

A FEW STORIES OF WITCHCRAFT, MAGIC,  
&c., TOLD BY NICCOLAO MANUCCI IN HIS  
"STORIA DO MOGOR" OR MOGUL  
INDIA (1653-1708).

*President*—LT.-COL. K. R. KIRTIKAR, I.M.S. (RETD.)

(Read on 28th February, 1912.)

The author of "The Folk-tales of Hindustan"<sup>1</sup> very properly says that: "We in India have left even the collection of folk-tales to be done by foreigners for the most part, considering these stories to be unworthy of the attention of so metaphysical a race as ourselves. But, we must, if we want to survive, take our place by the side of the progressive races of the world in all departments of scientific study and research."

It is one of these foreigners, referred to above, who has suggested to me the subject of my paper. It is the Venetian adventurer, Niccolao Manucci, who had come to India at the age of fourteen. His well-known "Storia Do Mogor," *i.e.*, "The Story of the Moguls," has been lately translated by Mr. William Irvine, under the title of "Storia Do Mogor" or Mogul India, and has been published in four volumes, as one of the publications of the "Indian Texts Series," under a scheme inaugurated by the Royal Asiatic Society, at the instance of its then Secretary Mr. T. W. Rhys Davids. The story of the discovery of the original manuscript of Manucci is an interesting romance.

Manucci's "Storia Do Mogor" is very interesting from several points of view, but while reading it, I have noted a few facts from the folklore point of view.

Mr. Gomme, who defines the Science of Folklore as "the science which treats of the survivals of archaic beliefs and

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Folk-tales of Hindustan" by Shaikh Chilli, Introduction, p. 2.

customs in modern ages," divides the materials of this science into four Parts.<sup>1</sup>

- I Traditional Narratives.
- II Traditional Customs.
- III Superstitions and Beliefs.
- IV Folk-speech.

He subdivides the four divisions as follows :—

I—Traditional Narratives, into

- 1 Folk-tales.
- 2 Hero-tales.
- 3 Ballads and Songs.
- 4 Place Legends.

II—Traditional Customs, into

- 1 Local Customs.
- 2 Festival Customs.
- 3 Ceremonial Customs.
- 4 Games.

III—Superstitions and Beliefs, into

- 1 Witchcraft.
- 2 Astrology.
- 3 Superstitious Practices and Fancies.

IV—Folk-speech, into

- 1 Popular Sayings.
- 2 Popular Nomenclature.
- 3 Proverbs.
- 4 Jingle Rhymes and Riddles.

My paper this day, refers to the first sub-division of the third of the above-mentioned divisions of the materials of the science of folk-lore. It does not exhaust the subject. It does not give all the stories of witchcraft referred to by Manucci, but gives

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*



only a few typical stories, found here and there, in Mr. Irvine's translation of Manucci's work. Manucci's work shows, that some of the Europeans, who came to India in those times, about 200 years ago, believed in the stories of witchcraft, etc., in the same way as the natives of the country. Again, most of the stories remind us of similar beliefs, prevalent even now, in India.

I remember having heard, when a boy, many stories of the witches ( *बिल्व* ). The worst sort of the witches was one, that had her belly turned on her back. She carried a *sagdi* (a kind of fire-vase) on her head. When she intended to frighten or injure anybody, what she did was this : she turned round, and let the victim see her belly torn open with all its distorted bowels. The very sight made the man fall sick and he died of a lingering illness.

(1) Manucci, was one day, sent by Rajah Jai Singh, a great officer of Aurangazeb, as an envoy to three *rajahs*, to ask them to give their word, not to take the side of Shivaji nor to allow him to pass through their territories, and to send one of their sons as a hostage or security for this promise. When in the territories of the third *rajah*, the Rajah of Chottia in the Nasik District, he came across, what he calls, cases of sorcery. He says : " Here two things happened to me that I wish to recount, so that inquiring persons may learn that these people are much given to sorcery. I had a handsome horse that Rajah Jai Singh had given me. The Rajah of Chottia (Chitua) took a fancy to this horse, and requested me to sell it to him ; he would pay me one thousand rupees. I was not willing, but when it was time for my departure the horse had lost the use of its legs, and was unable to move. I waited for eight days without any good when the rajah sent me word that, though the horse was damaged, he would still give me one thousand rupees. In a rage, I started from the place, telling, my people that if within twenty-four hours the horse could not move, to cut his throat and bring the hide to me. Finding me so resolute, the rajah sent me one

thousand two hundred rupees, beseeching me not to order the horse's throat to be cut, but to content myself with this present, and he would keep the horse in remembrance of me. I contented myself with taking the twelve hundred rupees, knowing quite well that if I did not, I should lose both horse and rupees." (Vol. II, pp. 133-134).

This reminds one of a miracle, attributed to Zoroaster, in later Pahlavi and Persian books. The Zarthusht-nâneh<sup>1</sup> refers to it. According to this book, a favourite horse of King Gushtâsp had lost the power of the use of his feet. It was thought to be the work of a magician. Zoroaster is said to have cured the horse of its disability.<sup>1</sup> As Dr. West very properly says, this Persian version of the Zarathusht-nâneh is "a highly embellished paraphrase"<sup>2</sup> of an allusion to the story of a horse in the Dinkard (Bk. VII, chap. IV, 66) which runs thus: "His (Zoroaster's) uttering on the horse-course (*aspânvar*) of Vishtâsp a reminder of the power and triumph of Aûharmazd over himself as he invited Vishtâsp to the religion of Aûharmazd."<sup>3</sup>

(2) Manucci thus describes the second story of witchcraft: "One of my servants, passing through a field of radishes, stretched out his hand to pluck one out of the ground, when his hand adhered in such a fashion to the radish that he could not take it away. It was necessary to find the owner of the field to get him liberated. This was done, and after taking something as a bribe and giving him a beating, the owner recited some words and the man was freed." (VI. II, p. 134).

<sup>1</sup> Vide Eastwick's translation of the Zarathusht-nâneh, in "The Parsi Religion," by Dr. Wilson. Appendix, pp. 504-6., Vide Dastur Dr. Peshotan Beharamji Sanjana's. *वेदमन्त्र साहेबा अर्थात् ज्ञानसाधना जन्मसाधना अहेवाल'* pp. 128-134., Vide "Le Livre de Zoroastre de Zardust-i-Behram Ben Pajdu by Frederich Rosenburg. Vide "Zoroastre. Essai sur la Philosophie Religieuse de la Perse, par Joachim Menant, Première Partie, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> S. B. E. Vol. XLVII, Introduction, pp. XXII.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* pp. 64-65.



We still hear stories of the above kind. Manucci then proceeds to say: "I could never sufficiently state to what an extent the Hindus and the Mahomedans in India are in the habit of practising witchcraft. I quite well know that if I were to recount that they can even make a cock crow in the belly of the man who stole and ate it, no credit would be given to me. Nevertheless, the truth is that many a time I heard the crowing in different cases, and of such instances I was told over and over again." (Vol. II, p. 134.)

This story referred to by Manucci is illustrated in a Gujarati slang saying "બચ્ચા તારા પેટમાં બોલાવશે" *i.e.*, "Boy! He will make it speak in your belly."

(3) Manucci thus speaks of spells used by women to control their lovers: "As for the spells practised by the women to bring young men under their control, they are infinite. Of such a nature are they that any such youth becomes mad, nor is he given any respite to think of anything else. This subject I postpone to the Third Part of my History (III, 248-265). Let this serve as a warning to our Europeans who intend to travel in India, so that they may not allow their liberty to be taken from them, for afterwards they will weep over their unhappy irremediable state. It happens often to one so bound by spells that after his lady-love has died he cannot endure the approach of any other woman, remaining ever overcome by sorrow for the defunct." (Vol. II, pp. 134-135.)

We still hear of love-charms. Superstitious women visit the so-called charmers for love charms.<sup>1</sup>

(4) Manucci describes several other stories of magic in the third volume of his book. He says: "There are to be seen commonly in this country a want of the fear of God and of love to one's neighbour. I will relate here some cases which happened

<sup>1</sup> For some old Persian *nirangs*, *i. e.*, charms or amulets, which can be classed under the head of love-charms, *vide* Pazend Texts by Ervad E. K. Antia, pp. 186-187.

in my sight of a diabolic nature. It is a practice very common among the Hindus and others, which does not fail also to lay hold of the Christians living in this country, who from want of true faith allow themselves to be persuaded into such-like errors.

“A woman wished to become with child, and not succeeding with drugs, had recourse to a magician. His orders were that at midnight she should go and stand below a large forest tree which in India is called *badd* (*baḍ*, *bar*).<sup>1</sup> It produces a small red fruit. Here she was to perform the sacrifice as to which he had instructed her. She then became pregnant, and the tree referred to became sterile, and never yielded fruit so long as it lived.” (Vol. III, p. 200.)

The so-called magical arts and charms are even now resorted to in India by women desirous of becoming mothers.

(5) Manucci gives another story of a different kind, of a woman desiring to have a child :

“In Bassahim (Bassein), a town of the Portuguese, there was a well-born woman—I will not mention her name—who wished to have a son to whom to leave her wealth. Secretly she had recourse to a magician, who by diabolic arts made it so appear that she was really pregnant, with all the signs that women have who are about to bring forth. When the time came, she was seized with pains, and several ladies came to assist, and she brought forth a tray full of sand; thereupon the delivery was complete. She lost all the great expenses she had gone to in preparing a feast for the occasion.” (Vol. III, p. 200).

(6) The following story seems to show that even Christian friars were not free from beliefs in magical influences :

“There was another case in Saõ Thome about the same time. A young friar had a woman-servant who cooked for

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Ficus Indica*, or Indian fig-tree.



him. This woman threw such a spell over him that he could not exist without her for one moment. Anyone who went to visit the friar was an annoyance; he sent them away as soon as possible, and the few words he uttered would all be in praise of the serving-woman. This friar fell ill of diarrhœa, and was already almost at the point of death. In place of fixing his mind on God to secure salvation for his soul, his whole concern was for the servant. At this time there arrived some friars from Goa, and seeing him thus forsaken, knew that he was bewitched. They seized the negro woman, and by force of torture made her relieve the friar of the spell she had thrown over him. After this happened he could not bear to see her or hear her name. It did not take long to cure him of his disease (the diarrhœa)." (Vol. III, p. 201).

(7) The following story is intended to show, that if one is over curious to peep in to the magical practices of others, he himself becomes the victim :

"I will tell you another instance. There was a Portuguese called Thome Borges de Villalobo, an inhabitant of Saõ Thome. To recover after an illness he moved with his family to the foot of the four hills, which are three leagues from Saõ Thome. After some days had passed he felt relieved of his illness. But one night, failing to get to sleep, he went out to walk about the town by moonlight. Hearing in a house the sound of dancing and the tinkling of bells, his curiosity led him to look through a peep-hole in the door. There he saw two small boys, well clothed, with bells on their feet, wearing jewels, and holding bows and arrows in their hands. Opposite them was a magician seated on the floor, holding a rod with which he struck the ground. To the sound of these strokes the children danced. From time to time the magician uttered a cry, and by reason of the gyrations made by the boys in dancing, their eyes became flaming coals of fire, their faces heavy and fearful to behold. When this condition arrived, they swooned and fell to the ground as if dead.

“The man’s wife, awaking, saw the door open and her husband absent from the room. She went to look for him, and found him lying senseless at the magician’s door. Hastening home, she brought her brothers and servants, and in dead silence they removed him to his house. There they began to lament. The lady who owned the house, hearing the weeping, came to them. She was told what had happened to the husband, found lying in front of such-and-such a door. The old lady showed amazement, so that all present were more disturbed than before. Upon seeing this the old lady consoled them, saying that she knew a cure. Leaving home, she had recourse to the magician, who appeared in about an hour. Entering the house he said there had been too great temerity in seeking to see things which did not concern one. All the relations entreated him to tell them some cure. He gave the man certain fumigations, and placed medicine upon his eyes. After one hour had passed the patient began to move, and when morning came he was able to tell his story, as I have above recounted it. After that he went back to Saõ Thome. At the present time the widow of that Portuguese, being now seventy years of age, lives in my house, and the poverty in which she was left has forced her to do this.” (Vol. III, pp. 201-202).

(8) The following story is of the kind which I remember having heard in my boyhood, wherein a Parsee was believed to possess the power of producing various fruits and sweets from a magical pot before him :

“In the days when I was at Āgrah I went to pay my respects to the brother of Shāistah Khan, who was called Faraçal (Falak-fāl), which means ‘The Diviner.’ He was a very ugly man, and never appeared at Court for fear the people would joke at his odd physiognomy. This gentleman had a magician who gave him much information about what was going on. In my presence the magician raised his head and voice, saying that apples, pears, peaches, and several other fruits would fall. Accordingly, in the sight of all there present, they began at once



to fall. This was a thing to be remarked on, for at that season there were no such fruits in that country. He offered me some to eat, but I declined to take them, knowing them to be a product of magic, so I thanked him for his kindness. This thing he could do whenever he liked." (Vol. III, pp. 202-203).

(9) The following story of Joaõ Coelho illustrates belief in a medley of various kinds of magical arts :

"As it happened, there came to Saõ Thome on the loss of Malacca a widow woman with two unmarried daughters, and took up her abode in the street called Galeras. This woman was poor and without protectors, but of a noble family, of good behaviour, respected, and of a retired life. In the same town dwelt a youth, called Joaõ Coelho, who was very rich. He did not know how much he had, and at that time did not count his money, but measured it by bushels as if it were grain. Relying upon his wealth, and seeing that the above woman was poor, he sent people to intrigue with the elder daughter, asking her to become his mistress. This insulting message she imparted to her mother, and it caused great indignation in the family.

"The widow had a servant girl of Rājāva race, who noticed the anger there was in the household, and made bold to ask her mistress the cause of so much indignation. They told her what was going on. Thereupon the Rājāva woman asked leave from her mistress to live out of the house for some days, till she could plan a remedy for such impertinence. The widow, who was aggrieved by the young man's overture, willingly gave leave of absence to the servant girl.

"The reader should know that these Rājāva people are for the most part magicians, and have a compact with the devil. After five days had passed, the servant girl returned to the house of her mistress with three others of the same race. She consoled the lady, saying that in a few days she would secure a remedy, and would obtain satisfaction of her desire. She asked for a separate room for these others to live in, into which

no one must enter. The mistress consented. After three days they rubbed a medicine on the eyes of the girl that the youth was in pursuit of, and directed her that when he was passing she should take post at the window.

“ Not many hours had elapsed when the youth, as was his practice every day, passed as anticipated in sight of the window to show himself off. The girl appeared at once, and then withdrew. When Joaõ Coelho saw his beloved, in place of going on his way, he came forthwith straight to the door of the widow, and began to knock, most humbly asking leave to enter and speak to the lady of the house. The Rājava servant advised them not to be in any hurry to open. The youth, growing impatient, began to knock vigorously, and shouted for them to open. They answered him from the window by abuse, ordering him to go away. To such an insolent fellow they would not open. On hearing this answer he prostrated himself on the ground, and said he had come for a proposal of marriage to her whom he had seen at the window.

“ They allowed him to enter. Then he sent off his servant-man to fetch a priest to marry them. This was carried out at once without delay, and the bride became lord over the husband and all his wealth, which turned out to be the cause of his undoing. Thus does it frequently happen that money in the hands of persons like this causes their perdition. After the lapse of some time, she found that her husband loved her passionately, and she had not the liberty of action that she wanted. She asked the servant-girl to find a device by which she might be able to live more according to her own fancy. The sorceress made an oil with which they anointed the soles of the husband's feet when asleep. He never more paid any heed to his wife, and noticed nothing that went on in the house. Next she resorted again to the servant-woman for means of getting hold of a young man for whom she longed.

“ The cunning sorceress by her arts fulfilled the desire of her mistress, and the youth came and went when she so required



The younger sister, seeing the delights her sister enjoyed, became desirous also of passing her days according to her pleasure. She informed the Rājava servant of her intention. As the magician was practised in curing such complaints, she made over to the young lady the youth that she affected and he, too, came and went like the other one.

“The Rājava woman warned the two sisters never to take betel from the hands of their lovers, for if they acted to the contrary, never again would the young men leave the house. Paying no heed to the warning of the sorceress, they took betel from the hands of their lovers, who never quitted the house again, but ruled over their mistresses as they pleased. The elder sister became enceinte. Her lover told her that when the procession of Corpus Christi passed, as it was to do the next day, she must not go to the window to look out.

“On the day of the procession, many ladies came from different parts of the town to the house of the aforementioned lady. When the procession was passing, the lady visitors noticed the absence of the lady of the house. They sought for her, and partly by force, partly by entreaty dragged her to the window. On beholding the pyx of the most holy sacrament, she fainted and fell, getting a great wound on the head, and thereby arose a great outcry and disturbance.

“The younger sister, who was in a room apart, hearing the noise, came out hastily to see. As she was coming her lover appeared and gave her a blow which knocked out one of her eyes. Upon this the confusion and the uproar were redoubled. The people in the procession, observing the disorder in the house, entered in numbers to accommodate matters. The three companions of the Rājava woman, seeing succour entering the house disappeared at once in a little boat of dough made of fine flour which they had prepared for the purpose. Along with them went the two lovers, and the two sisters were left wounded in the house. The Rājava woman, wanting to make off like the others, could not reach either the boat or the other fugitives. She

was tortured, and confessed that what has been told above was done by her diabolical arts. She was hanged and quartered. The elder sister brought forth a son, to whom she gave the same name as the father, and all the town called him "Son of the Devil."

"This family came to be in such a state that they went round asking for alms, and the race continued until the loss of the city. These (? their houses) were so badly haunted that no stranger could dwell there with safety to his progeny. It chanced that there came three strangers, and finding no place to shelter themselves, they took these houses, and hardly was it seven o'clock at night, when there came a dead man with chains on his legs, and walked round the room where the said men were. On seeing this figure, they fled in great haste to the door, and came out tumbling over each other, and hurting their hands and feet. When the skeleton reached the window, it said; 'You were lucky to run away so quickly; if you had delayed at all, I should have had to take notice of your temerity.' Upon hearing this, they turned and ran until they were placed in safety.

"To these same houses there came to live a captain and his company of soldiers. He was called Pê-da-patta (? Flat-foot)—a very valiant man; and where he planted his foot, there he stood fast. Then at six o'clock in the evening of the first day they saw a soldier come from outside, and pass through the midst of the soldiery without making any salute. He made his way to one of the rooms. Again on the second night the same thing happened; on the third day they made ready to find out who the intruder was. When he entered the house, they ran after him, their bared swords in their hands. Those pursuing were fourteen men, who went into the room he had entered. Within they measured swords, but the aforesaid man had vanished, and the fourteen men wounded each other, and all came forth in evil case. Then next day, they gave up the house, and Joaô Coelho came to it and lived in peace." (Vol. III, pp. 203-206).



(10) The following story shows how hair and nails of the fingers are used as means to communicate magical influence :—

“ In Madras I knew a Portuguese, of good position, honoured, and wealthy. His name was Joaô Pereira de Faria, and he was married to Donna Maria de Souza. He was a great friend of mine, and had great confidence in me, he and all his family. He came and settled in Madras upon the loss of Nagapataô (Negapatam). His wife told me of what happened to her, and her story was confirmed by many.

“ One of her slave-girls was much favoured by her husband. This lady's maid wanted to kill her mistress by magic arts. For this purpose she stole some money from her master and resorted to a young Hindû servant of the house to get him to take measures to put an end to her mistress's life. When the lady was dead, she would become head of the house, and would reward him. The youth accepted the task (for such persons when there is anything to gain have neither religion nor conscience). He tried to do what the slave-girl wanted, and not succeeding, had recourse to a magician. This man directed him to bring some hair, nail-clippings, and a piece of defiled cloth belonging to the lady. The youth reported to the slave-girl, and she sent what was required. When some days had passed, the youth made over to her a doll into the head of which had been thrust one pin, the point of which reached nearly to the stomach, and another pin was stuck into the navel coming half-way down the legs.

“ She was told that at midnight she must go entirely naked into the middle of the house-garden, holding up in one hand the doll, and in the other a piece of burning wood. Orders as to what she was to do were added. She was warned that while acting as above there would appear a black cat, but she must not be afraid. The wretched woman did as instructed. Going to the centre of the courtyard, she set fire to the ends of the doll's feet and hands. At that moment there appeared to her

the awe-inspiring cat, with eyes which looked like two flames of fire. On seeing such an apparition the slave girl was in terror.

“At this time there arose in the house loud cries and commotion. Being frightened, the girl went into her mistress's chamber as if she wanted to help, carrying with her the doll, which she hid in the sacking of the lady's bedstead. In her hurry and agitation she did not thrust it well in, so that it remained half hanging out. The lady of the house was in mortal anguish, complaining that she felt on fire from her head to her stomach, and from the naval down to her lower limbs, her hands and feet burning with insufferable heat and agony.

“They called in the doctors, who could not determine what ailment it was, and the remedies given her did not take effect. For several days the lady suffered in the same way. Then it chanced that a child of three years, playing about, went under the bed and saw a doll half projecting. It pulled it out with a cry of delight, and, playing with it, showed it to its nurse. When the woman saw it she recognised at once what it was, and showed it on the spot to her mistress and the rest of those present, saying that it was a piece of magic and through it she had suffered.

“Upon making sure of this, they called in a Hindu magician, who as soon as he entered the house went to Joaô Pereira de Faria and told him he was the cause of his wife's sufferings. He was ashamed, and hung his head. Upon seeing the image, the magician told the wife that in a short time she would be restored to health, but the people of the house must not be alarmed if they saw her lie without sense or movement. For his purposes the magician retired into a room and very slowly drew out the pins, unstitching the image bit by bit in each separate member. Finally he opened up the abdomen, where were found the nail-clippings, the hair and the cloth spoken of above, with other mixed items put in by the magician. When



the image had been entirely pulled to pieces, he threw it into a vessel of milk, and after making his incantations, he threw that vessel into the sea.

“At the expiration of twelve hours Donna Maria came back to her senses and lost her pains; but she was so weak that it took her three months to recover her strength. The magician fixed upon the slave-girl who had done the mischief, and the negress, on confessing it, was punished and banished for the rest of her life. The originator of the trouble was the master of the house, who had given such authority to a slave in order to gratify his own desires in an illicit direction. The slave thus thought she could become lady of the home upon the death of the wife. I have seen some lose their lives or ruin their families by the commission of such insults and discords in their own houses.” (Vol. III. pp. 206-208).

Hair and nails are often spoken of as means for communicating magical influences.<sup>1</sup> In the *Vendidâd*, the ancient Iranians were enjoined to bury the nails. Even now, Parsee priests bury their nails. I have referred to this subject at some length, in my paper before this society, entitled “Two Iranian Incantations for burying hair and nails.”<sup>2</sup>

---

1 *Vide* “Semitic Magic” by R. C. Thompson.

2 *Journal of the Society*, Vol. VIII, No. 8, pp. 557-72. *Vide my* “Anthropological papers” pp. 340-355.