

A NOTE ON "THE WOMEN'S HUNT"  
(JANI-SIKAR) AMONG THE ORAONS  
OF CHOTA NAGPUR.

(President—RAO BAHADUR P. B. JOSHI.)

(Read on 26th January 1916.)

Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy, in his interesting book on the Orâons of Chota Nâgpur,<sup>1</sup> thus describes, What is "Wo- Orâons of Chota Nâgpur,"<sup>1</sup> thus describes, men's Hunt"? what is called "Jani-Sikâr" i.e. "Women's Hunt" or Mukkasendra:— "Once in twelve years, Orâon maidens with generally a sprinkling of married women, go out on a pretended hunting expedition, armed with *lathis* (sticks), spears and axes, and wearing *pagris* or turbans on their heads, and *pichouris* or cloth-sheets wound round their bodies in the manner of men; one female from each Orâon family must join the 'hunt.' Arriving at the village next to theirs in a particular direction they go to the *âkhra*<sup>2</sup> of the village where they dance for a while. The wife of the village-Gorait<sup>3</sup> accompanies them with a *nâgerâ* or drum. Then they chase a pig belonging to some Orâon of that village. And if they cannot or do not kill a pig, the men of the village make up the price of a pig by raising a subscription amongst themselves and pay the amount to the female 'hunters'. If a pig is killed by these female 'hunters,' the money thus raised is paid to the owner of the pig by way of compensation. The women of the village where the pig is killed, in their turn proceed in similar guise to the village next to theirs in the same direction as the

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<sup>1</sup> "The Orâons of Chôtâ Nâgpur: Their History, Economic Life, and Social Organization" (1915).

<sup>2</sup> *âkhra* is the dancing ground for the bachelors of an Orâon village.

<sup>3</sup> The village Gorait is a village drudge who performs miscellaneous functions of the village from that of a messenger to that of a ferry-man (p. 72).

direction of their own village from that of the female hunting party who just visited their village."

Now, as to the origin of this 'women's hunt', Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy says: "It rather appears to belong to a class of ceremonial expeditions undertaken with the object of transferring, by magic, real or fancied calamities from the country. To this class belong the two varieties of the Rog-khednâ<sup>1</sup> expedition, one undertaken by men and the other by women—generally married women."

Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy then describes, at some length, the Rog-khednâ or the disease-driving expedition. According to his description, "when a rumour is somehow set afloat that..... some unusual misfortune has occurred to cattle ..... it is the men who have to undertake the Rog-khednâ expedition; when, on the other hand, the rumoured calamity refers to child-birth ..... it is the duty of the Orâon women to undertake a similar expedition. ... The women... sweep the floors and court-yards of their respective houses and clean them with cowdung and water. The sweepings are then carried to the nearest stream or pool of water and thrown away. Then the women return home, bathe and, in some villages, the Pâhân or Pahânâin<sup>2</sup> burns incense at the village pâhân's house. Then men or women, as the case may be, go out from house to house in their own village, carrying one or two bamboo-baskets, a brass *lota* and a few mango twigs, and receive a handful of rice or mâruâ from each house. Then they proceed to the next village in the direction opposite to that in which the calamity is said to have occurred. As soon as they enter the next village in that direction, they go from house to house with these baskets and at each house receive a handful of rice or

<sup>1</sup> *i. e.* Driving out a disease.

<sup>2</sup> *i. e.* the village priest or village priestess.

mâruâ. Then they proceed to the second village in the same direction and collect doles of rice, mâruâ &c., in the same way. Thus, after finishing three villages including their own, they retire at mid-day to some selected spot on the outskirts of the last village they visited, boil as much of the rice or mâruâ as they require for their mid-day meal, and eat the food thus prepared. Then they sell the balance of the rice and mâruâ, and with the sale proceeds buy liquor with which they cheer up their spirits, and then return home. Next day the men or women, as the case may be, of the villages visited the preceding day start on a similar expedition in the same direction. And thus the calamity is driven away from village to village till it is altogether driven out of the Orâon country. . . . . The original idea behind the practice is a magical transference of the calamity."

The above interesting description of the "Women's Hunt"

The Mâtânô-rath, a corresponding disease-driving procession in the Bombay Presidency.

and of the Rog-khednâ expeditions reminds us of what is known as Mâtânô-rath, *i.e.* the Chariot of the Goddess "in our Bombay Presidency. In my paper, entitled, "The Chariot of the Goddess (मातानो रथ), a

supposed remedy for driving out an epidemic," read before this society on 30th June 1897,<sup>1</sup> I have referred, at some length, to three cases of such disease-driving processions that came under my notice. In these processions, diseases like plague and cholera are sought to be driven away from village to village. Sir James Frazer, in the sixth part of his *Golden Bough*, entitled the *Scape-Goat*, refers to this paper of mine<sup>2</sup>, and takes it as an instance of the scape-goat, in his theory of "the use of the Dying God as a scape-goat to free his worshippers from the troubles of all sorts with which life in earth is beset." In the case of the chariot of the Goddess a goat or a cock plays important part.

<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. IV, No. 8, pp. 419-26. *Vide* my "Anthropological papers" Part I, pp. 96-103.

<sup>2</sup> The *Scape-Goat* (1913), p. 194.

Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy's account of the Women's Hunt among the Orâons, reminds us also of the Devil-driving processions of the Tibetans, referred to by me, in my paper before this Society, entitled, "A Devil-driving Procession of the Tibetan Buddhists as seen at Darjeeling, and a few Thoughts suggested by it."<sup>1</sup> In this Devil-driving procession, the Tibetans drive away, among other devils, the devil of disease and sickness, by throwing in the valley as a scape-goat a small wooden structure. This procession is followed the next day by a Book-procession, wherein they carry their sacred books in the form of a procession through the village. They believe, that after the devils are once driven off, the sacred scriptures bring all happiness to the village.

These processions remind us of the religious processions of the Christians intended to drive away pestilences. When Rome was visited by a pestilence in the sixth century, St. Gregory, afterwards Pope Gregory, had advised, that a procession may pass through the streets of Rome singing litanies, and he himself headed such a procession.<sup>2</sup>

The Holi festival, which is supposed to have been taken from the early Dravidians, who were more of a cattle-breeding people than of agriculturists, is also a kind of devil-driving ceremony. The burning of one or more logs of wood on the full moon day of the lunar month Falgun, symbolizes, as it were, the burning of the old year with all its faults, evils and diseases. It is said, that among the hill tribes of Mirzapur, the rite of burning a stake or log by the *Baiga* (Devil-priest) of the village is actually

<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. X, No. 3, pp. 209-228. *Vide* my "Anthropological Papers" Part II, pp. 124-143.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* my Paper on "St. Michael of the Christians and Mithra of the Zoroastrians" (Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. VI, No. 5 pp. 237-53). *Vide* my Anthropological Papers Part I, pp. 173-190.

known as *Sambat jalânâ*, i.e., burning the Old Year<sup>1</sup> (samvat). In Nepal, they burn a decorated wooden post on this occasion.

The celebration of the Holy festival, at a place named Barsana, reminds us of the above "Women's Hunt," or, perhaps, of what may be called, "Women's Battle." "On the first evening, a mock fight takes place between the women of the village armed with bamboos, their faces wrapped in their mantles, and the men of a neighbouring village, carrying stags' horns and round leather shields . . . . . In Bengal, 'a sort of Guy-Fawkes-like effigy, termed Holika made of Bamboo laths and straw, is formally carried to it (i.e. the fire) and committed to the flames. . . . On the third day . . . . there was another mock combat between men and women.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Handbook of Folklore," by Charlotte Sophia Burne (1914) p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 240-41.