

THE DHANGURS AND THE DHAVARS OF MĀHĀBLESHWAR.*

Read on 28th November 1894.

President—MR. KHARSETJI, RUSTAMJI CAMA.

THE correspondence, which began on the 11th of December 1891, between the Government of Bombay and our Society, on the subject of Mr. H. H. Risley's letter to the Government of Bengal, submitting a scheme for the continuation of ethnographical researches in the Lower Provinces of that Presidency, and for their extension to other parts of India, has ended with a letter from the Government of Bombay, dated 31st August 1894, thanking the Society "for undertaking to circulate the ethnographical questions (General series forming Part II, to Mr. Risley's Glossary) to District Officers and others who would be likely to deal intelligently with the subject." As a Parsee, I am interested in this scheme to some extent, and that especially in the case of a careful and scientific inquiry into the subject of the sixth question which says: "State the popular tradition, if any exists, as to the origin of the caste, naming the common ancestor, if any; the part of the country from which the caste is supposed to have come and the approximate time of its emigration, as marked by the reign of any king or the occurrence of any historical event, together with the number of generations supposed to have intervened." A studious, careful and scientific inquiry into the subject of this most important question may throw some light upon the subject of some emigrations of the Parsees or the ancient Persians, earlier or later than the emigration, well known in history, as that forced by the religious persecutions of the Arabs in the middle of the seventh century. For example, according to Firdousi, Kanouj,

* Journal Vol. III., No 8, pp. 471-83.

so often mentioned in the *Shâh-nâmeh*, passed by virtue of an Indian king's last testament into the hands of the Persian king Beharâm Gour, who must have sent a number of Persians to rule over the country. Again, Wilford in his *Asiatic Researches*¹ says: "there is hardly any doubt that the kings of Oodeypoor and the Mahrattas are descended from them (the Persian princes) and their followers." Again, Mr. William Hunter, in his narrative of a journey from Agra to Oojein, in 1790 (*Asiatic Researches*, VI., p. 8), says: "The Rajah of Oodi-poor, is looked on as the head of all the *Rajpoot* tribes and has the title of Ráná by way of pre-eminence. His family is also regarded with high respect by the Musulmans themselves; in consequence of a curious tradition, relating to his genealogy. He is said to be descended, in the female line, from the celebrated Anushirwan who was king of Persia." Careful enquiries into the traditions of the origins of different tribes, as suggested by Mr. Risley's sixth question, may throw some light upon curious traditions like those mentioned by Wilford, and consequently, upon the emigrations of the ancient Persians, other than those of the seventh century.

Being thus interested to some extent in the elaborate scheme put forth by Mr. Risley, during a short visit to Mâhâbleshwar at the time of the last Diwali holidays, I spent several hours in collecting some information on the subject of the questions, which the Government of Bombay has asked our Society to circulate. The subject of my paper is the Dhangurs and the Dhâvars, two of the four tribes living at Mâhâbleshwar. I do not pretend to present this paper as the result of any continued observations during a long residence. It is merely the outcome of a systematic inquiry, based on the excellent questions framed by Mr. Risley. As the author of the questions asks us to name the sources of our information, I will do so at the beginning.

¹ *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. IX., Essays on Vicramaditya and Salivahana Sec. II., pp. 233, *et seq.*

DHANGURS.

I collected my information about the Dhangurs from the following persons :—

1. A Dhangur named Ithoo, son of Rámá, son of Chiloo, aged about thirty, living in the village of Bhirvâda, a little below the Babington Point.

2. Dháu, son of Raghoo, son of Patsoo, son of Vagoo, son of Baboo, son of Maloo aged about 65, a Patel of one of the villages of Sindola, living in one of the few huts on the road leading to the Blue Valley.

3. Raghoo, son of Baboo, son of Ranoo, son of Javjee, aged about 60, living in a hut below the Bombay Point on the left hand side of the road of the Fitzgerald Ghaut leading to Mahád.

Though the information is collected from questions put to individual members of a village, it is, in fact, in most cases the information supplied by the whole village, because when I went to a village with my pen and note-book, I was surrounded by a large number of its inhabitants who, at times modified and corrected the answers, if not properly given.

1. * The name of the caste is Dhangur धंगर.

2—3. The sub-divisions of the caste are धेबा Dhebá, अखाड Akhád अरधा Bargháb, धोइफोडा Dhoinfodá, कतिर Kátore, हिरवा Hirwá, जनकोर Jánkore, धधगुंदा Dhaigundá, शिंदा Shindá, खोतेकर Khootekar and गोर Gorá. These names are said to be the अर Ar names of the different sub-divisions.

4. Members of these different sub-divisions intermarry, but they do not marry among themselves, e.g., a Dhebá can marry with a woman of the Akhád, Bargháb or Dhoinfodá sub-division and *vice versa* but not with a Dhebá woman. The children of brothers and sisters may intermarry, as the sister is generally married with a man of another Ar name e.g., a Dhebá man can marry his son with the daughter of his sister who is married with an Akhád. Children of two

* These numbers point to Mr. Risley's questions which are printed at the end, Volume III, No. 8 of the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay.

brothers cannot marry, as they belong to the same Ār or sub-division. Children of two sisters may intermarry, if the two sisters are married in separate sub-divisions. A Dhangur may marry two sisters.

5. A Dhangur cannot marry a woman who is not a Dhangur. Social status, geographical position and differences or changes of occupation are no bar to intermarriages. The difference of social position is no bar at all, as one of the Patels said, गरीब्याच्या आम हाथ नाही धरवा तो कोण धरेल? *i.e.*, who is to catch hold of the hand of the poor, if not we?

6. This tribe has come to Mahableshwar a long time before the advent of the British power here, a long time before Sivajee Māhārāj. It has come here from Satara.

7. The habit of the caste is wandering, but they do not wander, out of the limit of the Jāvli tālukā. As they live on the products of their cattle, they generally wander in search of pasture. Their emigrations are in most cases irregular, but all Dhangurs are generally expected to return to their villages in (पोष मास) the month of Posh. The village of (मेडा) Medā in the Satārā district was formerly their headquarters.

Their huts are made of thatched roofs. Light and air are admitted only from the front doors which are very low. In the front are the cattle and their requisites. Next to that, is generally the fire-place, and the furthest from the door is the place for sleeping. It is so dark at the furthest end, that even at midday we are required to have a lamp to have an inspection, but they say that their eyes are habituated to see things even in that darkness. The huts are more long than broad. Being very poorly clothed and fed, they are obliged to build such huts to keep off the cold of the winter and the rains.

8. They do not admit outsiders into their caste.

9. They have generally infant marriages. In case a man grows up without being married owing to extreme poverty, the caste-men help him to marry. What is the use, they say, of a man's being born at all, if he departs this life without being married?

10. Polygamy is permitted but polyandry prohibited. It is only very few, who are a little well-off in having a few more heads of cattle, that take more than one wife. If the first wife is childless, they generally take a second wife. If a boy is not married at an early age owing to poverty, the appearance of the moustache is considered to be a sign when they must look for arranging a marriage.

11. The marriage ceremony is generally performed by a Brâhmin. But if a Brâhmin is not available, and if the caste has assembled an elderly experienced man can perform the marriage ceremony. The Brâhmin generally looks to his Pothi or book of religious Shâstras, and fixes therefrom, the time of the day most auspicious for the celebration of the marriage. But in case the Brâhmin is not present, the most preferable medium for finding the auspicious time is a young calf. The cow is let out of the hut, and then, the calf. If the calf directly runs to the cow for sucking, and in so doing, passes by the right hand side of the marrying couple who are made to sit outside the cottage, the omen is the most auspicious, and the marriage takes place. But if the calf passes by the left of the couple, the marriage is postponed for an hour or two, the time being considered inauspicious and the operation is repeated. The marriage ceremony consists in the bride and the bridegroom being decorated with *kunkun* and *halad*, i.e., red pigment and turmeric, and made to sit opposite each other with a dhotar or a piece of cloth held between them. The Brâhmin and the whole assembly sprinkle a few grains of rice over them and the Brâhmin puts, on the fingers of the two, (ଉତ୍ସୁ) a small ring, either of silver or brass. A feast to the castemen completes the marriage.

12. The marriage of widows is permitted, but neither with the deceased husband's brother, nor with a member of the same sub-division to which her husband belonged. The ceremony performed is not the (କ୍ଷତ୍ର) marriage ceremony, as that in the case of the first marriage, but a (ସୁରୀ) *moorat* ceremony. In

this ceremony, both are, as usual, besmeared with *kunkun* and *halad* and made to sit opposite each other; a little water is given in the hands of both, and then the head of one is made to strike with that of another. This ceremony with a small customary feast to the castemen completes the *moorat* form of re-marriage. In the case of a re-marriage, the Brâhmin, or, in his absence any elderly experienced man, utters (ଓଡ଼ିଆ ଶୂଦ୍ର) an inverted form of prayer, *i.e.*, the order of the words of prayer is inverted.

13. Wives are divorced or deserted for adultery. In that case, they cannot re-marry even by *moorat* ceremony. The sin is sometimes expiated by giving a feast to the caste, when the adultery is committed with one of her own caste, *i.e.*, with a Dhangur, but never, when committed with one of another caste.

14. On the death of a person, the sons have a right to his property. In case, he has no sons, the brothers have a right of inheritance. In any case, the wife has a claim of maintenance as long as she continues a widow.

15. The Dhangurs are Hindu by religion, but they seem to have their own village deities. Five deities are known among them. 1. ମସୋଭା Masobâ, 2. ଜୋଲା Jollâ, 3. ବେହେରୀ Beheri, 4. ଜାନ୍ନୀ Janni, known as ଗୋଥାନେରୀ ଜାନ୍ନୀ *i.e.*, Janni of Gothânerâ, and 5. another ଜାନ୍ନୀ known as the ଥାଲରୀ ଜାନ୍ନୀ *i.e.*, the Janni of Thal. Of these five deities, Masobâ and Beheri are male deities and the rest are female. Sunday is the favourite day for the worship of Masobâ and Beheri, the male deities, and Tuesday or that of Jollâ and the two Jannis. Cocoanuts, flowers, and fruits are the things usually used as offerings. These deities have neither temples nor images of their own. Natural rocks, jutting out from the sides of hills, or from a level surface of the ground, form the *sanctum sanctorum* of these deities. I was led to see one of these. It is situated about a quarter of a mile on the left hand side of the road that leads us from the Sindhola to the Blue Valley and about half a

mile from the village huts. A walk of about ten minutes, on a very rough footpath from the road, brings us to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Janni of Gothânerâ. It is a piece of natural rock, built over with a small superstructure of stone, and with a stand of stone in its neighbourhood for holding lamps. On the days of ॠ, *i.e.*, the feast days, set apart in honour of these deities, 60 fowls, 60 ॠ३ khârucks (a kind of date-fruit) and 12 goats are offered as offerings to all these deities. The number of fowls offered is sixty, because there are supposed to be sixty ॠ or ghosts in these five deities, of which 25 are to be found in the Masobâ and the rest in the other four deities. On the death of a man, his soul becomes a (ॠ३) pitar and 12 pitars make one ghost. Hence 12 is the necessary number for the sacrifice of goats. Only the males can perform (ॠ३) the worship of these deities, and not the women. Young girls, until they come to the age of womanhood, can perform Poonja or the worship. Women, however, can go before the sacred places of the deities, and, standing at a long distance, prostrate themselves before them and otherwise pay their homage, but under no circumstances can they perform the Poonja and give the offerings. Even when they go for paying a distant homage, they must not be in their usual monthly courses. Before going there, they must wash themselves, and put on, either white or red clothes, never black ones. Their personal offerings are never accepted by the deities. If they persist and personally perform the Poonja and give offerings, they come across some mishap or another.

17. For marriage and death ceremonies they employ Brâhmîns, but when the Brâhmîns are not easily available the elders of the caste perform the ceremonies.

18. The cast buries their dead in a sitting posture with the face towards the east.

19. They do not perform the Srâdh ceremony, but perform, what they call, the (ॠ३) Mahâl ceremony for their deceased relations. They understand by this latter word, the ceremony

of calling the *pitars*. They perform that ceremony at home. They need not go to the sacred places of their deities for the purpose. They perform the ceremony in the month of (भाद्रपद) Bhâdarva, on the date of the death of the man. On the third and twelfth day after death they perform, what they call (पानी पान्ना) the ceremony of giving water. On the tenth day after death, they send for a (कुम्हार) potter who prepares (मूर्तियाँ i.e.,) small images of human forms made of flour and water. He carries these flour images with him and places them in flowing water. The potter also says (मन्त्र) prayers, playing on drums and bells.

20. They say that they are called Dhangurs, because they carry on the profession of herdsmen and prepare milk preparations. That was their former and is their present occupation. Very few are agriculturists. What little they cultivate, they do for their own use. If any Dhangur follows the profession of a Bhangi (sweeper), shoe-maker, or barber, they outcaste him.

21. They drink wine. If a woman drinks wine they form a very low opinion of her morality. They eat fish and mutton of male goats or sheep, but not of female ones.

22. They do not eat food cooked by castes other than those of Hindus. They smoke *biddies* offered by others, if they are not once smoked.

The Dhavads of Mahableshwar.

Sources of Information.

1. Shaik Lâl, son of Beg Mahomed, son of Ncor Mahomed, son of Ismâil, son of Shâh Jehân, son of Pirozeshaw, son of Fateh Âhmed, son of Bâwâ Jân. He is an intelligent man of 33 years, and the Patel of Dhâvad-vâdi, i.e., the Dhâvad quarters of Mâhâbleshtar or Malcolm Peth. He is popularly known as Laloo Patel.

2. Majuk, son of Husan, son of Fadoo, son of Âli, son of Beheroo, son of Chân, son of Hasan, son of Bâvâjee, Patel of the Dhâvar village of Nâk-khinda, aged about 100.

3. Dhanoo, son of Báboo, son of Ibrám, son of Ali, son of Beheroo, son of Tánoo, aged about 60, the Patel of the village of Ranjanwadi, situated about half a mile on the left of the Cassum Sajun Road, which leads from the Satara Road to the Panchgani Road.

4. Abdul, an inhabitant of the village of Malusre, about three-fourths of a mile from Shin Shin Ghal or the Robber's cave, and about five miles south-east of Máhábleshwar.

5. Patel Hoosein, son of Chandoo, son of Rahiman, son of Ismáil, son of Beheroo, about 75 years of age, living in the village of Máchutar, about four miles from the station on the left of the Satara Road.

6. The Kázi Sáheb of Máhábleshwar.

1. The name of the tribe is Dhávar. It is so called, they say, because their original profession was that of iron-smelters 2 and 3. Their sub-divisions are—

अरकंद Kharkandá, वारुंकर Várunkar or Máblé, दंगल Dángá, मोलाना Moláná, नालबंद Nálband, दोंगरे Dongrê, चिपारी Chipári, मुज्जवर Moojávar, मानकर Mánkar, परंद Parandá पींजारी Pinjâree, दुंदरा Doondrá, परनालकर Parnálkar, and वाळक्रेर Vaékore. These sub-divisions are said to be their आर Ar names.

4. Like the Dhangurs, people of all these sub-divisions intermarry, but they do not marry among their own sub-division, e.g., a Várunkar can marry a member of any other sub-division, but that of Várunkar. A man does not generally marry his wife's sister, but he may, if he likes. The children of two brothers cannot intermarry, as they belong to the same Ar. The children of a brother and a sister can intermarry because the sister, by her marriage, belongs to another Ar. So, the children of two sisters may intermarry, if the sisters are married with members of different Ars.

5. Social position, Geographical position and differences or changes of occupation are no prohibitions to intermarry, but being Sooni Mahomedans by religion, they do not intermarry with the Sihás.

6. Mr. Shapoorjee Byramjee Katruck, in his Gujarâti guide to Mâhâbleshwar, says, that the Dhâvars of Mâhâbleshwar are the descendants of those Arabs who had accompanied the army of Afzul Khân, during his historical visit to Sivâjee in the adjoining fort of Pratâbgad. On the death of Afzul Khân, the Arabs dispersed themselves in the adjoining hills and took Hindu women for their wives, and the Dhâvârs are the descendants of their mixed blood. Hence, though Mahomedan by religion, their habits and language are those of Hindus. All the Dhâvars, when interrogated on the subject of their descent, denied it altogether, and some did so with indignation, but the Kâzee of Mâhâbleshwar confirmed the above statement of Mr. Katruck, saying that he himself had heard it a few years ago from an old inhabitant of Mâhâbleshwar, since deceased. Mr. Laloo Patel declared, that according to his information traditionally received from his ancestors, the Dhâvars had come to Mâhâbleshwar and the adjoining places with one Chandar Rav More, who was a Sirdar of the Court of Bijâpore, and that their long stay with the Hindus had made their habits and customs more Hindu than Mahomedan.

The Bombay Gazetteer in its excellent description of Mâhâbleshwar says nothing about their origin. Most of them say, that it was simply their profession of iron-smelters that brought them to Mâhâbleshwar from Satara and Khandesh. They came there in search of new forests for the preparation of charcoal. An old Dhâvar of Mâchutar attributed their emigration to the time as old as that of Bhoj râjâ.

7. Their habit is mostly settled. Their head-quarters is Malcolm Peth, where there are about 700 Dhâvars. Formerly, when their occupation was that of iron-smelters, they wandered from place to place in search of new forests for the preparation of charcoal. Their huts generally are as dark as those of the Dhangurs, but not so long or deep, as they have no cattle to keep. They are generally square in form.

8. They admit outsiders into their caste on their turning Mahomedans according to the rules dictated by the Kazi.

9. They have infant marriages.

10. Polygamy is permitted among them, but polyandry prohibited.

11. The Kâzi performs the usual Mahomedan ceremony of marriage mixed with some Hindu customs. The bride and the bridegroom are made to sit opposite each other with a piece of cloth between them. The Kâzi says the Mahomedan prayer and shows the marrying couple a looking glass. Lastly, he throws rice over them, and then the assembled friends and relations do the same.

12. Widows may re-marry, but not with deceased husbands' brothers. In first marriages, the bridegrooms generally go to the mosque before the marriage ceremony but not in the case of widow marriages.

13. Divorce is allowed on paying the wife the (मेहेरा) meherâ money, *i.e.*, the money fixed by the Kâzi at the time of the marriage to be given in the case of a divorce. The divorce is given in the presence of the जमात, *i.e.*, the meeting of the tribe. Divorced wives may re-marry.

14. Their Religion is Mahomedan. They are Sooni in sect. They are so illiterate, that in some of the villages, there is hardly one who knows the name of his prophet.

15. They bury their dead with the head towards the south.

16. After death, they perform (दसवा) the tenth day, (बीसवा) the twentieth day, (चात्तीसवा) the fortieth day, and (वरसवा) the anniversary day ceremonies. They feast the जमात or the tribe on these days. They perform Khotbê in the month of Ramzân. On the Jiârât, the third day after death, they distribute a few fruits and sweets among the nearer relations after offering a portion first on the tombs. The ceremonies are performed in full for those that are married, even if they are minors of 8 or 9. In case of those that are unmarried, only a few are performed.

17. Their former occupation was that of iron-smelters. Now they follow various occupations. They say that three maunds of firewood produced one maund of charcoal, and that one maund of charcoal produced about 3 or 4 seers of iron.

18. They abstain from pork. Though enjoined by Mahomedan law to abstain from wine, they generally take it.

19. Formerly, they did not eat food prepared by the Deccani Mahomedans, but ate that prepared by the Hindus. But now, they eat food prepared by any Mahomedan. They do not eat, even now, food prepared by Christians. They smoke the *biddies* offered by others, but not when they are partly smoked. A Dhâvar can smoke a partly-smoked biddi of another Dhâvar. They do not eat in the same plate with a Sihâ.

The following are a few lines of their nursery songs. Their knowledge of these songs does not go beyond these few lines. The language of their songs, as that of their conversation, is Marâthi.

शुशुआला
 अंगे गाध गोतेतु
 दुध देवा वतेतु
 आगाला पाजला

Sleep child ! sleep

Oh cow ! come out of the hut

To give milk in the pot

To give it to the child for drink.

The cradle songs of all nations, whether educated or uneducated, are the simplest expressions of parental affections expressed in the most simple language. Again, they generally begin with some words invoking sleep. Compare with the above simple words of a Dhâvar mother, the following words of an educated French mother. Both begin with a call to sleep, and both promise a good thing to the child in return for its quietly going to sleep.

“ Fais do do Henry petit fils,

Fais do do, tu auras

Le bon coco.

For twelve days after birth, the mother keeps the child by her side. It is on the twelfth day that she places it in a cradle. The following is the cradle song that is generally sung then and afterwards. It enumerates, one after another, the nine months of pregnancy.

એક મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
દોન મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
ત્રીન મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
ચાર મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
પાંચ મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
છ મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
સાતવા મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
આથવા મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.
નવ મહીના લાગે પીપી ફાતીમા ગરવાર
લા ધલાહી નપી રસુલ તેરા નામ.

The following are other nursery rhymes :—

નાના નાની આઈ
આંગરા તોપલા લાઈ.
દાદા દાદી આઈ
અસલા ખીંદલા લાઈ.

i.e., The maternal grand-father and maternal grand-mother have come.

They have brought a shirt and a hat for you.

The paternal grand-father and grand-mother have come.

They have brought a necklace and a bangle for you.

જુ જુ જુ પરસરામાલા
ચુતલે કામાલા
હલવા ગે આચાનું.

May sleep overtake Purasram
All are busy in their work,
Oh child! accept this rocking of the cradle.
Compare this with the English cradle song—
“Sleep little brother, you must not awake,
Till mother comes home to her baby again.”
