deceased.\*

#### SĀNTĀLS

The Sāntāls are almost entirely confined to the Bānkurā subdivision. Only 6,236 are found in the Bishnupur subdivision, and most of these are residents of the western portion of that subdivision, not more than 1,266 being found in the eastern and northern thanas of Kotalpur, Indās and Sonāmukhi. They are rarely known to immigrate from the former to the latter subdivision, where, according to their notion, there exists no

\* Riskey's Tribes and Castes of Bengal.

field for them. Born and bred in the jungle, their favourite occupation, besides hunting, is the gradual reclamation of jungle land. To this work they assiduously adhere till, as is often the case, they are ousted from the land thus won from the waste by grasping landlords, who, when they find that the land broken up by the Sāntāls has attained the desired point of tillage, demand an exorbitant rent, or employ other means to compel them to give up their holdings and betake themselves to fresh jungle, where they are subsequently no better treated. Of late years, however, they have become more tenacious of their rights. A fuller description of this interesting race will be found in the Appendix to this Chapter.

#### BĀGDIS

The Bāgdīs are another 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 Behār and were the offspring of Siva and Pārvatī. Siva, it is said, lived there with a number of concubines of the Koch tribe. Pārvatī was moved by jealousy to come in the disguise of a fisherwoman and destroy the standing crops of the Koches, and Siva could only induce her to depart by begetting on her a son and a daughter. These twins were afterwards married, and gave birth to Hāmbīr, king of Bishnupur in this district, from whose four daughters—Sāntu, Netu, Mantu and Kshetu—the four sub-castes Tentuliā, Duliā, Kusmetia and Mātiā are descended. It is an instructive coincidence that the founder of the Bishnupur Rāj, Adi Malla, from whom Bir Hāmbir was descended, is to this day known as the Bāgdī Rājā, and his descendants as the kings of the Bāgdīs.

In this district the original structure of the caste seems to have been singularly well preserved, and we find the Bāgdīs divided into the following sub-castes: (1) Tentuliā, bearing the titles Bāgh, Sāntrā, Rai, Khān, Puliā; (2) Kāsāikuliā, with the titles Mānjhi, Masālchi, Palankhāi, Pherkā; (3) Duliā, with the titles Sardār and Dhārā; (4) Ujhā or Ojhā; (5) Māchhuā, Mechhuā or Mecho; (6) Gulimānjhi; (7) Dandamānjhi; (8) Kusmetia, Kusmātiā or Kusputra; (9) Mallametiā, Mātiā or Mātiāl. Of these endogamous sub-castes the Tentuliā is called after the tamarind tree (*tentul*), and the Kāsāikuliā is named

from the Kāsai river. These two groups work as masons, and also prepare the lime which is mixed with the betel leaves and areca nut chewed by all classes of natives of India. The Duliā Bāgdīs carry palanquins or *dulis*, and, in common with the other sub-castes, earn their livelihood by fishing, making gunny bags, weaving cotton, and preparing the red powder (*ābir*) used in the Holī festival. The Bāgdī fisherman uses the ordinary circular cast-net, but swings the net round his head before casting it, a practice which is supposed by the regular fishing castes of Bengal—Tiyar, Māl and Kaibartta—to be peculiarly dishonourable. Of the other sub-castes the Māchhuā derive their name from fishing, the Mātiāl from earth-working, the Kusmetia are called after the *kusa* grass; the Ojhā are, or are supposed to have been, the priests of the tribe. Within these sub-castes again are a number of exogamous sections, among which may be mentioned Kāsbak, the heron; Ponkrishi, the jungle cock; Sālrisi or Sālmāchh, the *sāl* fish; Pātrishi, the bean; and Kachchhap, the tortoise. The totem is taboo to the members of the section, e.g., a Kāsbak Bāgdī may not kill or eat a heron, and a Pātrishi may not touch a bean. A Bāgdī cannot marry outside the sub-caste nor inside the section to which he belongs. Thus, a Tentuliā must marry a Tentualiā, but a man of the Sālrisi section, to whatever sub-caste he may belong, cannot marry a woman of that section.

Bāgdīs 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. Among a mass of ritual borrowed from the Brahmanical system, the marriage ceremony (*bibāha* or *biāh*) has preserved some interesting usages, which appear to belong to a different, and perhaps more primitive, order of symbolism. Early on the wedding morning, before the bridegroom starts in procession for the bride's house, he goes through a mock marriage to a *mahuā* tree (*Bassia latifolia*). He embraces the tree and bedaubes it with vermilion; his right wrist is bound to it with thread; and after he is released from the tree, this same thread is used to attach a bunch of *mahuā* leaves to his wrist. The *barāt* or procession of the bridegroom's party is usually timed so as to reach the bride's house about sunset. On arrival, the inner

courtyard of the house is defended by the bride's friends, and a mimic conflict takes place, which ends in the victory of the *barāt*.

Symbolic capture having been thus effected, the bridegroom is seated with his face to the east on a wooden stool placed under a bower of *sāl* leaves, having pots of oil, grain and turmeric at the four corners, and a small pool of water in the centre. When the bride enters, she marches seven times round the bower, keeping it always on her right hand, and seats herself opposite to the bridegroom, the pool of water being between the pair. The right hands of the bride, the bridegroom, and the bride's eldest relative are tied together with thread by the officiating Brāhman, who at the same time recites sacred texts (*mantras*), the purport of which is that the bride has been given by her people to the bridegroom and has been accepted by him. The priest then claims his fee, and, after receiving it, unties the thread and knots together the scarves worn by the married couple. This part of the ceremony is called *gotrāntar*, the change of *gotra*, and is supposed to transfer the bride from her own section or exogamous group to that of her husband. It is followed by *sindurdān*, i.e. the bridegroom takes a small cup of vermilion (*sindur*) in his left hand, and with his right hand smears the colour on the parting of the bride's hair. This is considered the essential and binding portion of the marriage ceremony. Garlands of flowers are then exchanged by the parties, and the rest of the night is spent in feasting, the married couple leaving for the bridegroom's house early next morning. The knotted scarves are not untied until the fourth day after the wedding. When a divorce takes place, it is symbolized by the husband breaking a straw in two or taking away the iron bracelet commonly worn by married women.

Like the Bāuris, the Bāgdīs admit members of any higher caste into their circle, and the process of initiation is like that already described in the case of the Bāuris, except that a man admitted into the Duliā 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 Bāgdīs are to some extent engaged in agriculture, usually as *kortā* or under-ryots, 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 *bhāg-jot* system, under which they are remunerated by a specified share of the produce. Their social rank is very low, and they are usually classed with Bāuris and Bhuiyās as dwellers on the outskirts of Hinduism. Some Bāgdis eat beef and pork, and most indulge freely in flesh of other kinds, and are greatly addicted to drink. Tentuliā Bāgdis, however, will not eat beef, and many members of this sub-caste have become Vaishnavas and abstain from all sorts of flesh.\*

### SOCIAL LIFE

#### LANDLORDS AND TENANTS

The whole district was originally the territory of the Bishnupur Rājās, by whom portions were allotted to subordinate chiefs for the protection of the frontier. These chiefs, who, like the Rājās, were recognized as Kshatriyas, held sway over aboriginal tribes and were useful auxiliaries to their overlords in resisting the Marāthās and other hordes of invaders. Their descendants are still locally known as Rājās by their tenants, although the title is not recognized by Government. On the dissolution of the Bishnupur Rāj, the property in the immediate possession of the Rāj passed into the hands of the Burdwān Rāj, but the large fiefs continued as before in the possession of the Kshatriyas or their representatives in interest. The holders of these fiefs made grants to their relatives and kinsmen, but the latter have now, to a very large extent, transferred their holdings to money lenders and others, and are consequently in an impoverished state. The zamindārs in their turn did not fare better, for their poverty compelled them to mortgage their estates and in some cases to sell some portions to liquidate their debts. Owing to these and other causes the greater part of Bānkurā is now under large non-resident proprietors, such as the Mahārāj-Adhirāj Bahādūr of Burdwān, Kumār Rāmeswar Māliā, and the Rājā of Pānchet.

Another important class consists of *patnidārs*, who owe their existence to the system of permanent subinfeudation introduced by the Mahārājā of Burdwān after the Permanent Settlement. He parcelled out his vast estate into tenures known as *patni tāluks*, the grantees of which not only gave him a high premium

\* Risle's Tribes and Castes of Bengal.

but covenanted to pay an annual rental in perpetuity. This system, which left him a mere annuity on the land, was recognized by law in 1819, and a power of sale similar to that possessed by Government was given to the *patnidārs*. The latter again sublet on similar terms, and the result has been to create a class of persons living on small fixed incomes and without interest in the tenantry. This has caused a disappearance of the old feudal spirit and a disintegration of the relations between landlords and tenants, who no longer have that common solidarity of interest which used to exist. The surplus grain in former days was spent in works of public utility, and a large village would have good tanks and bathing *ghāts*, while its temples were carefully kept up and religious festivals were lavishly observed. Now, in many cases, the old zamindār's family residence is in ruins, and he himself often spends what income he can realise in fighting law suits. If the landlord is not in debt, he is usually an absentee, having but lately purchased the estate; but it is reported that the large non-resident landlords all treat their tenants with justice and consideration. It must be remembered, moreover, that this state of affairs only marks a transition stage, the old feudal inter-dependence between zamindārs and their tenants not yet having been replaced by the new inter-dependence between labour and capital.

#### VILLAGE OFFICIALS

The following is a brief account of the principal village officials or of those whose duties bring them into close connection with the villagers.

#### NĀIB

The *nāib* is the deputy or representative of the landholder, placed in charge of the whole or part of his zamindāri or estate, of which he has the general management. He is assisted by a staff of *muharrirs*, peons and *gumāshtas*.

#### GUMĀSHTA

Perhaps the most important personality in village life is the *gumāshta* or *tahsildār*, as he is the agent employed by the zamindār to manage affairs between himself and his tenants. His chief duties consist in collecting rents, granting receipts,

and seeing that the *nij-jot* or home farm lands of his master are properly cultivated, and that in case any cultivator abandons his fields and leaves the village, the relinquished lands are let out to a new tenant. Through him the zamindār carries on a trade with his ryots by advancing rice and seed at interest to those in need of accommodation; and he keeps the accounts of the rent collections and grain advances. At each village he has a *khāmār*, or house for storing grain, in which he keeps paddy received from the cultivators, either in payment of the grain advanced to them or of rent paid in kind (*sājā jamā* or *bhāg jamā*). His salary is generally paid in money, and in addition to this, he receives perquisites from the cultivators on the occasion of certain festivals. Where the estate is a large one, one *gumāshta* is appointed to collect the rents of a group of several villages; but in such cases he often has an assistant called an *ālpaharī* or *paik*, who is remunerated by a grant of rent-free land.

Besides his other multifarious duties, the *gumāshta* is often called upon to assist his employer in the conduct of suits connected with the villages in his charge, and occasionally to give evidence as a witness. But, by the custom of the country, a man who is considered respectable in the village community avoids giving testimony in a court as much as possible. He is therefore generally allowed an assistant, called the *laujdāri gumāshta*, whose duty it is to look after any case in which the zamindār's interests are involved.

#### MUKHIYA or MANDAL

The *mukhya* or *mandal* is a village official, who formerly held an important position, as he was the representative of the villagers in matters of general or individual interest, an arbiter in petty disputes, and a respectable man whose presence would be sought by the villagers at feasts and festivals. *Mukhya* is a Sanskrit word meaning superior, but at the present day it is a misnomer, as his social position is not always high and the respect shown to him is often a mere shadow of what it formerly was. He is still the village headman, however, and his post is hereditary. He receives perquisites and gifts from the villagers on the occasion of domestic and religious ceremonies, in accordance with time-honoured custom. When a marriage takes place, he

is paid a small sum of money, according to the means of the payer, and also receives a few betel-nuts, sweetmeats, and other presents, which, although of small value, are indicative of respect for his position. Again, whenever a villager gives a feast on the occasion of *annaprāsan* (or the feeding of an infant with rice for the first time), *karnabedh* (ear-boring), *upanayana* (first wearing of the sacred thread by Brāman boys), marriage, *srāddha* (funeral obsequies), *sapindakaran* (annual obsequies), or *pūjā* (religious ceremonies), the *mukhya*, of whatever caste he may be, must be invited to dine.

The other village officials are the priest, barber, washerman, astrologer, and the representatives of the various artisan castes. In the old Hindu organization, these persons were looked upon as public servants, and remunerated by grants of rent-free lands from the common lands of the village. They have, however, long ceased to exist as village officials, and are now hardly more than private servants carrying on certain occupations, and paid for their work by the individuals on whom they attend.

#### PUROHIT

The chief of these is the *purohit* or priest. Nearly every well-to-do Hindu cultivator maintains a family idol, generally a *sālgrām* (a black round stone with a hole in it), which the family priest worships every morning and evening as representing Vishnu. For this he is remunerated by daily gifts of rice and milk. In some villages there is an idol kept in a house called the *mandap*, or in a masonry temple erected at the joint expense of the great majority of the villagers; and gifts of rice, fruit, etc., for its service are contributed by each household in turn. If the village idol has been set up by a zamindār or rich villager, there will generally be found an endowment of land attached thereto, from the proceeds of which the articles necessary for the *pūja* service are purchased, and from which are supported the village priest, the *māli* who furnishes the flowers, the *doms* or musicians, the *kāmār* who sacrifices goats before the idol, the potter who supplies the earthen vessels, etc. Besides his remuneration for his services before the idol, the family priest receives numerous gifts from the villagers on occasions of births, marriages, *srāddha*, etc.

An account of the other village servants will be found in Chapter VII.

## SARDĀR

Formerly the responsibility of keeping the roads open and of protecting travellers from robbery rested with a quasi-military class of men, called *ghāt wāls*, to whom grants of lands were allotted in return for their services. The man at the head of this quasi-military class of men was called *sardār*; the man next in rank and immediately subordinate to him was the *sadiāl*, and the *tābedārs* or *ghāt wāls* were immediately subordinate to the latter. The duty of the *sardār* was to collect *panchak* or quitrent from the *sadiāls* and *tābedār ghāt wāls*, to pay the same to Government or to the zamindār, as the case might be, to depute *ghāt wāls* for keeping watch and ward in villages or on roads, to assist police officers in their investigations, and to perform other police duties when necessary. The lands granted to these men have been or are being resumed, but the old titles still remain. A more detailed account of them will be found in Chapter XI.

## SADIĀLS

The *Sadiāls* used to collect *panchak* from their *tābedārs* and to pay the same to the *sardār* and to supervise the work of the *ghāt wāls*. In some instances also they were deputed for watch and ward duties in the villages and along the roads.

## TĀBEDĀR GHĀTWĀLS

The duties of a *tābedār ghāt wāl* were to keep watch over a *ghāt*, a term which means generally a village or group of two or more villages and portions of roads. He was also required to give information of any offence cognizable by the police committed within his *ghāt*, and to report births and deaths, for which purpose he had to attend the police station periodically.

## DIGĀRS

In *parganas* Mahiswarā, Supur, Ambikānagar, Raipur, Phulkusmā, Syāmsundarpur, Simlāpāl, and Bhālāidihā, those who performed the duties of *sardār* were called *digārs*. The *digārs* of the last seven *parganas* exercised the powers of head constables when those *parganas* were in Mānbhūm.

## JĀGĪRDĀRS

In *parganas* Mahiswarā and Chhātnā there are a class of men called *Jāgwīrdārs*, who performed the duties of *sardārs* in the former and the duties of *ghāt wāls* in the latter *pargana*.

## SIMĀNĀDĀRS

In thanas Indās and Kotalpur, there are a body of men called *simānādārs*, who perform the duties of *chaukidārs*. They have grants of lands in lieu of wages; but in some instances these service lands have been resumed under Act VI of 1870.

## ITMĀMDĀRS OR MANDALS

*Itmāmdārs* or *mandals* are persons charged with the realization of a stipulated rent for a certain *mauzā* or number of *mauzās*, and in lieu of wages enjoy certain lands rent-free in the *mauzā* or *mauzās* in their charge. Such lands are called *itmāmdāri* or *mandali* lands.

## PARĀMĀNIK AND MĀNJIH

The *parāmānik* is the headman among certain lower castes, who decides questions affecting the caste and other social matters. Among Santāls the headman is called a *Mānjhi*. He presides at village meetings, decides petty disputes, arranges hunting parties and attends marriages and religious ceremonies.

## FAUJĀR AND CHHARIDĀR

It is reported that the district, or rather this part of the country, is divided into several divisions by the Goswāmis of Khardah in the 24-Parganas, who are the descendants of Nityānanda and are regarded as leaders of the Vaishnavas by the followers of Chaitanya and Nityānanda. In each division, which is called *bhābuk mahāl*, the Goswāmis keep two officers, viz., a *faujdar* and under him a *chharidar*. For every *bhek*, i.e., the ceremony of initiation of a Vaishnava, and for every marriage and death ceremony of Vaishnavas, Re. 1-6 is said to be due to the Goswāmis, of which the *faujdar* gets 4 annas and the *chharidar* 2 annas as remuneration for the services they render to the Goswāmis.

## FOOD

The ordinary food of all classes consists principally of rice, pulses (*dāl*), fish, milk and vegetables. The food and the time for taking it vary according to circumstances, but the general practice is to take two meals, one in the day at about 10 or 11 a.m., and the other at night at about 8 or 9 p.m. The meals consist of the articles mentioned above, except that some take bread

or *luchi*, i.e., bread fried in *ghī*, at night. As a rule, also a light repast, usually consisting of sweetmeats, is taken in the morning and in the evening.

#### DWELLINGS

The houses fall under three main heads, viz., *pākā* or houses made of brick or masonry, *Kānchā* or houses thatched with straw, and *khaprā* or houses with tiled roofs. The *pākā* houses again are generally of three kinds, viz., those roofed with beams and rafters made of wood, those in which the roof is supported by girders, and those in which it rests on arches; there are, however, very few of the latter two classes. The walls of these houses are either constructed of bricks made with *surki* and lime or of bricks made of mud. The thatched houses may be divided into three classes according to their thatching, viz., *ekchālā*, *duchālā* and *chauchālā*, i.e., houses with one, two, or four thatches. Some of the walls are made of clay, some of unburnt bricks, some of branches of trees and bushes smeared over with clay, and others of wood and clay. Houses of the latter two kinds are called *jhātībār* or *gurābār*, and the last kind is seen in places subject to inundation. Houses thatched with straw are common all over the district; in towns and populous villages masonry buildings are met with in fairly large numbers; while a few tiled houses are found in the town of Bānkurā and in the western parts of *parganas* Chhātnā and Ambikānagar.

The houses are mainly of the Lower Bengal style of architecture. With the ridge and eave lines curved and the thatch very thick. The reason for this style of architecture seems to be that in this part of the country the rainfall is so heavy that, unless very thick thatch is put on, water leaks through, especially along the corner beams of a *Chauchālā* or four-thatched house. "It must be clear that, when an oblong or a square room is covered by four thatches meeting either in a ridge or in a point, and the thatches have all the same inclination, the slope of the roof at the lines of junction of the four thatches is much gentler than elsewhere, and, as a consequence, leaks are more frequent at these than elsewhere. To give to these lines the same or nearly the same inclination as the other portions of the roof, the corners have to be lowered. Hence the curved outline of the ridge and eave lines."\*

\* *Reports. Arch. Surv. India, Vol. VIII, pp. 179-180.*

#### 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 *chādar* and shoes are worn. When appearing at office, the clothing consists of pantaloons, a shirt, a *chapkān*, a *chādar*, and a pair of stockings and shoes: persons of somewhat higher position use *chogās*, or loose overcoats, instead of *chādars*. The ordinary clothing of a man of the middle classes consists of a *dhuti*, *chādar* and a pair of shoes or slippers; shirts and coats are also occasionally used. A cultivator wears merely a coarse *dhuti* and a scarf (*gāmchā*) thrown over the shoulders or wrapped around the waist. Men of the lower classes have a coarser *dhuti* only. In the cold weather shawls and various wrappers are used, such as the *banāts* made of serge or broadcloth, the *dhusā* and *bālāposh* made of cotton and cloth, the *garbhasuti* woven with tusser and cotton thread, and the *gilāp* or *pāchhuri*, which is a double *chādar* made of coarse cloth. The dress of the women generally consists of a *sārī* 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 *Jātrā*, 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 musics are employed. Men of all classes attend *jātrās*, but the mass of the people amuse themselves with *Harisankīrtan*, in which they sing and dance in the name of Hari (God). Sometimes *Harisankīrtan* continues without intermission for several days and nights, and is called, according to its duration, *ahorātra* (one day and night), *chabbisprahar* (3 days and nights), *pancharātra* (5 days and nights) and *nabarātra* (9 days and nights). The people of the *Rārḥ desh*, of which Bānkurā forms part, are, it may be added, famous *jātrā* performers, and the inhabitants of Bishnupur are particularly musical.

#### 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 this district. "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 pleasures; 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 civilized home many of the virtues and vices of the savage aboriginal life which his forefathers lived. In every village 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 Bāuri *Pārā* or the Hāri *Pārā*. If a cow or a pig dies in the village, it is flayed, and the meat carried home by the Muchis or Bāuris, 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 Bāgdi *Pārā* or in the Bāuri *Pārā*; 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 get addicted to drink, but the mass of the

working classes, the frugal and calculating shopkeeper, the patient and hardworking Sadgop or Goālā, 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 Bāuris, the Bāgdis, 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 *pachwāi*; and now that spirit is cheaper, they take to it naturally in preference to *pachwāi*. Of the numerous outstills and *pachwāi* shops in Burdwān and Bānkurā 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 *pachwāi* shops; when the Hindu does drink, he sends for the drink, and consumes it at home.

"The distinction between 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 Musalmān 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 woman 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. These 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 Tānti or Chhutār women, the Kumhār or the Kamār'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 Bāuris. But, if the semi-aboriginal women enjoy the perfect freedom of European women, they have often to pay dearer for their



liberty. Household work is the lot of Hindu women, but the semi-aboriginal women must do outdoor 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 zamindār, Bāuri 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 field; the Bāuri women of Bānkurā are the best coolies for carrying luggage or portmanteaus, often twenty or thirty miles in a day.

There is a curious distinction made in field labour among the semi-aboriginal tribes. Ploughing and sowing are the duties of men, transplantation and weeding are the duties of women. When the seedlings are grown in the nursery, and the fields are well ploughed and prepared for receiving the seedlings, the work of the men has ceased for a time. To take the seedlings to the field and to plant them there in sand or knee-deep water, is the work of the women. They are said to be more proficient in their light but tiresome work than men, and some women are so proficient, that they will not work for others at daily rates of wages, but will earn much more by taking contracts for definite areas, which they will plant with seedlings in a wonderfully short time. In the fertile valley of the Kāsai, in the district of Bānkurā, we have seen rice-fields stretching one after the other for miles together, and all under transplantation. Bāuri and other semi-aboriginal women are seen by the hundred engaged in this work, standing in the midday sun, in wind or water, planting the seedlings with surprising nimbleness, or resting for a while, and gaily chatting with each other with the lightness and joyousness of heart which never deserts them. When the corn is ripe, the tougher work of reaping belongs to man, though we have sometimes seen women take a part in it also. 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.”