

“THE THÂKÛRS OF MATHERAN”*

Read on 30th January 1901.

President— MR. KHARSETJI RUSTAMJI CAMA.

The correspondence which had begun 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, had ended with a letter from the Government of Bombay, dated 31st August 1894, thanking our 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.”¹ In reply to the circular of our Society above referred to, several district officers had kindly sent us communications on some of the castes or tribes in their districts. Some of those communications have, from time to time, been read before our Society and published in our Journals.²

Mr. Edwardes, the City Census Commissioner, Bombay, wrote to us, on 30th June and 29th July 1900, asking for those communications. As they were originally intended for Mr. Risley, I, as the Secretary of the Society, referred that officer to Mr. Risley. On having an assurance, that Mr. Risley had no objection to our handing all these communications to the present Census Officer, I have sent them to him on 28th August 1900.

* Vol. V, No. 8, pp. 458-465.

¹ “Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay,” Vol. III., No. 8, p. 471.

² Vol. III, No. 8. Vol. IV, No. 7. Vol. IV, No. 8. Vol. V, No. 1. Vol. V, No. 2

My paper on "The Dhangars and Dhâvars of Mahableshtar," read on the 28th of November 1894, and published in the Journal (Vol. III No. 8,) of our Society, was the first paper before our Society, on the lines proposed by Mr. Risley. My paper to-day on "The Thâkûrs of Matheran" is in a line similar to that of my first paper. I have prepared it at the request of my friend Miss D. Menant, who has come to India, on a special scientific mission from the Government of France. At the desire of that Government, she takes an interest in ethnographical questions connected with our Presidency. On my short visit to Matheran during the last Christmas holidays, she requested me to collect information about "the Thâkûrs of Matheran," similar to that collected in my above paper. Hence this paper. It is the result of a few hours of careful enquiry on three separate days, one of which was spent in the very vicinity of a Thâkûr village. My sources of information are the following persons, who are all Thâkûrs:—

- (1) Dhâoo, son of Aloo, age 25. Living in the village of Palli, which is situated below Garbut. I saw him on the 23rd of December 1900 on the hill itself.
- (2) (a) Nâgyâ, son of Nâmyâ, son of Maidhyâ, age 30, belonging to a sub-division of the Oogrâ caste.
- (b) Hâmboo, son of Mâoo, age 45, belonging to a sub-division of the Chowdri caste.
- (c) Hânsiâ, son of Pândoo, son of Mâoo, age 30, belonging to a sub-division of the Chowdri caste.
- (d) Bâloo, son of Pândoo, son of Jâvoo, age 50, belonging to a sub-division of the Kâmri caste.
- (e) Bâloo, son of Jânu, age 40, belonging to a sub-division of the Ir caste. All these five persons lived in the village of Mâldoongâ, situated below the Mâldoongâ Point. I saw them on the hill and collected information from them on the 30th of December 1900.

(3) Dharmâ, son of Râmâ, son of Lakshman, age 40, belonging to a sub-division of the Pârdhi caste. The information collected from this man is, in fact, the information supplied by the whole village of Kerwâdi, situated at the foot of the hill, midway between Matheran and Narel. I had been to this village on the 1st of January 1901 from 10 to 11 a.m. My visit to this Thâkûr village had collected the whole village, as it were, round my informant and myself, and when Dharmâ did not answer my questions properly or clearly, others around him modified or corrected his answers. My information about the Thâkûrs is mostly from this village, which is a small village of about 12 huts containing about 100 people.

(1-3) The name of the caste is Thâkûr. The subdivisions of the caste are:—

जुग्रीआ	Joogriâ.
नीरग्रा	Nirgra.
गुटीआ	Gootiâ.
मंगाल	Mengâl.
दरवरा	Daravrâ.
बस्मा	Basmâ.
आंहवांधी	Âhvândhi.
पार्ध्या	Pârdhyâ.
सांबुय्ये	Sâmbhooyêh.
कुंठिया	Kaûnthya.
नीग	Nig.
कामरी	Kâmri.
ओग्रा	Oogrâ.
चोद्री	Chodhri.
ईर	Ir.
नीरगधा	Nirgadhâ.

* These numbers point to Mr. Risley's questions printed in Vol. III No. 8, of the Journal of the Society, p. 503.

वाग	Vâgh.
दोरी	Dori.
शीधा	Shidhâ.
पिरकड	Pirkad.
थोम्रा	Thomra.

These sub-divisions are generally localised, *i. e.*, it is difficult to find people of all these sub-divisions in one particular village. For example, the people of the sub-castes Pârdhyâ, Nirgrâ, Shidhâ, Pirkad, Thomra are generally found in the Kerwadi village. The first six sub-castes named in the above list are found in the Maldoonga village, which, in its turn, has not the 7th, 9th, 10th and 11th sub-castes.

(4) Members of the above sub-castes intermarry, but the people of the same sub-caste do not intermarry. For example, a man of the अह्वंधी (Āhvândhi) sub-caste can marry a woman of any other sub-caste, but never a Āhvândhi woman, *i. e.*, a woman of his own sub-caste. They have no intermarriages with other castes. For example, a Thâkur would not marry a Dhangar woman and *vice versâ*.

5. As far as the marriages are permitted between the sub-castes, there is no prohibition based upon social status or on geographical or local position. A Maldoongâ Thakur can marry a Thakur woman of Kerwâdi or any other village.

6. They have no popular tradition about the origin of their caste. They do not believe to have come to this district from any other place, but say that their forefathers have been living here from very old times.

7. The habit of the caste is not wandering but settled.

8. They do not admit outsiders into their caste on any account.

9. Infant marriage is tolerated. But they generally marry at an adult age, because, being poor, they cannot afford to marry their children early.

10. Polygamy is permitted among them, but not polyandry. The people being poor, polygamy is rarely indulged in.

It is only those who are comparatively a little well off, that have more than one wife.

11. It is the Brahmins who perform the marriage ceremonies. Their fees vary in different villages. They also vary according to the circumstances of the parties. In Pâli below Garbut it varies from As. 8 to Rs. 3. In Maldoongâ it varies from Rs. 2 to Rs. 8. Particular Brahmins have particular villages to which they are attached. Brahmins attached to one village or more, cannot go to other villages that do not belong to their circle or district.

12. Widow marriages are permitted but not in the same village. For example, a Thakur widow of the Maldoongâ village cannot re-marry a Thakur of her own village, but can that of any other Thakur village. The performance of the ceremony of widow marriages does not require a Brahmin. Widow marriages are not known by the ordinary phrase of *ବିଧବା ବିବାହ* but by another phrase, namely, *ଧର୍ମର ବିବାହ*. The form of this marriage is very simple. The widow has a koonkoo mark (*କୁନ୍କୁ*) made on her forehead, and then she goes round and makes obeisance to the elders that may be present. Widows are not permitted to marry the brothers of their deceased husbands.

13. Divorce is permitted among them. There is no special form of ceremony for divorce. Divorced wives may marry again.

14. It is the children who inherit the property of the father. If one has no children, it is the brothers who inherit.

15. They are Hindus, but they do not worship all Hindu gods. They do not worship Ganpati; they have their own special gods. Generally each village has its own special god or gods. There are special circumstances which have given rise to the worship of these particular gods in particular villages. For example, in the village of Kerwâdi, which I visited, they generally worship two gods. One of these is

वघीया Vâghiâ. This god derives its name from Vâgh, *i.e.*, tiger. They say, that, at one time, the village suffered a good deal from the ravages of tigers. Cattle and even men were often killed by tigers. So the villagers, with common consent, founded the worship of Vâghiâ, *i.e.*, the tiger-god. There are no shrines or temples in honour of these village gods, but some rocks in the vicinity of the village, form, as it were, the abode of the deity, and the villagers resort there for worship and offerings. In the case of the above Vâghiâ or tiger-god, it is a small rock about a mile away from, the village of Kerwâdi that forms his abode. The red mark of koonkoo and some articles of offering turn the rock into an abode of their special god.

The villagers believe, that since the origin or foundation of the worship of the Vâghiâ or tiger-god, ravages from tiger have decreased in number. They have still, now and then, cases of tigers killing cattle or men, but that is due, they say, to their own fault, which consists in not giving the regular offerings to the god at its above-mentioned abode. The offerings consist of cocoanuts, sindoor, &c.

The other village god of the village of Kerwâdi is चेरâ Cherâ. The rock which forms the abode of this god is about 100 yards from the village. His origin is due, they say, to an epidemic of fever, which occurred formerly in the times of their forefathers. Many people died of fever then. So, the worship of the god was founded to avert that epidemic. In cases of fever, the villagers resort to the above rock, and there give offerings to their Cherâ or fever god.

Every village has its special god, and the abode of that god. Thus the village of बोर Bore, near Chawk, has its own god, known as स्रोंदा, Sronâ. On the Matheran hill itself, there is a god whose worship is to a certain extent common to all castes. It is the पितनाथ Pitnâth. He is worshipped by the Dhangars, by the Thakurs and by other tribes of the Hindus. His abode is a small rock jutting out from the ground, situated on the

south of the Charlotte lake. It is about 75 yards from the path which leads to the Danger point. The ground round this rock is covered with a large number of bells, about 100, of varying size. The presentation of bells to arouse the god to make him hear the prayers of the worshippers, forms a striking feature of the worship of the Pitnâth god here. The place is in the charge of a Dhangar, who, I was told lives in a village at the foot of the Garbut. He attends there for worship regularly, every Sunday, which is the bazar day on the hill.

16. Women are not permitted to take any active part in the worship of these village gods. They can go to the place where the gods are set up, and offer their obeisance, but they must stand at a respectful distance and never give any offering themselves. In case of children also, it is the male children who can offer, not the female children.

17-19. Brahmins attend for religious ceremonies, such as the marriage or funeral ceremonies. In funeral ceremonies, it is the Brahmin who generally first kindles the fire for the ceremony. He then says some *mantras* before the victuals that are placed there. If a Brahmin is not at hand, a Koombhâr (potter) can officiate. The funeral ceremonies are generally performed on the 10th day after death. The fee for the Brahmin, or in his absence for the Koombhâr, varies from two annas to one Rupee.

18. The Thakurs bury their dead. They generally bury with the head towards the west.

20. No animals are specially worshipped. Snake worship is not prevalent among them. Only those who are believed to know the charm of curing snake-bites, worship the snake on the Nâg-panchmi day, which is a general holiday for snake-worship in many parts of India.

21-22-23. Their occupation is cultivation. They till Government land on paying an annual sum per binghâ.

26. They eat mutton, fish and fowls, not beef or pork. They do not eat snakes. They drink liquor.

27. They eat food prepared by Brahmins, Dhangars and Koonbis, but not that prepared by any other caste.

They smoke a (श्री १) cigarette prepared by a Dhangar, but not if it is once smoked by others. If it is smoked by one of their own caste they can smoke it. They drink the water offered by a Brahmin, Dhangar or Koonbi, but they do not drink from the same pot from which a part is drunk by people of other castes.

In the whole village of Kerwâdi, consisting of about 100 men, there was not a single individual who can write anything.

The following is a cradle song which I heard at the Thakur village of Kerwadi:—

पंढरपुर परगानां
 आयाये दशबाला कुलांये पालनां.
 हलवा गो सयानो.
 संगती रामाला भी गुंतली कामाला.
 आंआ कापु याकुम्मे
 रस लेंवु वातीम्मे
 रसाया सुगरली के आया आमया.
 आया अमया अराया.
 आंत नतले अराया.
 ते आयाया मालामदी नर्ध सीपु.
 नर्ध सीपीतां
 डिगावली नप्पेत्रा.
 अमी मायु आयापसी तांलीयाला.

Translation.

In the province of Punderpur there is a cradle of flowers on the door of the goddess.

Oh, lady friend ! you rock the cradle.

Tell Rama I am busy.

I cut the mango with a knife, and take the juice in a cup to our goddess to take the smell of the juice.

Our goddess is a good one.

She took the child in the hand for taking her out in the open air.

I will scatter (the flowers of) Jâin in the grotto of the goddess.

While the (flowers of) Jâin were being scattered

There appeared the constellation on the horizon.

I ask in prayers from the goddess small children.
