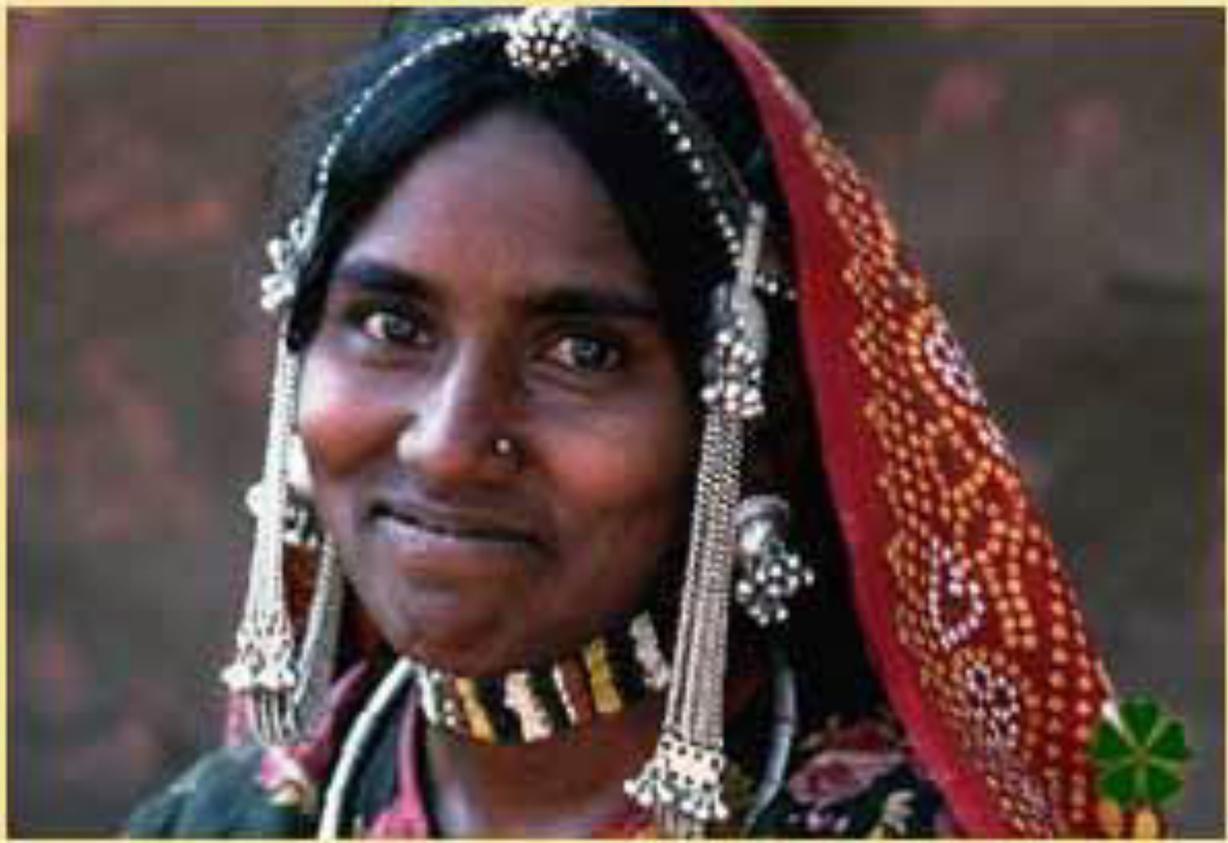


# ETHNIC GROUP OF BHIL ABORGINALS

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**Bhil Woman in Traditional Dress.**

## **Introduction**

The Bhils are so-called aboriginals of India. This is all that is known about their ancestry. Once they were regarded as Dravidians, closely related to the Gonds. But this opinion has been discarded. The physiognomy and the nature of the Bhils and those of the Dravidians differ too much to allow us to place them in the same racial fold. The Bhils are more primitive, original and simply children of nature. In this respect they differ considerably even from the least developed of the Dravidians, namely the Gonds, which are their neighbours.

It is noteworthy that the Bhils also differ widely from the Dravidians, from a linguistic point of view as their language is of Aryan origin.

Another theory has been advanced, namely that the Bhils are a Munda people, that is to say, they are closely related to the so-called Kols and Santals in Bengal, Bihar and Assam. This theory is more probable. The one who has had an opportunity to see and associate with these people cannot fail to observe a certain similarity between them and the Bhils. Here is the same primitive nature, and partly at least, the same physiognomy. But this does not settle the question; however, it is not possible to make a positive and definite statement in this respect. The language may or may not be a guiding star. However, if due regard is paid to the language it will lead us in another direction. The Munda and the Bhil dialects have very little or no organic relations. Nor does history provide a solution of the problem,

The question regarding the origin of the Bhils is still left unsettled. All that can be said is that they belong to the aboriginals which do not seem to be so very closely related to the Dravidians. They are

probably still older, pre-Dravidians. Many attempts have been made to discover their original status and cultural conditions from the name of the tribe if not their racial origin at the time of the Aryan invasion of their country. Different theories have been advanced. Bhil is thus said to have been derived from the Dravidian word Billa, abow. In that case the name would mean a bowman. This derivation is, however, not very likely. It is true that the Bhils are skilful archers, and were more so in days gone by, but other Indian aborigines have not been inferior to them when it comes to this skill. Thus there is no reason why they should just be called bowmen above all others. Others have derived the word Bhil from the Sanskrit word Billa', meaning, hole, cave, etc. Should this derivation be right, the Bhil would originally have been a cave dweller and this conjecture, too, is wrong.

A third theory is more plausible. According to this, the word Bhil is derived from the Sanskrit word 'abhira', a cowherd. Via Prakrit, bhilla, the word has arrived at its present form, bhil. One does not require much linguistic experience to realize the possibility of a word undergoing changes in this way. In Hindi and other North Indian languages, a cowherd is still called ahir. In Kutch, there lives a comparatively large group of ahirs, whose mother tongue is so closely related to the Bhili dialects that in Grierson's Linguistic survey they have been treated as one of them. And further: in Khandesh there is a Bhili dialect called Airani, which is the same as ahirani, i.e. the language of the ahirs or cowherds.

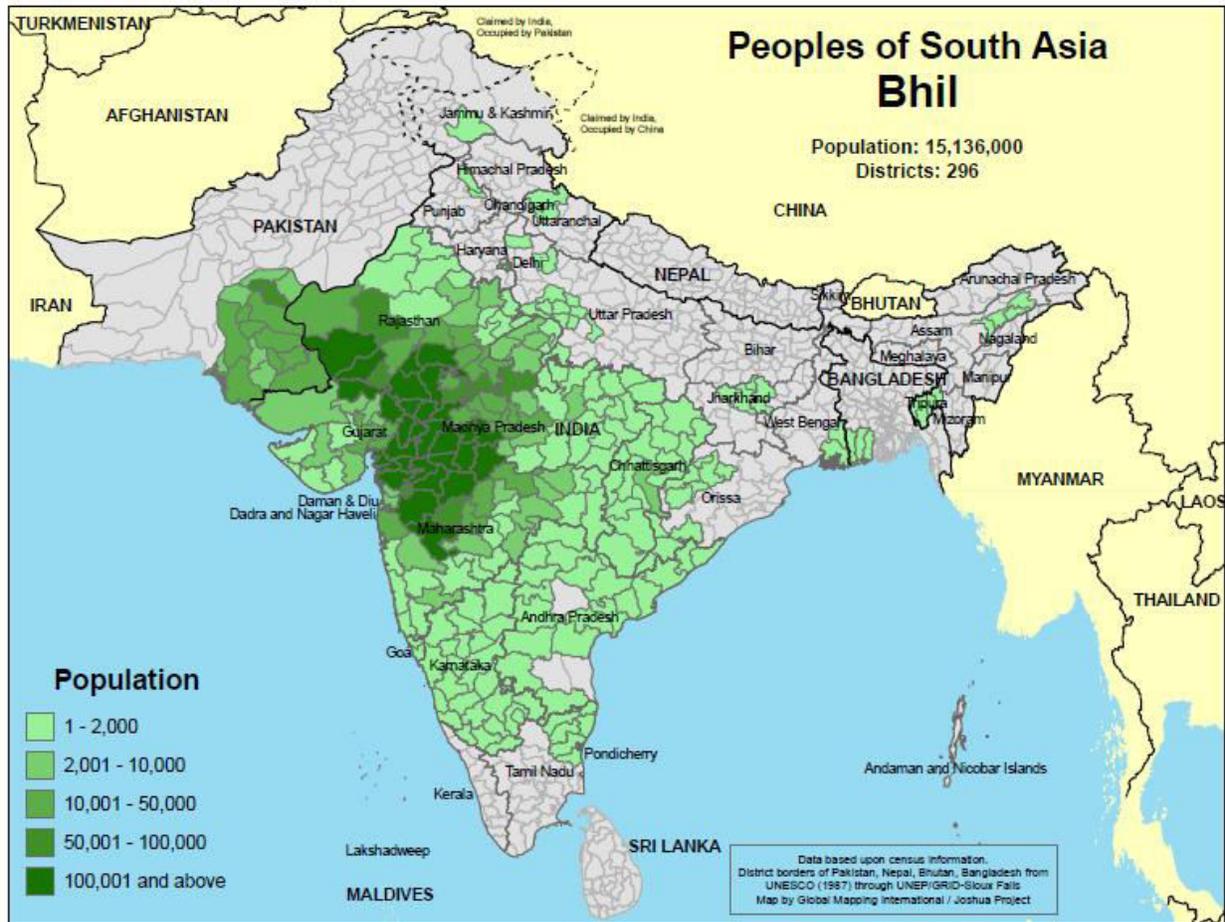
At the stage of our present knowledge there are reasons to interpret the word Bhil as a cowherd. Thus the Bhils may be supposed to have been cowherds originally, i.e. at the time of the Aryan invasion. If this interpretation is right, the Bhils must have reached a fairly high standard of civilization at that time.

In the annals of history the Bhils figure very rarely. It is, however, believed that they can be traced as far back as 2000 years ago, if not further. The great Alexandrian geographer, Klauditos Ptlomaios, who flourished in the beginning and middle of the second century mentions an Indian people called Phyllitas. There is reason to believe that this refers to the Bhils, who then, more than now, had their abode on the west coast.

In Mahabharata, the longest epic the world has ever seen and written about 200 B.C. the Bhils are referred to under the name of Pulinda as participants in the great war described in the epic. Valmiki's Ramayana which is believed to have been composed about 500 B.C. is also acquainted with the Bhils. They fought in Rama's army against Rawan, the despotic demon from Lanka (Ceylon), and Rama the seventh avatar of Vishnu, is said to have eaten berries from the hand of a Bhil woman, Sabari. If, as is generally supposed, Rama should have lived and reigned about 1600 B.C., the Bhils must have been a people known in India since the time of Moses' appearance in Egypt. Besides these two epics, other holy books of the Hindus, e.g. Panch Tantra mention the Bhils.

When closer to modern times it is found the Bhils mentioned more frequently on the pages of history. During the long wars waged by the Muhammedan kings and their rule over India the Bhils play a rather important role. About 1000 A.D. they were in possession of large tracts of Gujarat and Central India. By and by they were, however, expelled from their ancestral land both by the Muslims and the Rajputs and their land was occupied. But this did not take place without bloody fighting. And the Bhils were never completely subdued. In the unapproachable backwoods they continued to live an independent life.

By the Moghul rulers they are praised as a diligent and law abiding people. And previous to that time, in the eleventh century, their villages are held up as models, where industriousness and cleanliness are prevailing, law being administered, and discipline strictly applied. In mythology the Bhil woman is glorified as being plucky, pretty and chaste. Thus, for instance, when Parvati wanted to charm Mahadev in order to make him forgo his ascetic life, she adopted the shape of a bhildi (bhil woman). Most wonderful of all that tradition has to tell is that Valmiki, the great author of Ramayana, was a Bhil. This goes to prove that the Bhils, thousands of years ago, occupied a prominent place among the various peoples of India, and that their culture at that time had reached a high standard.



From the Marathas, which entered the scene in the beginning of the 17th century and for a couple of centuries fought with the Moghuls and the British for the supremacy of areas inhabited by the Bhils, the latter ones did not get any praise. No mercy was shown to them. No people seem to have been treated more severely by them. Even taken into account that the descriptions given by the English historians of the atrocities of the Marathas are considerably coloured, enough remains to prove that their treatment of the Bhils was unusually severe and cruel. If, for example, a man was captured in a riotous area and it was proved that he was Bhil, this was regarded as reason enough to fleece and hang him without trial or else his nose and ears were cut off and he was burnt to death in a red-hot iron chair or on a heated cannon. Every year hundreds of Bhils were hurled down the high precipice of Antur to perish in the deep abyss. On one occasion three large groups of Bhils with a letter of safe conduct had assembled in three towns in Khandesh in order to receive pardon, as had been solemnly promised, for an uproarious attempt. They were however killed, beheaded, or shot; their women were mutilated or smoked to death, while their children were dashed against stones or rocks.

If the Bhils had already started to degenerate socially, culturally, politically and intellectually, the pace was now accelerated. It was during these hard days that they underwent the last stage of their development which brought them to the point of degeneration, which they have occupied all since.

When in 1818 the British took over the Bhil country, the Bhils, by the sad play of fate, had developed into the most cunning, skillful but suspicious and unmanageable guerilla fighters, highway men, and freebooters. It took a long time, much patience and wisdom to pacify the country and win the confidence of the Bhils. But at last this end was achieved. And during the last half of a century the Bhils have lived a very peaceful and quiet life. Only a few years ago they were however counted among the

criminal tribes, who were registered with the police and had to report at fixed intervals. This system is still in vogue in several districts

Today the Bhil is as a rule a harmless being. If not provoked or unfairly treated, he will harm nobody. But much is not required to conjure up the old nature, innate during many generations. Then he may change into the most formidable revenger or the most cunning and merciless culprit. Several instances of that kind are encountered now and then. The leader of a gang of robbers operating in and around Bhilwada is more often than not a Bhil, And in Akrani, where there is a compact population of Bhils, and where the Swedish Alliance Mission has a station, Mandulwar, murders are so common that Mr. Rowland, a Welshman, who served in our Mission for some years, had reason to describe that area as the most criminal within the British Empire. Approximately one in a thousand is murdered there every year.

The average standard of the Bhils, socially as well as economically, is very low. The majority lives from hand to mouth. In the areas where they form a small minority of the population, they have been degraded into the servants or coolies of other people, living from day to day on what little they can earn, gathering firewood in the jungle which they carry on their heads to villages and towns where it is sold, and so on.

In places where they form a majority and a friendly government rules, they are farmers. In most cases they cultivate their land in a poor way. But there are also honorable exceptions. Some Bhil farmers having large landowners having hundreds of acres of land, which is being cultivated just as nationally as anybody else's in India.

Besides farming, the Bhil occupies himself with cutting, rough-hewing and transport of timber. With other occupation or crafts he is rarely acquainted. In every Bhil section of farmers, though, there are one or two carpenters who produce what simple farming implements are required. The smith work is generally done by artisans belonging to other tribes or castes.

Hunting and fishing, especially the last-mentioned, are occupations that are cherished by the Bhils. As a result hereof the rivers in the Bhil country are almost devoid of fish. Whole villages go a fishing to a man, not to say to a woman. Dams are built to shut in the fish. Then it is caught in hoop-nets, bucks, pots, and nets, or with the hands. Not even the smallest can get away. It is an extremely picturesque and interesting thing to see the whole male and female population of a village wade through a river catching fish.

Hunting will soon belong to the pleasures and occupations of the past. Game is continually on the decrease. And the Bhil is not allowed to carry the arms he wants; not even a large bow with iron arrows, let alone swords or spears or daggers or lances, and guns or rifles. But it may happen that even a panther is laid down before the insistent attacks by a group of Bhils, armed with bamboos only. But it may also happen that one or more Bhils have to pay with their lives for a reckless chase on wild boar. Rabbits, antilopes, gazelles and even deer and blue- bulls may be killed with bamboo lathis after having been tired out by a wild chase. During his hunting excursions the Bhil is possessed with a fury.

Of one occupation the Bhil is a born master, viz: the distilling of liquor. Here nobody can compete with him. And the women are just as skilled as the men. As the Government authorities both in British India as well as in the Native states have monopoly of producing liquor, the whole traffic has to be carried on secretly. And in this art too the Bhil is a master. Few persons, whatever people they belong to, have such a pronounced ingenious skill of completely concealing what they want to conceal as the Bhil in general enjoys.

Speaking of occupations and crafts it should be mentioned that the Bhil builds his own house. Most Bhil dwellings are grass or straw huts. In jungles tracts, where bamboo is plentiful, the walls are made of split bamboos. The roof is thatched its straw, leaves, curry stalks or something of the kind. The walls are often made of bulrushes, maize stalks, etc. Nowadays Bhil dwellings are often found roofed with tiles, which, however, are not made by themselves. Of late quite a number of the farmer Bhils on the plain have erected for themselves big brick-houses with roofs of corrugated iron.



**Bhil Tribe**

The Bhil is of a playful disposition, being jocular and of a comparatively lively imagination. He is in no way ungifted. On the contrary, the Bhils are probably more gifted than most of the aborigines of India. Their gift for languages is marked. It is no uncommon thing to come across Bhils who speak three or four languages fluently. In the primary schools they do just as well, if not better, than the children of other people. When it comes to higher studies they do not do so well.

Generally speaking they are children. They are therefore not to be depended upon. It is easy to extract promises from them. But if you expect these to be fulfilled you will often be deceived. Like children they forget what they have promised. Their manners are pleasant, courteous and obliging. Among the inhabitants of Khandesh they are, in the opinion of many, the most gentlemen like and so, one easily learns to like them. To get into real touch with them is not easy, though. Their degradation and ignorance are great. Only four men in a thousand are literate and among the women hardly one in ten thousand. Drunkenness knows no restraint. Men, women and children learn from childhood to use intoxicating liquor.

By Hindus, Mohammadans, and other confessors of indigenous, religions, they are looked upon with contempt, oppressed and trampled down. But they are not regarded as untouchables. Even a Brahman may take water from the hands of a Bhil. Some of them claim to be Kshatriyas, i.e. the second of the Indian castes, the warrior caste.

Going into debt is so common that it is practically impossible to come across a Bhil without debts. It almost seems as if contracting debts is looked upon as a necessity of life. The money-lenders therefore have a happy hunting ground among the Bhils. The lowest interest charged is 75%. Cases where the interest has amounted to 75% per month are not lacking. The most common rate seems to be 25% a month. More need not be said to explain the severity of the situation. But the worst part of the tale is not yet told, for according to Indian custom, debts are passed on from one generation to another, endlessly. The debt may thus become of 100 years standing and simply unpayable. The Bhil becomes the slave of the usurer, practically if not nominally.

During the period of degradation the Bhil has degenerated even physically. He is dwarfed in some way. Oppression has stamped his features. Under the surface, however, a glimpse may be seen of a noble strain, something that tells you of a noble inheritance, of a happier past.

### **Tribal, divisions and numbers.**

The Bhils are not a homogeneous people. Far from that! Few people are so divided into clans, tribes and families as are the Bhils. The full number of these has never been known. Some fifty are, however, known. And these are scattered over a tremendous area. It can be seen from the 18th to the 28th latitude and from the 72nd to the 77th longitude, approximately the area of the size of Sweden.

A glance at the map will show that the Bhils, politically are divided between the Native States of Central India and Rajputana, Baroda, and other Native States of Gujarat, Khandesh, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Poona and other districts of Maharashtra, and Hyderabad Deccan, Kutch and Thar Desert. In West Khandesh, one can find the densest and broadest Bhil block. Experience has also shown that the Bhils that are most gifted and capable of development are to be found here. For all practical purposes these are the Dehvali-speaking; they must however share this honour to some extent, with those who have Mowchi as their language, a dialect closely related to Dehvali.

The most prominent tribes or families within these areas are Padvi, Vasava, Valvi, Pardan Naik, and Gavti. Originally these names have stood for professions: Padvi:- rulers, officials and officers; Vasava:- bailiffs and higher village officials; Valvi:- councillors; and Gavti:- cultivators. The only Bhil princes still in existence belong to the Dehvali group. The only Bhils, so outstanding as to have become Government officials also belong to the same category. Quite recently three of their numbers were appointed as honorary magistrates at their respective places. Other Bhil tribes in Khandesh are: Nojri, Nihali, Pavri, Naikulli, Kajli, Kotli, Bardi, Ajrani, Kokni, Kotri, Dubli, and others.

These tribes often differ considerably as to intellectual gifts, disposition and character, social status, manners and customs and languages. The Pavri people do not even regard themselves as Bhils, boasting that they are Rajputs. It is possible that they have "royal" blood in their veins. Their posture and skin bespeak this. The Kokni people have been Hindunized and Marathaized to such an extent as to regard themselves too distinguished to be ranked among the Bhils. The Kators may not be pure Bhils. Their standard is lower than that of the Kandesh Bhils in general, and they form an inconsiderable minority in Khandesh. The Kotlis are on the whole are of a weaker character than the rest, they are also

less industrious and therefore the poorest among the bigger tribes. They are of low morals. Hundreds of their women are to be found as second or third wives or concubines with Mohammadans. From their ranks the army of prostitutes is being fed. Prostitution is otherwise an unknown institution among the Bhils. The Kotlis live around Nandurbar. The hill tribes i.e. Pavri, Nihali, Nojri, and some of the Valvi have the peculiarities of the hill people in a very marked way.

The Dehvali people live in the western part of Nan durbar Taluka (round Dhanora) and Taloda Taluka and in the Mewa States, which are ruled by Bhil princes. In Shahada, there are Bardi and Kajli people, which belong to the best type of Bhils. In Sindkheda there are Bardis and Airanis. In Shirpur and Dhulia Airanis are found. The latter ones have been highly enslaved by the people they live among, and more so by liquor.

The total number of Bhils in the country are 14,538,000, largest population in the states of Madhyapradesh is 5,190,000, then comes Gujrat(3,772,000), Rajsthan(3,531,000), Maharashtra(1,915,000), Chhattisgarh (12,000), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (5,900), Karnataka (3,200), Delhi (2,900), Tripura(2,400), Odish(1,300) Compared to other aborigines it will be found that the Bhils occupy the third place as far as numbers are concerned.. In importance however they do not lag behind these larger groups of aborigines.

### **The Family Festivals**

A Bhil who is himself a married man and a father relates as follows concerning an occasion of this kind:

When symptoms appear that the days of the prospective mother are up the women of the Neighborhoods are called in together with the midwife. The latter delivers her. When the child has been born, a hole is dug in one corner of the house for its bath. Close to this hole another one is dug where the placenta is thrown, where after the hole is filled with earth, which is packed. On the top of this, cowdung is plastered.

The child which uptill now has undergone only a meagre drycleaning with a rag or a piece of cloth, is now laid by the midwife on a piece of board which is placed over the first hole, where it is thoroughly washed together with its mother, who also has been placed on the board. Duties thus performed the mid-wife gets a few champas of grain from the house and leaves the house.

The mother then has to do the bathing both of herself and the child. This is done twice a day over the above-mentioned hole. Her food consists of water-gruel, which is served every three hours by a woman temporarily employed. After a lapse of five days the father of the child goes to the liquor shop from where he brings a few, generally six bottles of liquor. Arrived home he sends for the mid-wife again and the elder woman of the neighbourhood, who will be there very quickly. The first duty of the mid-wife will now be to perform "penchro punji" (the worship of the fifth day), to the honour of which deity this is done, remains her secret as a rule.

The worship having been performed, she fills up with earth the hole over which the child and her mother have been bathed. After having been packed it is plastered with cowdung, on which she draws a design of red lead and paint. Finally she sprinkles a little liquor on the top of the whole thing. Of the liquor the midwife takes a bottle with her home. What is left is divided between the women that have come and squatted down on the floor. They all help themselves liberally to it.



**Shy girl**

### **Naming the child**

The time has now come to give the child a name. The midwife gets up, takes a piece of cloth which she gives to two women to fold so as to make a swing or cradle of it in the form of a hammock, in which the child is placed. The midwife stands in the middle swinging the hammock while singing.

Should anyone try to scare thee, be not afraid!

Should any one try to deceive thee, be not deceived!

Then she stops the hammock, takes up the child and hands it to its mother. All the women now combine to give the child a name.

The name given is so chosen as to refer to the day on which the child was born or to some characteristic features of child. Thus for example, it may be called Navapuria to denote that it was born on a Saturday: Kalia, the black one, because of its complexion, or Raltia, the crying one, because it cried vehemently on entering this world and so on. Names of animals, such as, dog and tiger, cat, rat, bullock are rather common; and so are goblin, fairy and others of that kind. An ugly name will protect the bearer against evil spirits,

When this ceremony is over, the midwife is presented with two champas of grain, one bottle of liquor and one Rupee in cash for her services. Then she leaves the family. The other women who have squatted down also leave for their homes.

After this ceremony, the confined woman, who, however, now is up and around, is considered unclean (napak, unholy) for another month and a quarter, i.e. 35 days. During this period no one may touch her, let alone, eat anything she has put her hand to or dine together with her. Her meals are served to her in a special corner.

When the five weeks prescribed have elapsed, the whole family dines together again, all "eat from her hand", and that is to say, what she has cooked and is now serving. In other words, she reoccupies her position as wife and mother.



**Bhil Tribal**

## Marriage

Marriage in the Bhil country is a very complicated affair. Firstly, like many primitive people, the Bhils are exogamous. That is to say, they never marry within their own tribe. To do so would be regarded as incest, and the one guilty of it, would be excommunicated from his family and tribe. Secondly, it is not the young man himself that is in-charge of the negotiations in connection with the proposal. It is the mother, father and brothers. Thirdly, it is expensive to secure a bride. If thus the parents and the brothers (including cousins) do not approve of an early marriage or money should be lacking, the marriageable young man may have to wait for a long time with an aching heart, before he achieves his heart's desire.

Formerly the price of a bride was low. Fifty years ago it was fixed at Rs. 50/- or less. Nowadays it has risen to several hundred rupees. The story goes that a wealthy and prominent Bhil paid Rs. 2300/- for his bride. Under such circumstances it is no easy thing for the poor man to get married. In spite of the price to be paid for the bride it seldom or never happens that one comes across old spinsters or bachelors. Be it men or women they are practically without exception married at 20 or 25 years of age. The majority are, of course, married long before that age. As regards the marriage age, it is only during the last 50 years that child marriage has been practiced. Formerly marriage was not contracted before adolescence. In the folklore of this people one cannot find a single instance of the hideous Hindu practice of child marriage having been followed. Nowadays it is, alas, far from uncommon.

Polygamy exists as everywhere the countries. Most people have to be content with one wife due to the fact that the women otherwise would not suffice. It is estimated that 15% of the men have more than one wife, and out of these 1% have three or four. Although the Bhil woman does not have the same disposition as her European sister it must be admitted that polygamy often results in jealousy, quarrels, fighting and divorce and so on. The man on his part is just as jealous as any European might be. He looks upon his wife as his property, which he or his parents have honestly purchased. Woe unto him who dares to fall in love with his wife! That may mean death. Especially this is the case in Akrani. Otherwise he may be satisfied with getting the money he has paid out for his wife so as to enable him to buy another one. Divorces of this kind are rather common among the Bhils, especially on the plains. Before anything is said about engagement and wedding rites, some other peculiarities in connection with marriage must be mentioned.

One is the so-called levirate and the other is rather common usage of the bridegroom serving for several years with his prospective father-in-law for his bride. The levirate exists only among the Kotli tribe. But they regard it as proper for a younger brother to marry the widow of his deceased elder brother, whether she has any children or not by her first husband. An elder brother, however, may not marry the widow of a younger brother. That would be incest. For the elder brothers are regarded as fathers of the younger once.

The custom of serving the prospective father-in-law for the bride is common among all tribes, clans and tribal families. This is resorted to when for instance the young man has no money whereby to pay for the bride, or when the parents of the girl do not want to be separated from her. They then persuade a young man to become their "Koh-java", (son-in-law residing in the house.)

A "Koh-java" has to serve for about three years before he is allowed to marry the girl. During this time he works just as an ordinary servant, the only difference being that at meals he is served by the maiden of his choice. But this is the only relationship between them. Any intercourse of an intimate kind would be severely punished. It goes to the credit of the young and testifies to a strict discipline still in force that not one in ten should break this unwritten law.

Having come to the very act of the performance of the wedding it is said, that it is a complicated affair. There are no fewer than five stages with several subordinate ones that those concerned have to go through; or, to express it in a more dramatic way; it consists of five acts with several sense; quite a drama, then.

The first act deals with the proposal, which is played in the home of the girl by the parents and brothers of the young man. This is called "hogai" (making of one kin.) The second act contains the return visit by the girl's parents to the village and home of the youth. This is called "Koho-herulo" (inspecting the house). The third act is "dej" (giving of dowry) or the engagement. The fourth is naturally the

wedding which is called "voral" (with cerebral I). And the fifth act is "ano" (the coming). With this is meant the coming of the young wife to the family of her husband to stay there, after having paid a ceremonial visit to her parents' home after the wedding.

Space does not admit any descriptions of the many ceremonies performed in connection with a Bhil wedding. One or two things may, however, be mentioned. All the acts, with the possible exception for the first one, are accompanied with profuse drinking, dancing and playing. Liquor is literally flowing. And all, men, women, children, drink, Liquor is the burden of a marriage tale.

Another peculiarity is that the wedding hymns are sung only by women and children, and that it is a custom in these hymns to refer disparagingly to the one who is now be taken into the family, while the one belonging to one's own family is lauded without restraint. Thus for example the female relatives of the bridegroom tell in their singing that he is wealthy and noble, in possession of oxen, cows, buffaloes, and horses etc: in plenty, that he sits on a spirited charge with a saddle inlaid with gold and a golden saddle cloth; that he drinks finest liquor and eats the most delicious courses, and so on. About the bride, on the other hand, they sing that, by her poor parents and tribesmen, she has been bathed in the filthy urine of an ass, that she is poor as coolie, without other possessions than a donkey, which she rides on, or travels on foot, and drinks a mixture of cow-dung and water, eating pods and dross, and so on. Her girlfriends and female relatives sing in like manner about the bridegroom and in the same glowing terms about the bride as did the people of the bridegroom to his honour,

This peculiar custom corresponds with the boastful disposition of the Bhil. Does the Gond lack in self-confidence, the Bhil may be said to have got a double portion. This is revealed especially when he is drunk.

### **Death and Burial Customs**

As the wedding so has the burial five acts. There are also many scenes to each act. Liquor plays an important part here too. It flows as drink and offering, as a tribute to the deceased and in ceremonies of purification,

The first act is "duk", (suffering, sickness); the second "mot" (death); the third "tijajo" (burial), the fourth "kukri parulo" (chicken offering), and the fifth is "vori" (festival of remembrance with singing and dancing).

It is touching to observe the care and consideration bestowed on the deceased. He is presented with all kinds of commodities: clothes, ornaments, silver bars, money, water pitcher, pot house, liquor, tobacco and pipe, chickens, bread, spices, pulses, a cot (which has been used as a bier) etc: It is believed that he will need all these commodities in the other world, where conditions are regarded as similar to those in this world. In order to test whether the deceased has approved or not of the arrangements made, the floor of the house of mourning it's strewn with ashes whereon grains of com are thrown. This is done in the evening of the day of the burial. If, in the morning, foot-marks of rats can be seen in the ashes, this is a sign that what has been offered to and done for the deceased has met with his approval.

On the whole as in the details, the burial ceremonies present a sad spectacle without anything of inspiration. They bespeak fumbling in the dark before of death and eternity.

### **Languages**

In most cases they speak their own language or rather languages. During a Linguistic Survey executed by Government, no fewer than 15 languages or dialects were noted, including those spoken on the border lines as Khandesh Bhil dialects. Several of them are so closely related that by knowing one it is possible to understand other of them. Others, on the other hand, differ in such marked way that they have to be classified as different languages.

### **Dehvali**

The most important language is the one which is spoken in the western parts of Nandurbar and Taloda Talukas and in the Mewa States. This is called Dehvali, meaning the language of the plain. This name has been given to it because the majority of those having it as their mother tongue live on the plain.

About 80,000 Bhils and others living among them speaks Dehvali. It is no literary language, though. Before taking up work among the Bhils, there was not one single line written in that language. On the whole, it may be said, however, the Dehvali is still an uncultivated language. Nor is any glorious future to be expected for it. Like all similar minor languages it is doomed to extinction. This will, however, take some time. The major Bhil languages are bound to live for several generations yet, for the Bhil are a conservative people, especially as regards their language.

### **Valvi**

Up in Akrani, where Nandulwar is situated, four or five dialects of Bhili are spoken. The most important is no doubt Powri, which is spoken by the majority in this area. The Powri tribe also seems to be the most prominent of the hill tribes living here.

Nandulwar, however, is situated in a different dialectal area. The language of the people here is Valvi or Volvi. Most of the Bhils in Akrani speak this dialect. The Valvi speaking tribe numbers no more than five or six thousand people. Their language is, however, understood by a smaller tribe. Moyri, whose dialect is closely related to Valvi. The Moyris can only muster half the number. The number of the Powri tribe may be estimated at 10,000 persons if those living outside Akrani are included.

All Bhili dialects belong to the large Aryan family of languages. There are, however, traces indicating that the Bhils formerly have spoken another language. These traces are few, and have not had much influence on the construction of these dialects. They come closest to Gujerathi. The Valvi and Dehvali dialects are closely related as are the people speaking these languages. The construction of the Bhili languages is simpler than that of many other North Indian languages. They are comparatively easy to learn, provided grammars, readers, and dictionaries were compiled.

### **Religion**

The religion of the Bhils has hitherto been regarded as gross animism. For the present, however, it is in a transitory stage, being influenced very strongly by the crude form of Hinduism. Thus for example a number of the Hindu deities are being worshipped, as Hanuman (Maruti), Mahadev, (Shiva), Kali in the form of Devi, Parbati, and Bavani (Shiva's consort). In all some ten Hindu deities are being worshipped by the Bhils.

The Bhils also celebrate the main Hindu festivals: Dusherra, Diwali, Holi, etc., although they are given a peculiar expression which is very animistic in its character. A certain caste system is being developed, which points to Hinduism. All Bhils confess to be Hindus. And since Hinduism is so comprehensive as to have room for all and sundry, it may not be correct to call the Bhils non-Hindus or

On the other hand are the peculiarities so many and so important as to mark these people as different from the Hindus. They have their own religion, which ought to be more known. The Government officials and Hindu and other religious leaders are ignorant of its contents. Not even the missionaries know in its details, although some have been permitted to peep into it. On the whole it remains a closed world.

### **The Deities of the Bhils**

It is however, got to know some of the superficial features. Thus it is known that the Bhils have at least 25 or 30 deities of their own which they still worship, although they are not looked upon as Hindus. Hindu missionaries and reformers are trying their best to put a stop to this, but, according to their own statements, they have not succeeded. The village will be destroyed; and so they will have to call in sorcerers and diviners again and sacrificial priests in order to put everything right. And this will be too expensive, they say.

Among the Bhil deities are: the tiger, the boundary of field god, god Hivario, the village goddess Pandrio, the rain god Nonduro, and the hill gods, which are several in number. Hardly a month passes without the Bhils having to worship one of the 35 or 40 gods or goddesses which have been adopted. Of the latter kind there are names of sixteen and of the former nineteen.

The very rites of worship that is what mantras are mumbled, now the ceremonies are performed etc: are known to all. The majority of the Bhils do not know them, this is the business and secret of the

sacrificial priest. But this much is known, that the worship is always connected with liquor and offerings. As regards the use of liquor only two deities are excepted, namely Mahadev and Maruti (Shiva and Hanuman), both of which are Hindu deities.

The following are among unbloody offerings: grain, coconuts, bread of wheat, cooked dumplings, rice, eggs, sweets and milk, and as has already been mentioned, liquor. As bloody sacrifices are presented: buffaloes, bulls, he-goats, and cocks, Geldings and females are not acceptable sacrifices. The animal must be a male and without blemish, after the birth of a child, however, a hen is offered. The officiating person is then a woman, namely the midwife.

Similarly the milk that is to be offered must not be sour, nor eggs rotten. For the gods only the very best will suffice. The Bhils often eat other grain than rice and cheaper bread than wheat. But such things may not be presented as offerings to the gods. Other things required for a ceremonial sacrifice are red lead, sweet, oil and frankincense (from *Boswellia serrata*). The latter is used for incense and the lead for smearing the image. Two to four copper coins are also needed.

Of the deities of the Bhils, five have a day each set apart for them. On these days no one goes to work, neither beast nor man. All these days fall within the rainy season. They are: the rain god, the sun god, the field god, the tiger god, and the cattle god. On the day of the tiger god or on the previous evening, is also the snake worshipped. As has been seen the worship of these deities express the foremost needs of a primitive people a good crop, healthy cattle, and protection against wild animals. The other gods have no whole day set apart for them. But their annual sacrifice is accorded to them. This must not be neglected or the people of the village will have to put up with no end of trouble. With the exceptions of the Hindu gods, Hanuman and Mahadev the Bhil gods do not live in temples or shrines. Three of them have platforms of earth or stone. The hill gods live in the open.

Twenty-three deities are worshipped during the cold season, eight in the rainy season, and only two in the hot season. This arrangement has its natural reason. During the rains the most important gods of an agricultural and cattle attending people have to be worshipped. During the cold weather after the crops have been harvested people are in a position to afford the expenses connected with the sacrificial ceremonies. In the hot season, on the other hand, taxes and debts have to be paid. Then much is not left over for the gods.

As regards the sacrificial priests these serve their village. They are never house priests. Every house father is priest in his own house anyone may become a sacrificial priest (Punjari). But as a rule this calling is hereditary. The secrets of the worship are not revealed to anybody, except the prospective priests, which have been chosen by the Punjaris as their successors. The duties of the priest are not performed as a profession or a calling. The Punjari is a cultivator like the rest. A Brahman is never called in as sacrificial priest or spiritual adviser.

The majority of the male population of the village is present at the sacrificial acts. The leaders may not be absent without a valid reason. The sacrificial ceremonies having been completed, the Punjari distributes part of the things offered, which may be eaten by those present, including the priest. Some religious festivals are rounded off by heavy eating and drinking bout. The expenses are paid by the whole village in common. The fees for the priest are only one anna, the coins offered, the food and liquor he has helped himself too.

### **Evil Spirits**

In animism, an important part is played by the evil spirits, the demons, which are called 'Put' or 'Putlo'. Of these, only a few names are got to know. They are no doubt very numerous. The two that are most dangerous have their abode in graveyards and places for cremation. Should a person pass such a place when these demons are on their way out, he will be at their mercy and their evil influence will either cause illness or temptation to evil deeds, e.g. collecting and carrying cremation ashes with the hands and so on.

Most evil spirits live in trees, especially in hollow ones, others live in woods and on hills. One lives in Hades with the dead. Several have, however, taken up their abode with man, in his house or among his property etc. One may thus live in the bed, another one, in the bed poles, a third in the door frame, or in the door, a fourth in the threshold, a fifth in the ashes, and so on. Boldness is said to have its

evil spirit, poison insanity, the bird all have their evil spirits. While the gods are favourably disposed to men, the evil spirits are always hostile. They are the cause of bad luck. Disease and death are wrought by them. Similarly imbecility and insanity, they are always planning mischief. They have to be feared everywhere, for there is hardly a place whereof their kind does not have his rightful abode.

Among the demons or dangerous spirits are 'chural' and 'soti'. The first ones are ghosts of women which have died in confinement, after the child has been born, but before it has been named, that before the fifth day after birth. The last mentioned are ghosts of brides who have died after they have been dressed for the wedding, but before the ceremony has been performed. Both of these very dangerous spirits or ghosts have their abode in wells, brooks, swamp, more seldom in trees. Woe unto the one who runs up against a being of this kind! A soti is dangerous, especially to men, whom she will pursue, seduce and kill, should they happen to enter her sphere after dark. A 'chural' will treat a man in about the same manner as does a 'soti'. But she prefers women. If opportunity offers, she will take possession of a woman. This means illness and insanity, and, if she is not driven out, a certain death.

Fortunately a 'chural' may be identified. She always lights a torch when about to proceed on her tours; and if she is observed, several torches will be seen around her. Her feet are turned and her front side has the appearance of a fully developed woman, while her back is hollow like a trough.

### **Witches and Magicians**

Belief in witchcraft, magic, ghosts, and sorcery. These, especially the witches, play an important part among the Bhils. There are, of course, magicians but they are not as numerous nor is their ability so great or disposition so vicious as is the case with the witches. A 'dagan' (witch) is almost worse than a demon. All sorts of bad luck and ruin, illness and death are caused by witches. They are therefore much feared. In reality those that occupy themselves with sorcery are very few in number. Most of those that are alleged of witchcraft are probably innocent. But there are those who practice witchcraft as an occupation. Whatever may be the case, if a woman has been pointed out as one who has 'eaten' a person, she will from that moment on remain a most deplorable creature. She will be pursued, ill-treated and expelled from society.

### **Ghosts of people that have met with an accidental death.**

If 'chural' and 'soti' may be said to represent also conceptions found in popular Hinduism, the case will be different when it comes to another of spirits; ghosts of people that have died by accident. It is true that in places these are worshipped also by the lower classes of the Hindus. But, they do not elsewhere play such an important part as among the Bhils. To die by accident is, curiously enough, not looked upon with horror by the Bhils. It is rather a good form of death. The one who has parted in this way, be it man, woman or child is said to have gone to the gods. And this is a reason to perpetuate his memory on earth. He simply becomes a god. This happens in the following way:

After the burial in the ordinary graveyard, either a staff is made or a stone, three feet in length, is hewn. A picture of the deceased is carved on the wooden staff or hewn out of the stone. Over the head are drawn pictures of the sun, and the moon, and under the feet a pictorial description of his death is engraved. Thus for example, if he was drowned, the memorial will have a well or a river; if he died by falling down from a tree, from a cart, or a horse, a picture of the thing connected with his death will be formed.

When the memorial is ready and clothes, ornaments, food and liquor have been bought for the new god, for that is what it will become, and sacrificial requisites and frank incense have been secured, three or four 'bhagats' (witch doctors) are called in to perform the ceremony. This is done with secret rites, sawing, mumble of mantras and a maximum of pageantry in the presence of all the male population of the village. Those of the women who are next of kin are also in the procession which now moves towards the house of mourning. Just outside the village the officiating priest makes a halt, causes a hole to be dug in the ground, in which the stone or the wooden staff, properly clothed, will be placed. Then it is smeared with lead diluted in oil. At the feet of it is offered liquor and the very best of food, cooked and raw. To the upper bracelets are tied.

After this dedication the priests together with the crowd of people that have been invited make a big tree in the shade of which they sit down. Here liquor and costly food are taken of copiously. When the time comes for the priest to come home, they receive a sum of money, not less than ten rupees for their services, and everybody leaves for home. The new god is now called 'path' if the memorial is of wood, and 'khotro' if of stone. The god will be worshipped by the people of his family, often by others as well. Before sowing, harvesting and threshing, and winnowing, and on numerous festivals this god has to be remembered with foodstuffs of rice and wheat and liquor, which never must be lacking, and a burning oil-lamp. Every village has one or more gods of this kind placed at its boundary.

### **Medicine, Men and Witch Priests**

If magicians and witches have no enviable position among the Bhils, medicine men and witch priests (madvi, bhagat, and hovrio) are given a place of honour and are very influential men. For they are not mischievous, that is, they do not try to destroy people and cattle or eat them. Their duties are to investigate about the causes of bad luck and illness and remove them. They are also acquainted with the lives of gods, demons and other spirits and are able to teach this subject extensively. The madvi also knows how to appease the wrath of demons, ghosts and goblins and give them the kind of worship they crave. In like manner a bhagat is acquainted with the gods and knows how to fill their needs.

But these 'Benefactors' of the people are not employed but practice in a private capacity. They know how to charge their clients heavily. As a rule, they are held in high esteem. People believe in their ability to make out the whereabouts of spirits, the causes of illness etc. from water, leaves from the flame of the forest, wings of peacocks or coarse paper, or copper coins. Just as deeply rooted is their belief in their ability to cure disease, drive out evil spirits and bind them etc.

### **Treatment of Spirits**

There exist many rules and regulations, rites and customs, with a view to avoiding the evil influence of spirits. Thus certain trees, wells, places, woods and clefts in the rocks must not be visited without company or after dark, as they are supposed to be dangerous. Amulettes have to be used or else a special ring or another protective article. Even so one has every reason to be on one's guard, to be cautious, as one is surrounded on all sides by divine beings, which one may have offended unwittingly, and evil spirits, goblins, ghosts and other bad being which are always looking for an opportunity to harm a person.

The tricks of deceiving or binding the spirits are many. Only a few examples may be given. When a woman who has died in confinement is to be buried, seeds of sesame and grass are thrown on the path between the boundary of the village and the grave yard up to the grave. This is to prevent her from reaching her home when during the first five weeks she will wander about every night trying to kill her child. This is done in the following way: Having left the grave for her old home she will stop to pick the seeds one after the other till the cock-crow. Then she will return to her grave, replacing the seeds one by one till she reaches the grave again. She will rest till the following night, when the same thing will be repeated. It is to the nature of the thing that a sufficient number of seeds are put out in order to keep the ghost more than occupied for the night. Another example. When a 'chural' has been discovered as having her abode in a woman, she will be driven out and confined to a tree by hammering several nails into the trunk of the tree. In all their childish simplicity these examples are touching and clarify better than words the low standard of the Bhils in matters spiritual.

### **The Ethics of the Bhils**

The ethical views of the Bhils do not range very high. Direct commandments and prohibitions, expressed in concisely formed sentences do not exist. Rules and regulations, without the attention to which a society cannot survive, are nevertheless to be found. They are theoretically imbedded in their proverbs and rather numerous tales and stories, which are encountered within every tribe. Practically they are revealed in customs and usages, the age-long authority of which none dares to oppose. This might mean death in certain cases. Taking into consideration their highly unsatisfactory religion, it must be admitted that the Bhils are a people of a comparatively high moral standing. They compare favourably

with the genuine Hindus. On the whole they are more truthful. For a primitive they are of remarkable good manners. A Bhil that has not been degenerated will scrumptiously regard the right of ownership. And still he is not greedy or ungenerous. In some respects the sexual ties are very strong. That much in their favour. The dark spots on the character of the Bhils are, however, many and big. Drunkenness is probably more common among them than with any other people in India. Quarrels and frays, which often end in murder, are horribly common, especially among the hill tribes. Adultery is also very common, often leading to divorce, when the offender after having paid to the offended man the sum fixed by the village or tribal council, will take the woman he has fallen in love with as his wife. Then his position in society may be just as honourable as anybody else's.

The belief in sorcery and witchcraft darkens the life of many. It has caused murders without number. By their profound ignorance, which is looked upon almost as a virtue, the people are kept down in poverty, weakness of mind and body, which do not admit their intellectual growth or their looking for higher ideals.

In their treatment of woman the Bhils are more advanced than the Hindus. She is free and the widow is allowed to remarry and may choose her own husband. But her condition is not enviable. She is practically sold as a bride. In the tribal or village council she has no say. In the worship of "the gods this holds also true with one exception. If she dies as a bride or in confinement she will become an evil spirit, which is to be feared. Only if she dies by accident will she become a divine being. These details show that their reverence for a woman is deficient.

### **Belief in Transmigration of Soul The Bhils and Eternal Hope**

There is no eternal hope with the Bhils. It is true that they believe in immortality, but their conceptions of it are very vague. When a person has died he is said to have gone to God. It is not believed however that he will remain there for any length of time, let alone for eternity. Within short, some say after a day, he has to return to this world being born as a different man. Nobody knows the length of this transmigration. Nor does anybody know where or within which people he will be born again. It is only known that he will be reborn as a human being.

Behind the belief in a multitude of gods and goddesses the Bhil has caught a glimpse of a supreme Being, which he calls either Bhogvano or Ponmissar. In his heart of hearts he believes in this Being. Hence the spirit of the deceased goes to him. Bhogvano means the shining one, the adorable one, the glorious one etc. Ponmissar means the Overlord, the Supreme Being, the supreme or only God.

### **Social Life**

To lease an improved and rational system of living on the culture of an aboriginal tribe may stimulate the less critical observer to nourish feelings of surprise. Aborigines and their primitive culture acquired, thanks to disorted reports of explorers who usually culminate their investigations by releasing a flood of minimising and prejudicial literature on the subject-acquired the reputation of forming the elements of the lowest possible strata of human advance and this stage of affairs became an ill-used criterion applied by mankind who, only too eager to cover its own shortcomings, loves to draw attention to those inhabitants of the Earth less advanced (or should one; say less shrewd) than itself. Contempt and the cherished manner of looking down on less fortunate fellow-creatures resulted consequently in harmful misunderstanding which could so far not be drowned by the voices of a very limited number of interested and understanding investigators. Even the school books are packed with wrong and entirely misleading description so the life, modes of living and cultural manifestations of aborigines and it is hardly astonishing that this type of knowledge - once established in the receptive mind of a young grain-tends to remain fixed. The mere mention of the word "Junglewallah" provokes a shudder, projecting fantastic scenes of naked tribesmen hunting in hostile virgin-forests, notions of squalor and filth, primitive life in caves and blood thirsty feasts on unspeakably repulsive kinds of food. The Press, magazines and Film further corrupt the minds of children and adults by presenting the aborigines in a manner irresponsible and positively prejudicial, exploiting by this means man's utterly regrettable inclinations to see and to

hear something about hair-raising habits of some isolated and neglected tribe. The impression is created that one should be very glad to belong to a more cultured circle, apart from a deliberately fostered tendency to keep aloof from those wretched creatures the sight of which is already enough to drive anyone to fits. Did not every one of us read thrilling stories of aborigines who roast their slain opponents to death? Certainly cannibalism did exist, though it has long been proved that cannibalism was based on a carnal lust and cruelty, but no-body felt prevented to believe that this kind of barbaric lack of consideration that contributed so much to the rather doubtful reputation of aborigines is nothing else than a ritualistic manifestation of a certain type of culture excellent in the eyes of the adherents, but not too pleasing in the eyes of the civilised world.

Besides, the city-dweller whose whole outlook on life is exclusively centred on appearances, make-ups, aping of superiors, fashions and super-smart chit-chat on world-reforms, brotherhood and mutual understanding etc. feels instinctively repulsed when he is compelled to contact a stray-member of an aboriginal tribe. The junglewallah is usually the exponent of poverty and shabbiness his simple manners do not make him eligible to membership of dandy-clubs and not to wellfed in addition, the tribesman unwillingly contributes to the maintenance of wrong ideas as to him. This shy and helpless behaviour, his embarrassment apparently stress that he merely belong to the skum of mankind. The impression is indeed quite wrong; some junglewallahs maybe rascals, the majority, however, incorporated more candable elements into the simple but pure culture of their tribes, thought less civilised as they may be, the aborigine positively represents, a most valuable type of man and it is the very object of this study to analyse, to compare, to sift and to separate the characteristics of aborigines with the aim of establishing a definite programme of rejuvenation, reform and appreciation. This paper is not intended to be another ethnological treatise, though based on ethnology; it aims at the creation of a new spirit, a new attitude. Once consciousness is acquired, it will ultimately result in a new culture and mental outlook combining the best that the so-called primitive and the advanced civilizations have to offer. Logically, only those who deeply plunged into this most fascinating subject are entitled and able to undertake such a task.

Besides, the great number of tribes makes it from the very beginning impossible to consider all the good elements of all the various tribal cultures and, consequently, the writer prefers to limit his scheme- though not lessening it in value -to a comparative study of the Bhils who, after an existence in exclusion casting many centuries, have succeeded in preserving an exceedingly high culture absolutely from hampering influences from outside. A culture sparkling with life, simplicity, honesty and a notable absence of hypocrisy. These assets alone are worthy of any effort. Present day's life became so cramped an affair, complicated in all its details, dominated by greed, falsehood and hypocrisy, boredom and lack of sincerity and it is imperative to question the usefulness of so wretched a force which our lives have happened to become-through our own fault. One should listen to the song of aborigines peacefully relaxing in the shade of a mohur tree? A song so free from worldly haste, so rich in sound, saturated with a melodious narrative of love, frank longing, fulfillment and happiness. This language should be learnt to understand and once understood, one will cease to be slaves of one's own life and self-created institutions.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the origin of the Bhils. Many writers have stated that they inhabit their land since the dawn of history and not being able to contradict such a statement, matters are left as they are, in as much as they have no direct bearing on the aims of this publication. One circumstance, however, is noteworthy. The Bhils do not stand back in their earliest efforts to discover the great riddle that envelops the creation. The small selection of mythological accounts that follows proves that the Bhils, despite an entire absence of any form of intercourse with any of the highly advanced - but now extinguished - peoples or nations, acquired beliefs not much unlike those the great Western Cultural movements. Anybody acquainted with the mythology of the East will not have the impression that the religious myth of the Bhils offers anything fundamentally new or distinguishable. But this is not the point; the realization that the Bhils were-despite the lack of contact with the outer world-able to develop a theory not (in principle) much different than the mythological interpretations of dominant folk groups in India and elsewhere, is witness of an advanced degree of reasoning. It is not intended to claim that the Bhils succeeded in discovering the facts that really governed the act of creating the Universe. They are

positively utterly mistaken, though aiming at the proper demonstration of the great trend that characterises everything produced by the Bhils, namely simplicity and the desire to seek delight even in un-explainable happenings. Simplicity is the key-note; the inexplainable is taken for granted. For the sake of convenience, gods act in the same way as any Bhil would like to act. This very convenient attitude attributed to the Creative Powers was without hesitation applied when human problems were at stake. If everything is feasible in theory, then it should as well be feasible in practice and no worry or anxiety is able to produce anything creative. The Bhils adopted such a simplified outlook on life as one of the main objects of their existence.

It must be stressed that it is not intended to advocate as truth the religious beliefs of the Bhils nor will it ever deem desirable to make any attempts aiming at a world-wide establishment of a new religion based on Bhil beliefs. Should, however, the introduction of a new belief result in a losing of those harassing conventions that strangle our present life, well, in such a case it would be justified to do so. The conflict that would result would, however, culminate in more damage than good and the solid points therefore to the mere acceptance of a desirable attitude and out-looks.

There is not the slightest doubt that our present civilization resulted in an unheard advance. Innumerable amenities are at our disposal, new inventions make us believe that our lives became richer and worthwhile living, though it must be admitted that this type of advance deprived us from any chance to live in a natural way, to express ourselves freely, to act accordingly to our desires, to express our feelings in a fashion devoid of hypocrisy, man has himself completely undermined confidence in himself and his brethren are no more able to meet him on terms of mutual goodwill and understanding. Present day's life is absolutely barren of simplicity, all watch each other with fear and have to maintain an uninterrupted state of alert and the whole atmosphere in which we move seems to be saturated with poisonous vapours. This is the result of civilization.

Now, any advance that really results in an advancement of our liberties can only be sought by struggling against those powers that corrupted our very existence. There is no need to discard the good, through there is no limit, in acquiring more properties and by pointing to the culture of the Bhils, it must be understood that nobody is expected to accept without reservation any out-of-date conceptions that might still linger in the minds of the Bhils. Unconditional surrender of the whole structure of our own outlook is bound to be followed by an irrational upheaval and it is more advisable to borrow from others. One can borrow a good deal from the Bhils, though, of course, they as well have to borrow from us, but it will be demonstrated that the aboriginal has greater treasures to distribute than any member of the highly advanced races.

### **Cosmology**

The Bhils share the belief that the Universe consisted in the beginning merely of an enormous boundless sheet of water, enveloped in darkness. This state of affairs was, however, interrupted by the appearance of an enormous light which emitted a bell-like sound. This sound, gaining in volume, acquired the shape of a man who, far from being passive set out to create various parts of the Universe by putting his hands on the sheet of water and continents appeared wherever his hands came in contact with the wet element. The stretches of water dividing the continents were conveniently called the sweet sea, the saltish sea, the Chik Sea, the kid sea, the black, the oily and the yellow sea. The whole Universe was thereafter in an orderly fashion divided into 9 parts though a tenth region had to be added suitable for the erection of a holy town.

As soon as it became evident that a reliable source of light must be made available, the huge man ordered that a sun has to appear, whilst a softer light was required for the illumination of nightly sceneries. Additional arrangements caused the moon to increase and decrease which greatly aided the inhabitants of the World to determine time and seasons.

In order to animate the Earth, insects were created by God, first those that live in the water and those that live on the firm surface of the Earth. An additional blessing was added in the shape of grasses, trees, shrubs and fruits and the insects soon understood that they are meant to grow for their own maintenance and protection. God furthermore decided that the introduction of the Summer, Rainy and Winter Seasons would greatly facilitate matters and he did accordingly.

God, however, was not satisfied with the thought that His creation was merely inhabited by insects and he took thus some earth into his hands and moulded to human beings, a man and a woman. By the blow of his breath life was impacted to the moulds and with His blessings the two started to rule over the Earth and over everything on it.

The first man and the first woman - called Mahadev and Parwati - became the ancestors of all mankind. Their son and daughter formed one union resulting in a vast multiplication and everyone has to trace his origin back to this couple. Though the increasing number of men soon resulted in a clash of opinions and various castes and religions resulted from the quarrel, but everybody was as liberty to follow his own vocation, some occupied themselves with the cultivation of their lands; others served or reared domestic animals.

Everything went well and according to plan, but everybody felt that the sky was still missing and the impassionate God created the sky covering the whole Universe, adorned by the sun and the moon. In order to prevent the sky from falling down, the sky had to be well fixed and He used for this purpose a good many nails. The nails are still to be seen; they acquired the form of stars and it is worth mentioning that God abstained from using the nails indiscriminately. The nails were placed in such a position that they represented the outline of things well known on Earth, and He omitted not to design a cot, a bird sitting on its eggs, a plough, a thief and a dog. On the moon, so ample in space, a banyan tree was planted and on one of its spreading branches a witch was hanged as a warning to the entire world. The witch is still hanging there to-day.

Sincere in his endeavors to maintain the world in good order, God passed orders regulating the health of man and beast. Thus, God desire that we keep our house and its surroundings clean by sweeping the refuse into gullies or watercourses. Fortunately, sweepers are available to occupy themselves with such a task, but so far as the jungles had to be cleaned themselves. The dirt of the jungle and the remains of fallen animals are eaten by other creatures and foulness and evil smell is removed. The leaves falling from the trees are swept away by the wind and deposited elsewhere till the rains burst. The torrents recondition hills and valleys, carry the dirt to the sea where it is finally consumed by insects - burdened with the task of keeping the seas transparent and clear. And by this means sun-light, air and water, insects and animals became helpers of God.

This legend, incorporating the main principles of the religious beliefs of the Bhils, underwent alterations and variations of the same theme are narrated wherever Bhils have settled down. There is, for instance, the story told of 7 sisters who, after being created by God, were ordered to descend to the bottom of the sea. The 7 sisters obeyed the command and as soon as their feet touched the sea-bottom, they set out to collect sand and earth (mud), forming with great care piles which, after assuming proper size and shape, became the continents. God was highly pleased with the excellent work done by the diligent sisters and he extended these the invitation to remain and to settle. He promised to send every year a rainy season conveying a feeling of happiness and freshness to everything on Earth. The 7 sisters readily succumbed to this generous suggestion and since that day the arrival of the monsoon is everywhere expected with joy and longing.

Another legend goes a step- father. Its origin is so far noteworthy as it clearly demonstrates that the Bhils, despite the utter primitiveness of their conceptions of the Universe, pondered the destinies of man. Fate, and the impossibility to escape from it, has apparently to a large extent occupied their mind. The sisters related to in the following legend certainly occupy the same status as an Angel of the mythology of other races. Their functions, at least, are the same.

As the time the Almighty created Mahadev and Parvati, he created simultaneously 2 sisters who were employed in the service of God. They were given the task of writing down the fate of newly born children. One of the sisters settled such items as the life in general, happiness, the various difficulties that have to be met in the course of the life and, finally death, whilst the second sister was empowered to fix by the means of notes the degree of wealth and earthly riches that fate kept in store for each individual. No power on Earth is strong enough to change or to alter the dictations bound to develop as predestined.

The Bhil's fatalistic attitude towards fate is certainly one of the reasons that led them to acquire a sense of helplessness. Lack of impulsive initiative so far as their well-being and prosperity is concerned, is one of the characteristics so inherent in Bhils that much time will be needed before a change to the better becomes noticeable.

One more legend may be added. It originated in the desire to explain how it is possible for the Earth to resist the laws of gravity. God overcame this difficulty by placing the Earth on the head of a snake and, so that legend runs, the snake sometimes feels the heavy burden resting on her head and in an attempt to get rid of her, the whole Universe is set into vibrations and the strange phenomenon becomes noticeable in the form of an earth-quake.

It is inconceivable how this strange, fantastic and rather absurd myth kept strong and alive during the centuries. It is therefore justified to say that those stories solely survived on account of the fact that bards and professional story-tellers chose them as particularly suitable. A primitive mind is attracted by glorified primitiveness and the circumstance that the very act of creating the Universe was a deed so absolutely beyond his power of comprehension fostered probably a feeling of appreciation of the supernatural. No part, (not even an alteration of it) of Bhil mythology was ever incorporated into his religious beliefs. On the contrary, the Bhil ponders very little over God. He merely believes that (some kind of a) God is great and powerful and his worship consists only in applying some zinc-chloride or stones and boulders, being quite satisfied that the sight of white painted stones not only pleases God, but will also stimulate future generations to remember the existence of God. Sometimes a temple is visited after having equipped themselves with a sufficient quantity of zinc-chloride which is more or less lavishly, smeared on the very next best stone in sight, being it within the temple or nearby. On such occasions chappals and boots are removed, one bows slightly but not without reverence and the bow becomes obligatory when-ever the road passes a stone auspiciously shining with a coat of paint.

Now, nobody is expected to imitate the Bhils so far as the ritual of their religion is concerned. Our attention is, however, drawn to the admirable lack of complicating factors. Religion ceases to be a menace; the Bhils do not believe in any kind of hellish existence after death. One might be plagued with all kinds of devilish inconveniences during life time, but they are neither wished nor caused by God. It is God's business to be present at least somewhere in the Universe and, apart his whereabouts, He is expected to notice painted stones and show by means of some kind of benevolent manifestation that even the most insignificant efforts is highly appreciated.

Taking into consideration that religious conflicts never upset the Bhil community and that no bitter feud ever resulted from doctrinal differences opinion, one dares say that this type of extremely simplified religion possessed more merits than usually admitted. The religion as such does not matter, the resulting attitude is most remarkable and, provided that the "civilized" world desires to learn something from so primitive a tribe, many of us should consider it worth the candle to scrutinize the response towards the religion into which one is born. Be it again stressed that no attempt is made to gain converts, it is merely desired that we should cease to make our life too burdensome by attaching great importance to trifles. Life is encrusted with a host of disputable bagatelles.

Much has been said as to religion. Religion is certainly of great educational value and one of the main pillars that supports the structure of Human Society. Unfortunately, religion acquired many grotesque forms or developed complicating ramifications which, grotesquely estranged from the principal idea that formed the initial foundation, lost their right to exist and is merely maintained for the sake of tradition. No country encouraged this trend more than India. Continuously splitting up in sections and sub-sections, the religious outlook became as confused as the sections into which man started to divide his circle or society, hardly leaving chances open to those who rather prefer to escape. 'Advanced Civilization' or its wrong interpretation is one of reasons. If mankind had remained simpler or had considered simplicity a value impossible to replace, man's craving for new variations of the existing would not have driven us so far. In some countries, it became fashionable to applaud and follow anything that is new, particularly if the new caters for those of us who believe to have finally discovered something

that might satisfy their longing for sophisticated mental torture and mortification. Happiness is neither at the bottom of such distorted longings, nor any happiness ever results by rushing uninterruptedly to new ideas. The old and well-established but lightheartedly discarded religious attitude of yesterday became nearly a thing of the past though not everywhere. The Bhils, for instance, are far away from lending a hand to bigotry, they never think of expressing any doubts so far as their religion is concerned and feel perfectly happy about it. The desire to complicate existing does not exist and although the ritual of painting stones does not appeal to adherents of other religions, it still remains a fact that the Bhils derive a certain satisfaction and consolation from doing so and, as the spirit counts and not the deed, one may justly say that one can indeed adopt the liberal idea and apply them in such a way that one frees one self from chains which we ourselves have slung round our ankles. Bhil religion is not devoid of heathenly outlooks, but should they desire to do so, nobody should ever attempt to destroy their own beliefs not as long at least as the horizon of their happiness remains undisturbed.

First as much as the mysterious events of the creation of the Universe merely awakened the desire to marvel at it and to wrap it into a mantle of glory, in the same way religion is approached by the Bhils and they are more than satisfied that if in transit values generally attached to things by which we are influenced or surrounded should not be clarified and codified, as nothing can be gained by it. Clarification creates problems and each problem can only be solved by creating more and such a thing is, of course, not the path on which a Bhil would like to stroll. He is not dominated by religion, it is taken partly as a necessity, partly as the cause and reason of a good number of festivals and holidays and nobody, not at least a Bhil, has ever resented a festival.

It is undoubtedly not a coincidence that even the tribes-man-who has never heard of any alike aspirations of other nations made many a start in order to reveal the even greater mysteries of life after death. Nobody has so far succeeded in tearing the veil that conceals the greatest of all mysteries, though it is more than amazing that so primitive a mind came to the same conclusions as did more advanced groups. It is likely that tales, describing the dreadful things that will happen to any wicked person after death, circulated in the earliest times during which group movements and migrations took place. It can, however, not with certainly be denied that the Bhils possessed great imaginative power, combined with the desire to describe in such a manner the difficulties that await the sinner, that they represent any kind of punishment that could possibly be administered by themselves here on Earth, in case they were called upon to do so. Many things are described as wicked, for instance "driving cows from a field". A trifle in itself and extremely insignificant in the eyes of those who are not acquainted with life in village and jungle, but, alas, inferno awaits those who drive cows away, where they will be joined by those who are back-biters, cheats, liars or rogues or by departed souls of man who indulged into the following bad deeds; torturing an innocent animal, deceit, murder, intercourse with the wife of another man, unnatural intercourse or any sexual relations with sisters, sister's daughter, aunt or grand-mother etc., infanticide, seducing a woman, theft, putting obstacles into good deeds, showing the house of a butcher, setting fire to houses, destroying corn with the help of mantras, refusing water to the thirsty, insulting the sage or a monk, destroying young plants, disobedience to parents, not must one be accustomed to rapt — Well, everybody who is found guilty of anyone of those offences will be required to answer for them at the gate of heaven. The road leading to heaven's gate is not an easy one; the disciples of god Yama drag the souls of the departed along a path ten times sharper than a sword, whilst those who behaved well during life-time reach Paradise with ease and comfort. Many calamities await the wicked sinner's soul pits and ditches filled with scorpions, fire, serpents, ants and worms form a perpetual menace and only those who succeed in getting through this infernal maze ultimately manage to approach God.

As in any other religion, punishment awaits the bad. It is a kind of belief that crept into every creed; particularly useful if it is meant to influence the ignorant. It was actually, much better if fear was entirely obliterated from religion. There is no such thing like hell and infernal torture; God who created us, presented us in the same time with the ability to act wrong and as the wrong takes place during our earthly life and is so closely related to our life, any kind of wrong is punished here on this earth. Many escape punishment; others do not feel it or refuse to realize it. The threats of punishment after death are merely means of checking uncontrolled action and serve to maintain order. The soul, if there is any, has

little to do with any deeds dictated by bodily lust or physical cravings and can therefore not be punished after death.

The Bhils inclination to take things as easy as possible finds expression in all his way of life. No doubt, they could be happier as they are and it is rather essential to rid them of certain rude customs which could be achieved by introducing social reforms. Popularizing social reforms faces, however difficulties due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the settlements or villages. Besides, people living in remote village are inclined to be obstinate and headstrong so far as their own social customs are concerned, though, here again, the same attitude can be observed in towns with the only difference that constant contact with strangers is bound to result in a change of the ways of viewing things and a certain progress to the better usually results in the mitigation of limited and crude aspects that, by tradition, deprive social customs of any elastic adaptability. The villager and particularly the tribesman who dwells in forest and jungle usually suffers from some kind of inferiority complex which stimulates the desire to cultivate friendship exclusively with co-members of his own society, avoiding, so far as possible, contact with the world beyond the limit of the forest outskirts, a ban to the free development of their faculties is created which, of course, resulted in backwardness. Although the Bhils are to a large extent themselves responsible for this state of affairs, many circumstances work together making it impossible to achieve the desired goal, even if a good number of Bhils had the intention to cast away certain crude customs and adopt those of more advanced clans or groups. Language is one of the chief obstacles and it should be attempted to introduce at least one common that could be understood by everybody. Only then will it be possible to bring them to the level of other advanced communities.

One question arises: Who is to be blamed? The tribesman was deliberately made to feel that he is an extremely backward and ignorant creature and no possibilities and chances were offered to him to rid himself from so wrong an exposition. Provided efforts are made, steps could soon be taken that would lead the Bhils to cultivate the desire to contact the outer world. Such a chance was so far only very sparsely offered to hill-tribes. It was, on the contrary, not even wished that a change of outlook on life overlooked; they prefer to deal with an ignorant clientele from which greater profits can be extracted. Thus, the more shrewd communities can, directly and indirectly, be made responsible for the backwardness of the Bhils who, not inclined to worry much about it, left things as they are. Lack of ambition and the complete absence of any thirst of power kept the Bhils in the background or in a kind of perpetual exile. Many traditions, customs etc. had hereby the change of being preserved and it is only too natural that they differ widely from those in use by wealthy town folk. Town-dweller is, however, not therefore entitled to detest the primitive man. The latter has to a large extent in ancient days taken part in the gradual formation of our present social structure and it is certainly not the fault of the aboriginal that others managed to outflank him. The more intelligent man will always surpass ignorant, though ignorance has nothing in common with stupidity and the Bhils are certainly not stupid. They might be careless and easy-going, but one should take into consideration that a stay in any locality remote from the rest of the world exercises a paralysing effect. Items that seem so important elsewhere, dwindle into insignificance and in-stead of acquiring additional faculties, mind and body feels dragged into the claws of animalism. The whole reason of life appears futile, struggle becomes absurd and resignation invades the mind. It is from this very angle that one had to jungle the aborigines; it is preposterous to expect from them anything with which they simply cannot be acquainted. Anybody, for instance, who derives his livelihood by collecting forest-produce hardly enabling him and his family to exist, will exhibit such a passive attitude. Accustomed to a dreary life and knowing that the lot of his forefathers did not vary in any way, does not feel induced to effect a change or, better even, he acquires the conviction that his ways of living are the best possible. In case he shares such an opinion with others, an atmosphere of happiness and contentment can be created and maintained. Not knowing the lure of refinement, he is satisfied with the available and consequently happier than those who hastily rush from one innovation to the other, not even taking time the possibilities of one of them.

Thus, primitiveness of the aborigin is not disqualifying and primitiveness excuses a certain crudeness that slipped into his daily life, though crudeness may riot be looked upon from that angle by the aborigin himself. In his eyes it is merely a lively, but natural manifestation of his own sphere. The

introduction of reforms might possibly upset the equilibrium and instead of imparting benefit, the decreased pressure of handed down tradition can eventually result in a moral upheaval and uproot whatever was firm so far. It will at least happen in extreme cases. In case now if his fellow-brethren object to tribesman's being coarse and rude, in such a case it is perfectly alright to be crude, because by being crude they merely cater for the expectations of those who do not for one moment expect anything else. The introduction of refinement would only result in creating a ridiculous atmosphere of dandyism and far away from being understood, the trespasser will only feel uncomfortable and try to fall back on the old standard, or even go beyond it in order to recapture his lost position. Uplift, provided it aims at the amelioration of financial calamities, is always welcome, but every step that attempts to transform a Bhil into a student of Shakespeare's works is wrong. The aboriginals will not benefit by it and Western Civilization will not see any blessing in it. The ability to read and write their own language is much more praiseworthy and if this is achieved, the Bhils can for themselves decide if it is necessary to change their habits.

With the view to stress that foreign influence is not always beneficial a few notes will follow; notes collected in places where Bhils are living. Moreover, the contents of these notes are utterances of Bhils themselves and it will be seen that education is not at all looked upon as an asset.

Faithfulness, hospitality, strictest adherence to truth, chivalry towards women, respect for civilised person, and for the Administrator are virtues of the Bhils for generations past.

So far as faithfulness and reliability go, no un-educated Bhil has so far disappointed. If he is entrusted to take a certain sum to a certain person, he will by all means faithfully carry out the command. The educated Bhil, however, cannot be relied upon; he will most certainly spend the entrusted sum somewhere and somehow for himself and refuge in all sorts of excuses in order to conceal the non-delivery of the money to a third person.

In short, faithfulness and reliability disappear as quickly as education advances. From time immemorial, the laws that govern hospitality were irrefutable. If a guest arrives at the house of the poorest man where absolutely no food is available, the host will all the same inquire if his guest wants to share a meal with him and the offered meal will be available, even it means borrowing from the neighbours. The educated Bhils who pretend that their smaller knowledge rendered them un-approachable and dignified, does not feel inclined to extend hospitality to visitors, at least not if the visitor is uneducated. This change of one of the fundamental virtues of man is, by the Bhils themselves, ascribed to the corrupting influence of education; very little seems to be gained when instruction results in the abandonment of friends and relations, only because of the tatter's lack of knowledge of the ABC.

In the eyes of the Bhil, the speaking of untruth is one of the most despicable crimes. Whatever happened, the Bhil will always give a most correct description, even if it is detrimental to him. Even in case of homicide he has puzzled the courts of law and justice. The uneducated Bhil always confesses without restraint and his strong urge to speak the truth is by no means diminished by the knowledge that punishment may be hard. The slightly polished Bhil behaves differently. He uses his insufficient knowledge in such a way that any commitment of his appears distorted in his favour; he hides and conceals the truth with the express aim of sparing himself from punishment. So the aborigin himself condemns any sort of education, firmly believing that the ability to read and write undermines tradition and custom and it is not astonishing that he eyes with disfavour the influences exercised by towns. It is likely that a good number of educated Bhils still abstain from violating the laws of their clans, though they cannot escape the sinister impression they create in the eyes of their uneducated brethren by reading books of any kind.

The uneducated Bhil is always fond of his wife. The wives are not unduly petted; they are well watched by their husbands and trespassing is certainly not allowed. Should any woman supply proof to her husband that she is guilty of unfaithfulness, in such a case punishment is dealt out in the form of a good thrashing or, if it comes to that, he murders his wife straight away. The educated Bhil abandoned drastic means of this order (which is laudable) and he prefers to desert his wife. To desert a wife is, however, according to Bhil's tradition, an unpardonable act and aborigine resents his more learned brethren's inclination to neglect whatever was considered good by his forefathers.

In justice to these Bhils who still honour tradition despite the limited education that might possibly have turned their minds, one must admit, that not every one misused his contact with school in such a way that he necessarily had to become a scoundrel. The primitive man does not know that knowledge can easily be put to beneficial use and not knowing what to do with knowledge he rather prefers to consider only its bad aspects. Knowledge had no room within the framework of his daily routine; knowledge was never desired, knowledge was alien and superfluous and his antagonism is excusable.

Besides, very little use can be made of it when living in the jungle. Knowledge, once acquired, may induce a youngster to leave his homestead; he might feel attracted by a more eventful life in town and the danger exists that he will sever relations with his own family and clan resulting in an estrangement that can never be bridged again. Nevertheless, he has discovered that it is useful to go to school as it is a means to ameliorate his financial position. To free himself from the clutches of money-lenders is an art which he never understood, though realising that it can be done, his antagonistic attitude towards school and education may fade away and assist him directly to better his plight. Once he realizes that he benefits by the proper knowledge of prices, he will be able to check shrewd money lenders and thus raise his standard of living, desirable as such, provided he himself does not succumb to corruption or spend his earnings on drink.

Aborigines in general and the Bhils in particular are often blamed for excessive drinking habits. Freely drinking forms an important item of the diet of nearly every Bhil and nothing on earth exercises a greater lure on him than alcohol. Knowing only too well that the intoxicating effect of liquor is detrimental to his general well-being, an aborigine may in so far be excused as drink is not always taken for the sake of getting drunk. The Bhils distrust for any kind of modern medicine, the remoteness of his village and the non-availability of medical aid whenever he is confronted with an emergency, naturally lead him to believe that alcohol possesses the properties of a good medicine able to cure all kinds of diseases. He fancies that liquor is the best antidote against fatigue and that any kind of bodily sufferings are bound to vanish as soon as he resorts to the bottle. He is furthermore convinced that alcohol makes the brave even braver and that he gains strength for doing all kinds of things which he ordinarily would not carry out.

In addition, alcohol is said to stimulate the appetite and as the Bhil is rather fond of eating he does not want to miss a chance and eat moderately for the good reason that he failed to create a hunger-rising condition. Thus many good and whole some properties are ascribed to alcohol and, besides, many ha hob days, celebrations and even his religious rituals could never properly be carried out without the flow of liquor.

Alcoholic drink is known from the earliest beginnings of civilization. It is logical that any intoxicating liquid became, even in earliest times, highly priced, inasmuch as its very effect could not properly be explained. The desire to be courageous, strong and healthy exists everywhere and no wonder that aboriginal tribes cling much to it. Their lives are only maintained by physical labour and any sign of drinking endurance it taken as an indication of approaching age, increased weakness and consequently a restriction of physical abilities. If such indication can be counter-acted by a free intake of alcohol, it may not be surprising that it is actually done. Moreover, the life of primitive men is monotonous enough; festivals may be frequent but they do not last forever and even the merriest ceremony does not decrease or mitigate the necessity to return to the daily routine of hunting or killing. Cinemas and stage plays are unknown in the jungle, there is no distraction of any kind; alcohol is the only means of escape.

It must be admitted that the Bhils made and still make to frequent and excessive use of this kind of salvation. It constitutes as a matter of fact a great danger. Not that alcohol alone will cause untold harm to the physical well-being of the Bhils; hill-tribesmen are usually strong enough and hard-work and continuous stay in the open air counter-balances effectively. The curse that accompanies drinking habits finds expression in poverty and a low standard of having. The Bhils cannot claim that their standard of living is high in any way; they are indescribably poor. The huts in which they live are of most primitive pattern, devoid of anything that might give rise to the belief that they should like to introduce a change for the better. The intention to do so might exist in their subconscious-ness, but being already poor, it is

easier to spend the last rupee on liquor than to attempt to purchase an object that might be of some use somehow which, however, does not prove that one must have it. Even a little drink causes sorrows to vanish; one forgets the money-lender, his threats and vile tactics and being seen in the liquor-shop is the centre of information, one meets every body and particularly those whose state of mind is quite similar.

It is interesting to note that those who acquired some degree of liberty usually abstain from drinking or drink at least very moderately. The little bit of education which they call their own has at least liberated the sense of consciousness and very much afraid to loose reputation, the literature Bhil became able to exercise control over himself and his efforts may in the long run influence a wider circle. The foundations exist and many Bhils are quite prepared to become abstinent if they only could. Prohibition should be introduced, but the question remains open how and when the passionate longing for alcohol will find some other outlet. Every suppression of one craving, be it physical or mental, will help any other suppressed urge to develop and to act as safely valve. It remains to be seen in which way and to what extent the abstinent Bhil is going to react and if he resorts to some other vice as a compensation for the last. On the other hand, one must not forget that alcohol is needed for ceremonial purposes with a centuries old background. A prohibition would therefore be rather out of place as it interferes too much with the maintenance of social institution which forms, after all, the backbone of primitive life. Liquor is needed at the time of sowing, planting and harvesting; alcohol cannot be dispensed with at marriage ceremonies and it is as much indispensable whenever Death claims a Bhil. Alcohol is believed to influence and to appease indirectly the gods and as nobody thrives well without their blessings, it would be rather difficult for anyone to find a suitable substitute. A substitute could be found, but it may not please the gods and if anything goes wrong in the village, the tribesman will only fall back with increased vigour and consume more alcohol. He will resort to illicit distillation and take great pleasure in doing so. As nearly every effort has so far failed to convince the average Bhil that medicines supplied by dispensaries they are best possible means of curing maladies, he will stick to his own method and in case he fails to obtain alcohol in the open market, different method has to be employed. Stills will be installed in every house. The baghat or medicine-man cannot cure anybody without alcohol, through him liquor is effaced to the gods and it is plausible that gods benevolent influences are entirely determined by and dependent on the amount of alcohol offered. Any restriction the free availability of liquor would therefore only result in an enormous upheaval, spreading discontent and dissatisfaction. The money saved through abstinence would be spent on other vices and, besides the poor life of the aborigine would only become poorer. As along as advanced races do not adhere strictly to prohibition, they are morally not entitled to force others to do what they themselves cannot do. Despite the misuse, the Bhils should be given the option of deciding themselves what is best for them. Their fondness of drink keeps nevertheless the door open to advance and it is astonishing why drink is really so dreadful a vice, steps were not taken centuries ago. The Bhils survived all the same and may it be said again, they are in no way unhappier than anybody else. Moderation, and not Prohibition, is advisable.

Whatever has been said here with reference to drink aims only at better understanding. Primitive man has to be judged from a different angle and, more important even, he can only then be condemned when he deliberately acts in such way that his doing so really deserves to be classified as bad; as long as the primitive does not himself have the impression that he acts wrong, well in such a case, he is right. His ignorance does not disqualify. Finally we have to take into consideration that aborigines are proved to be very superstitious. The Bhils form also exception; drink is linked with superstition and superstition is one of the foundations of their society.

Whoever has lived in hilly tracts where communication is only possible by means of meandering footpaths, may have noticed that hill tribes to either like to live in village like settlements or in isolated houses dotted over the landscape. Despite their sociable inclinations, the Bhils abstains from forming any compact settlement; one prefers to live out of the way in some lonely spot closely attracted and attached to Nature, preference is given to a site where he can live absolutely unhampered by any conventions. Living at a distance from the houses of his brethren appeals in so far to him as close contract with neighbors in apt to lead to friction. The maintenance of peaceful relations is of paramount importance; the aborigine cannot afford to engage in perpetual quarrels that might lead to the destruction of his own

happiness or culminate in a clash. Life in the jungle is based on mutual assistance and as such assistance can only too easily be forfeited, it is decided upon to keep at a respectful distance. Unnecessary gossip, the cause of much trouble, is thus avoided; everybody concentrates only on those events that happen within his own circle and the neighbor is thus saved from unpleasant interference. In this respect town folk have much to learn from the Bhils. The town dweller's tendency to flock together and to create a state of congestion is the source of untold friction and inconvenience, though, unfortunately, the concentration of activities in a town necessitates as well a concentration within a certain radius of living space. The Bhils do not have to face such an evil. Agricultural occupation and the location of fields rather encourage decentralization. This attitude is even carried further. If a Bhil happens so have 4 sons of marriageable age, he will build for each one of them a hut at a spot distinctly separated from the others. Each son is given a gift in form of cattle, fowls and some primitive implements and he will henceforth live in his own little world, quite apart from father and brothers. Family ties and personal affection do not suffer herewith; a visit can quickly be paid and after an exchange of opinions everyone returns to his homely abode.

The huts are of a primitive pattern. Bamboo and mud are used as building material, but the huts are constructed in such a way that fresh air is permitted to circulate freely. The latter seldom takes place in a town-house. The Bhils attach great importance to fresh air and it is certainly due to this circumstance that the general state of health is superior to that prevailing in congested areas. The Bhils preference to light structures had many good reasons. Very thrifty by nature, the Bhils likes to change his habitations as often as he can which could not easily be undertaken in the case of stone buildings. A light hut is easily demolished and easily erected; it does not involve any outlay in form of costly building material. He does not feel prevented to realize a sudden craving for a change of site and climate and the ease with which his few belongings can be moved remains an inexhaustible source of happiness.

Problems do not exist; contracts must not be cancelled. The new departure means a new life and access to new hunting grounds. It becomes thus evident that primitiveness offers a large margin of freedom and it is not uncertain that the aborigine is more than wise by clinging to his freedom even at the cost of being considered a "wild man".

Despite the fact that the Bhils are so jealous of their personal freedom, they never attempted to counter-act the Baghat's endeavor to render the Bhils slaves of his influence. The medicine-man's word counts everywhere, he is the ruler and dictator and those who disobeyed his instructions were soon taught that such high handedness has to be punished. The Baghat is the intermediary between the gods and the Bhils and superstitious to the highest degree, no Bhil dares to contradict. The Baghat blesses the field he assists at ceremonies, he helps departed souls on their way to heaven and, more important even, he is able to detect witches and know how their evil activities can be checked. Of course, the existence of a Baghat is by no means a compliment which one could extend to the Bhils; a sorcerer of his caliber is positively an anomaly and a sign of great backwardness.

Nobody has already been more attacked than the Baghat, his prestige, however, remains unshaken thanks to his own cleverness. Those who strive to curtail his powers, soon relapse into indifference out of sheer fear that the Baghat may indeed be in constant touch with gods or sinister spirits and heap misfortune on their shoulders. On the other hand the dead would run the risk of missing heaven, fatal to the dead and fatal to those who survive.

It cannot be said that the very existence of a Baghat and the freedom with which he exercises his powers denote that Bhils are particularly primitive. The medicine-man is an age old institution, known all over the world and it is thus not surprising that the Bhils rely on him at least as much as others do. Moreover, it is the privilege of the aborigines to employ Baghats without whom the tribe could not have developed his characteristic attitude towards life.

The Baghats activities only become objectionable when they are linked with willful exploitation or result in loss of life and prosperity. Loss of life was often enough caused by who specialize in the detection of witches. Once a woman has been declared a witch she may by sheer luck escape torture but many so called witches were not able to remove the spell from the body of a sick person and unreservedly perished on the instigation of the Baghats.

Advanced races have since long discarded witch doctors, substituting them by charlatans of any kind. This may be explained by man's desire to probe the mystical. By not making use of moral remedies, he likes to entrust those who claim supernatural powers and as everybody hopes to escape from the unavoidable medicine-men and their colleagues are permitted to flourish. The Bhils are thus not much worse than civilized people.

A recent dealing with the many fold changes that came into being in the course of the last two decades, special attention was drawn to the Bhils who, like many other aborigines, develop a liking for western dress. It was stated that coats, long pants are increasingly worn. Being decently attired certainly helps the wearer to look respectable in a way; though it is rather doubtful if the adoption of an alien form of dress is really desirable. In the first instance, it does really not fit into the landscape; the Bhil who derives his livelihood from agriculture does not need modern attire. It would only prevent him from moving freely and, besides, to consider himself better than the common lot, will have no beneficial influence on him nor on another. A simple mind becomes easily influenced and a pair of fashionable trousers is enough to make a man of his kind conceited. Coat and trousers prevent him from doing his regular work and once he has taken to wearing western clothes, he will not easily abandon such out-of-the-place habits for fear that the newly acquired dignity will leave him as soon as his babu attire is removed. Personal discomfort counts little or is bravely endured. When combined with a certain degree of literacy, the new habit may easily develop into a profound alienation. Those members of his clan who still wear the regular jungle-outfit are forced to feel inferior whilst the dandy is apt to nourish feelings of superiority. No more able and willing to attend to the work and daily routine of the village, the modern young savage feels attracted by petty jobs in nearby towns and bazaars, provided, of course, that such kind of work still permits him to wear a coat. The meager education he had regulates naturally his income and not being able to make the two ends meet, the young dandy has to resort to all kinds of uses and instead of being a help to his own community he is led to become a traitor. Grain dealers and merchants might avail themselves of his influence in the villages and induce him to act as a middle man not with the aim to assist him on his way to success, but with the intention to get a better and more ruthless hold of the villagers. The simple minded tiller of the soil will with little doubt accept the recommendations of some urbanized member of the clan and blindly believe in his suggestion. In case the bania desires to purchase a certain produce at a low rate, it is only necessary to send his special envoy to the villagers with the order to spread news beneficial to the dealer though utterly detrimental to the cultivator. A trifling commission may be paid to the modernized son of the soil; just enough to buy a new coat which, again, is a further step to the complete break with tradition

### **Customs & Manners**

It is, of course, not wanted that aborigines never acquire the habit of dressing themselves properly, though-properly -means that the national Dress privilege in the district should be preferred. A clean dhoti is certainly an esthetic garment, it is adapted to climatically conditions, comfortable and not too expensive. A national dress fosters in addition national feelings, whilst western dress can be left to those who is by necessity had to adopt such apparel at a time when their mind and character was already firmly moulded.

The Bhils resort at present to a loin-cloth. A loin-cloth has many advantages: cheapness is the most important. Apart from easy availability, it is a most fitting garment for those who have to spend their lives in hospitable forests where physical work and hunt constitute the main sources of income. A loin-cloth, however, covers the body only to the barest minimum and despite its efficiency as a work-outfit, the loincloth gives the poor man an even poorer appearance and his chances decrease rapidly whenever he has to come in contact with people who do not look with favour at aborigine's kind of dress. It is therefore advisable that as primitive tribes increase they should strictly keep aloof from western styles. Nevertheless, even if aborigines prefer to wear a loin-cloth only, they have reason to do so. They themselves feel properly attired and, as long as this conviction is not shaken, it is better to allow every one of them to suite his own convenience. The whole question of dress is, admittedly, merely a matter of

tradition and prejudice and happy are those who do not face the necessity of making all kinds of concessions only for the take of respectability.

After having so much said in favour of the Bhils, one should turn to the most fundamental order that governs the life of every man. Marriage and marriage customs are of great importance everywhere; many nations have succeeded in simplifying the matter, others incorporated a tremendous amount of complicating ritual, particularly here is India. Negotiations have to be launched, horoscopes are to be consulted, gods must be invoked and only little attention is paid to the real aim of marriage. As long as the dowry offered is considered acceptable, the bride necessarily becomes acceptable to the same degree and it matters relatively little if and how the parties concerned derive any satisfaction and happiness from such arrangements. Bride and bridegroom hardly meet personally before marriage and whenever they meet refuge is taken to hypocrisy and pretension by means of which both partners enter the matrimonial bond with wrong ideas about each other. Everybody concerned hopes that things can be settled after marriage and as things seldom settle as expected, untold unhappiness results, matters did not become easier with the advance of civilization and it is worthwhile to inquire how the primitive man tries to tackle the problem. Marriage remains a problem even in backward communities though less puzzling as everybody relies on a tradition that leaves little space for complications and besides, everybody knows what can be expected. The Bhils, for instance do not require any young maiden to possess knowledge which cannot profitably be employed. As a good house-wife and coworker, the Bhil woman exclusively concentrates on tasks connected with such duties; she knows the limit of her capacities and she is therefore quite free from inhibitions or wrong ideas. Husband and wife know the little world in which they live and discard from the very beginning any ambitions that might possibly upset the equilibrium of the household. She knows that her husband is fond of alcohol, but nothing prevents her from taking a sip herself and, so far as the children are concerned they are at an early age offered the chance of getting acquainted with the taste of liquor and there is none in the whole family who could possibly condemn the others. Moreover, both partners know well the financial potentialities of their holding and a Bhil woman will therefore never abandon herself to longings for objects which cannot in the normal way be acquired. In this respect they differ greatly from their sisters in towns. Town often fail to abstain from maintaining a sober outlook; the marriage settlement is spiced with vague promises are permitted to rely on assurance that is seldom realised which nevertheless instill in their minds the desire to brave for the inaccessible. The Bhils approach matrimony from a different angle; they know life means hard work, occasionally interrupted by a holiday.

However, the human element is not absent. Mutual love brings both partners together and the alliance convenient comes most seldom into working. No partner is forced on anybody. Of course, the parents still like to arrange a match, but the boy as well as the girl is at liberty to refuse without causing any offence. As a rule, the boy courts the girl and marriage takes place as soon as they discover that their love is profound enough. Any widow stands a fair chance to marry again. In cases where parents or relatives object, the young man and woman simply run away and such an act is enough to declare them properly married. In extreme case the girdhas to be kidnapped and provided the girl is in love, the use of force sanctions the deed and elopement is followed by recognition. Many girls merely join their lovers by going to houses. This is indication enough that they wish to live together and the union becomes legally sanctified.

A like everywhere in the world, the Bhils often decide to run away with the wives of a neighbour. Nobody can prevent a man to elope any married woman with her consent; but the escaped is usually followed by a sequel based on clan traditions in order to assure that certain compensation is paid to the deserted husband. The compensation depends on the age of the run-away wife, the amount which her first husband had to pay to her father at the time of her first marriage and the preparedness of the first husband to part with his wife. The settling of the zagada requires a lot of bargaining. The whole procedure is to some extent flattering to the unfaithful female. Sums as thousand rupees are asked for her release, but, usually her value sinks during the bargaining operations and she discovers that her second husband purchased her for the bare sum of 200 rupees. This, however, is natural course of events and she still remains recognised as a valuable acquisition. The social status of any woman of her kind remains

unaffected. The payment of compensation legalizes and sanctions (according to the laws of the clan) her transfer from one husband to another. Moreover, the procedure accompanying the action culminates in a feast. The judges, the parting and the newly united parties, some members of their clans and good friends join merrily the trouble-makers with the firm intention to forget the past with the help of some liquor. The newly wedded are presented with gifts and the new departure is made easy by the conviction that everything is all right and in strict accordance with the law and custom of the tribe. Disturbing gossip is hereby eliminated. Any reason to feel guilty or ashamed fades away in to oblivion, whilst the structure of the tribal society was kept intact.

The Zagada system, though condemned by many observers, incorporates one important advantage: a peaceful settlement avoiding blood-shed. To a good number of Bhils now violence is not acceptable and refuge is often to drastic measures resulting in loss of life. The unfaithful wife of the seducer runs the risk of being either beaten or murdered in extreme cases. Any union of a man with the wife of another man fails to become sanctioned by the tribe's law in case compensation is refused and the female degrades herself to the status of a concubine. As the keeping of concubines is, however, an age-old institution, the woman is nevertheless able to enjoy all the animates which her tribe can offer, in as much as the Bhils recognize the necessity of satisfying sexual urges by adoption of any accessible means and concubines are therefore spared from any humiliating attacks as her functions differ, in principle, little from those of a legally married woman.

Pre-nuptial intercourses widely spread. The general atmosphere of same contact with nature created no abhorrence for ex-marital relations despite the fact that it is well known that this state of affairs is not desirable as such. Damage is usually prepared by inviting the trespassers in a legalized union and no blame falls on a child born soon after the marriage ceremony. Illegitimate off spring enjoy the same status as any legitimate -child and prejudices, so often connected with illegitimacy are either unknown or deliberately ignored.

A great number of songs demonstrate even that there is nothing objectionable in having pre-nuptial intercourse with a girl. Many love-songs concentrate on the subject, mentally describing that things could not happen differently as the girl, waylaid by her lover, simply could not resist his entreaties. Remote and silent valleys, a cluster of trees with under growth or the protected slope of a hill are pictured as a ideal meeting places. The poets of the Bhils love to see the heroine made pregnant, though matters are mitigated by the birth of a son. Love escapades are (at least in songs) seldom rewarded by the birth of a daughter, whilst a son greatly changes the situation.

All goes well if it is a matter of mutual love. Unfortunately, rape is not too uncommon and it is regrettable that girls under age fall into the category of those who are most easily victimized. The Bhils themselves consider rape a condemnable crime and evildoers are without exception handed over to the police, which, in itself, is indication enough that nothing vile or extra-ordinary is attached to prenuptial intercourse, whilst any attempts to molest a child-girl are taken at face-value as unpardonable mischief.

It is rather typical that the aborigines attitude towards any kind of problem appertaining to the question of her and marriage is more healthy and normal than that of civilized individuals. Personal liberties (provided excessive liberty does not result in crime) are the proof around which life rotates and should personal liberty and real happiness benefit by it marriage as such could be abolished. Many Bhils, for instance, have clamoured for its destruction, but they have not shown a more excellent way, whilst a greater number defend this immemorial institution. Marriage is believed sacred and indispensable to social order, necessary in the interest of children, but, it results too often in failure and, in actual fact, develops often in a hell of torment. Without marriage humanity would perhaps have to suffer more and accepting marriage as an institution, the primitive egotism of nature's mighty urge has partly to be subdued. The aborigine, deprived of easy access to the great World, become, by nature, more profoundly and exclusively emotional and he takes consequently sex matters at once as a concession and a demand, to be shaped accordingly to his own world and outlook. He does not ponder eventual terrifying anxiety or perplexity adapting his life (and that of his female partner) to the same subject which appears to both with approximately equal force. Sexual activity, in every from this very angle that we have to judge the

primitive man; his edifice, however balanced, offers him the shelter he desires, and it never dawns upon him that he is not enlightened.

It is not true that the backward tribesman is incapable of seeing the difference between sheer impulse and preservation; he always remains within his own sphere. He prefers to be normal and whatever suits him best is adopted without remorse.

Aesthetic values and personal inclinations determine the choice of the partner, the girls must be able to boast of hair as smooth as the skin of a snake, her walk must be graceful, the forehead must not be flat, so may her nose resemble a flower voluminous buttocks, flat feet and big ears disqualify; desirable. Any young girl with hair on chest and back is declared able to develop. Lop virtues; white teeth and the absence of gossipy inclinations are as well favourable assets.

It is believed that a girl becomes particularly passionate when she indulges into sexual intercourse before reaching puberty. The experience of the jungle further taught that it is wiser to provide as soon as possible a husband for the girl or, failing to do so, she turns mad with desire. In such a state it is difficult to pacify her passion, she might even become a menace to the village and compel the very next male to devote attention to her or she dies of madness.

It becomes apparent that the Bhils do not believe in restraint and it can rally not be said that animal passion plays an important part in his life. The desolate and isolated region in which they live, and the close contact with the nature around merely fosters a straight forward attitude. Erotic pleasures are the only available distraction. After the days toil fires are lit, men and women of every age and description assemble, in order to start with the popular nocturnal dance round the fire, enlivened by obscene songs, movements and gesture every one of which exclusively represents an erotic provocation. Demonstrations of this kind, surpassing the borderline of decency, find, thanks to the vulgar note, an echo in the primitive soul, sweeping inhibitions away and resulting in an alarmingly high degree of debauchery. The effect of the flickering flames of the fire, combines lewdness of exciting songs, is traditionally accompanied by liquor and it is really not surprising that such lusty assemblies culminate in events which, with some restraint, could have been avoided. Everyone is caught by the desire to kidnap, to elope or to rape, thought not too much attention is paid to it. The inability to stem the natural course of events is recognised and well-known and, everybody admits, the provocation was planned by organised mass-action which, in its turn, naturally has to result in mass debauchery. It is of course regretted by many Bhils that established family-ties can so easily be loosened as a result of their dancing parties, but nothing is done that might possibly eradicate the evil.

The practice as such teaches very little that could be accepted by more advanced groups and it must be kept in mind that it is the main aim of this treating to illustrate that mankind derives only to a certain extent benefit from convention, on the one hand ample proof extent that lack of strangling conversions exercise a loosening effect on the moral attitude of clans or even whole nations.

It is often said primitive tribes can only advance after being acquainted with certain fixed moral standards. There is little doubt that much could not done in that direction, but it still remains to be questioned if the introduction, of moral standards so far alien to the primitive man really results in an increase of personal happiness. The latter counts so much in our life, is so easily jeopardized and so difficult to regain. In the case of the Bhils it can be said that only few members really desire a change, the majority is firmly convinced that a change is not at all necessary and it is therefore very doubtful if the Bhils will ever feel more contented after being more or less forced to adopt standards that might mean much to others, offering however, little to themselves. The subject has to be handled with great delicacy; and primitive man who has the impression that his customs are threatened is prone to adopt an antagonistic attitude which induces him, for the sake of the maintenance of his personal habits and inclinations, to retire to more remote corners of his jungle kingdom where an unhampered indulgence into old-established tribal life can be carried out.

Uplift work has been carried out and attempts are begin made to teach reading and writing. A man who knows to read well might be an ornament to the village and his ability to interpret the news of the daily papers might possibly stimulate others to follow his example. Literacy means as well that the obscure accounts of money lenders can easier be chequed which, in return, lead to increased prosperity of

the village population. Such an advantage is required by the Bhils, but little could so far be achieved in the field of tribal custom. The easy way of living remains the foundation of the village society and, should it be possible to pay less to the creditor, the savings are by preference used to cover expenses pertaining boastfully staged celebrations which, in conformity with the degree of opulence, result and are desired to result in a fall and absolutely unrestricted outburst of gaiety crowned by a general relaxation of any moral barriers. A Bachande spiced with erotic provocation, constitutes the climax of the primitive man's life. Even the literature is unable to resist nonparticipation would earn him the reputation or being either conceited or even important and as nobody likes to see these attributes connected with his name, barriers are bound to fall easily. The great tenacity with which the Bhils stick to established institutions is demonstrated by his reluctance to ease believing in witchcraft. The community is ruled by the witch-doctor who, thanks to his good relations with gods and demons, is considered the only being who can avoid disaster. The witch-doctor's efficiency depends, naturally, on the remuneration offered to him, though a goat or some fowl are considered not too shabby a payment. Alcohol increases the Baghats power to summon the invisible rulers of this world; in extreme cases he feels alike to detect the source of any calamity and (in common with many witch-doctors acting all over the world) mystic currents draw him to the witch. Witches are supposed to maintain mischievous intercourse with demons and the devil in particular, though she can save her good name by admitting that she is the witch who caused illness in the neighbour's house. The witch, after many entreaties, forcibly agrees to drive the ghastly spell away by performances near the bed of the affected, sick person. She might become a great celebrity in the districts provided, of course, that the spell is removed and the neighbour's health is restored; failure to do so has torture and death in its trail Exposed to unsurpassable brutality, the witch life is slowly but painfully extinguished, whilst glamour, fame presents are kept in store for those more fortunate witches who, helped by Nature, luckily escaped from a rather unpleasant treatment. The very fact that the authorities had to take the most severe steps in order to impress the Bhils that belief in witches is more than vain, proves that it is not easy to interfere with tribal custom. The torture of witches is now prohibited; nevertheless every Bhil will probably never cease to do so. The witchdoctor's powers remain unrestricted; his medicines are obtainable at Government dispensaries and it is quite likely that witches are still tortured and killed without the knowledge of the authorities. Government's decision was certainly right on humanitarian reasons, in new order. In the first instance they hold on to the conviction that witches exist and, secondly, by not being able to accuse a witch, the latter cannot be induced to cure a sick person or animal and death is bound to result. Moreover, the very knowledge that is legally not possible exterminable witches by torture resulted in the apprehension that many more women might feel inclined to overcome surplus and to become witches instead. As witches are now protected by law, witchdom is made easy and attractive and the Bhils feel that they run the grave risk of being overpowered by many fold sinister influences. Nobody can understand why it suddenly became necessary to break with tradition. Whilst a number of women is spared from unjust attack, the whole tribe undergoes pangs of fear and the innovation is far away from being applauded. Thus the new law, imported from the civilised world, failed to contribute to the personal happiness of the Bhils it is afraid that the influence of the civilized world will become more and more persistent in the course of time and it is worthwhile to watch the effects. Superstition is framework of daily tasks. Apart from agriculture, hunting is one of the major occupations. Not only that hunting appeals to man in general; it is one of the source from which his livelihood is derived. A successful hunt provides meal for the whole family and it is logical that many precautions must be taken in order to ensure success. A favourable moment has to be awaited for the start; the early morning hours and late in the evening are considered particularly favourable, inasmuch as the risk of meeting people on the road is largely diminished at such a moment. By no means must the hunter betray that he intends to kill game and nothing is more harmful than a question posed to him during his wanderings through the forest. Any question means bad luck, though he can remove the evil effects by throwing a stone in the direction of the questioner. It is, however, much wiser to resort to a more thorough methods and the spell case on his weapon is nullified by winding small branches of a wild plum tree around his hunting paraphernalia. The bow is then placed under some stones over which the hunter has to step. This procedure, when carried out with care and concentration, pacifies the demons. Great silence

must reign and nothing is more unfortunate than the noise produced by the ears when a dog violently shakes his head; worse even if a deer manages to escape. The sight of a fox makes it clear to the shikari that it is futile to continue in his search for game. Matters are quite different in case the hunters happen to meet a pregnant woman. As a matter of fact, the hunter cannot ask for a more auspicious omen, particularly if the woman carries ajar filled with water on her head. Tikur and Lawi birds have the power to impart success to hunters enterprise, but everything is bound to go wrong after the crowing of the pingale bird could be heard from a distance.

In desperate case the blessings of the witch-doctor are sought who, in exchange of appropriate remuneration, gently summons the gods of the forest. The observation of all these precautions is hardly necessary on the day following the 14th of January. It is the proverbial lucky day for every hunter and one way unpunished indulge into a slightly indifferent attitude towards the otherwise golden rules for hunt.



**A beautiful Bhil Tribe lady of India**

### **Cultural Identity**

It would be a matter of great difficulty to teach the Bhils that phenomena as described have little to do with success or failure of a hunt. Of course the escape of a Sambhar is an exasperating experience and every hunter will describe the event as unfortunate. In the eyes of the primitive man happenings of this kind become unlucky and once disappointed and nervous due to failure, the hunter's steadiness and keenness is easily effected and more failures are consequently not excluded. The desire not to be questioned when out setting for a hunt is explicable. The hunter feels inclined to boast that he intends to shoot so many pieces of game, whilst it might easily happen that he shoots nothing at all, His reputation as a hunter is thus exposed to criticism and ridicule and he prefers not to be questioned in advance. There is always time and opportunity enough to boast after the sambhar has been killed.

Light hunted, swift and active and fond of excitement, the Bhils possess good qualities as hunters, killing with arrow and bow every kind of creature that can possibly be killed without the use of fire weapons, steady work is loathed, it seems much more profitable to roam about, to collect some honey,

grass or fuel to supplement eventual meagre results of the shikar. At particularly critical moments help is offered to bigger landlords and the few annas gained are enough to carry on for the moment. The daily diet consists of milk bread, curds, vegetables, fish and occasionally a mouthful of flesh. All these items are produced either by themselves or their little holdings or the forest supplies whatever may be lacking. Roots and fruits grow profusely throughout the jungle. The sacrificial slaughter of Buffaloes is the crowning event of the year; on such an occasion large quantities of meat are eaten. The Bhil does in principle not object to eating the flesh of cows and his want of reverence for the life of these animals placed him rather low among Hindus, though touch does not defile. Several tribes abstain from eating beef, but all of them believe in demoniacal influences, witchcraft and omens. Their religion is one of fear and it is therefore quite natural that their whole pattern of life was and is in consequence shaped by fear and superstition. Orgies, feasts and bachnales are the natural means of escape. A prayer uttered on one of the consecrated stones offers mental calm and satisfaction to those who do not participate in worldly orgies. A few reverences holy trees or believe in the assistance of an enchanted horse or dog.

Nature provided a fitting setting for this extraordinary kind of life. The luxuriant jungle with her ever green coat of foliage, undulating and rising to lofty heights, forms indeed the most suitable background in which the cultural life of the Bhils could develop. Rustling trees the calm of dale, the gentle roar of a waterfall and the manifold strange voices of the forest exercise an eloquent appeal pleasing to the casual traveler, but immensely laden with significance and meaning to the primitive son of the forest. The guarted tree, growing in solitude on the summit of a mound literally invites the presumption that the huge stem ever served as an abode of some powerful spirit, whilst the slight animation of the foliage, stirred by the evening breeze, logically indicates pleasure or displeasure of the demon and is it not natural that Gods prefer to dwell near running water, ever ready to listen to the playful sound of the waves? Strange meanings are attributed to strangely shaped shrubs which, when covered with blossoms, exercise alluring influences or what shall the Bhil think of the solitary giant boulder found on slope? They are manifestations of an almighty power, beyond reach, and worthy to be worshipped. Why should the strange cry of a bird not be taken as an indication of warning to abstain from approaching a silent valley where apparently, witches confer with the devil and his helpmates? Not listening to the warning spells disaster, but where laid the boundary within which the devil agitates sinister forces? The witch-doctor, the only man able to extract the proper meaning from strange phenomena, has, by necessity to be consulted and nothing would be more dangerous and provocative than not to sacrifice a goat on a certain day, Town officials, sent from far away to the judge wilderness, have good talking, though what do they actually know? Not initiated will be secrets and love of the forest, they represent, from the point of view of the primitive man, a heretical menace. The jungle dweller does not want to get acquainted with civilization alien to his beliefs; he might appreciate his son's ability to write and to read and to settle his accounts with the bania, but this is all what is actually wanted. This very life established in its present form and shape for thousands of years, seems to him so utterly perfect and regular and what does poverty matter to him. Of course, an increase of his income does not meet with any objection, but money is easily spent. The whole matter would interest the primitive man provided it is possible to ascertain that his gods, demons and spirits fall into line and adopt themselves to the new situation. Is there any guarantee that witches are going to lose the power to trouble the village or will they at least become more docile and less aggressive? Who can prove that the witch-doctor is wrong? Hardly anybody is so far willing to believe in the curative properties of modern drugs available at the dispensary; the recovery of a sick person is still ascribed to the good influences of gods who, despite the intake of outlandish medicines, benevolently pardoned those who temporarily lost faith. In the case of death blame is thrown on medicines, obtained from outside and the baghats position is only strengthened.

The Bhils cling to tradition as much as more advanced communities do and it would indeed be a great mistake to pronounce a verdict in their disfavour. No doubt, they are very backward, but in many instances the backwardness itself contributed to their well-being and happiness to such an extent that one feels really inclined to ponder over the merits of this kind of life. Natural in acting and thinking, straight forward in expression, the Bhils possess perhaps the key to happiness. Anything that makes life complicated is avoided and ambitions do not exist. Everybody follows the one and only for the personal

happiness and satisfaction. The means of reaching the goal may be crude, though they are crude only in the eyes of those who want to reform. On the other hand, nobody outside anyone of the tried can be forced to adopt anything that is acceptable to the Bhils only, but we should not fail to appreciate that the primitive culture of the Bhils is extremely rich though not acceptable to the civilised world. The whole structure of civilised life would collapse if any one of those institutions preferred by the Bhils were introduced; the upheaval would attain dimensions of unforeseen magnitude, without speaking of the many obstacles that have to be overcome. From a certain point of view, it is regrettable that civilized groups are already to such an extent entangled in strangling conventions that personal liberty and happiness became more and more unknown. If it would be possible to change our attitude without causing lasting harm, one should try to do so, abstain, however, from importing new ideas from utopia and fall instead back on the flow of energy still circulating in districts which one pleased to describe as backward. The Bhils are foolish in many ways and they do not deserve to be imitated, but as they are positively happier than any civilised person, one should not entirely discard the possibility to make use of the few good ideas which they can offer and correct, as the same time, the mischief that the Bhils are just one of those wild tribes whose name alone ought to be taboo; official literature has little sympathy for the Bhils: they are described as lazy, ignorant cattle-lifters and robbers, concentrating occasionally on agriculture out of the sheer necessity to fill their stomachs. Every society is well supplied with a good number of rowdies, but this does not indicate that everyone is a gangster. Many Bhils are most charming people, hospitable, sincere and ready to please and it is utterly regrettable that they are prepared to resist the claims of money-lenders and grain dealers who discovered that the Bhils are an easy prey. Incapable to appreciate material profits, they fostered themselves the belief that the every Bhil is endowed with a great deal of stupidity which, as a matter of fact, is not the case. Simple and inoffensive in their outlook, they are inclined to take everything for granted, only in order not to disturb the peace of their lives.

It is not exactly known how many Bhils actually live in the various parts of India. An accurate census is in so far made difficult as the name Bhil is often given to wild or half wild tribes. The hilly tracts of the Bombay presidency are considered to be the original home, from which many clans spread in all directions, even as far as the plains of Gujarat and the Northern Deccan. Bhils can even be met in Rajputana and Sind; the migration to the latter districts, so contrary in climate to the original home, is probably based on necessity. Famine and an increase of difficulties drove the dweller of the forests into the scorched plains of northern India where land was available.

It is generally presumed that Bhils occupied once an honorable position. Some of their kings ruled over wide countries and exercised great power, but opposed to the advancing tide of Aryan conquest in primitive times, the opposing Bhils were unable to stern the invaders who gradually succeeded to push the Bhils back to the fastness of mountains and forests which they eventually occupied. As a race they were feared and hated and it is not surprising that the contemporary chronicler felt great reluctance to mention the Bhils in his scripts where the history of a fierce uncivilized, conquered or fallen race was not considered a subject sufficiently attractive to adorn the annals of more advanced races. Only on few occasions are they contemptuously spoken off as an illegitimate people. The Bhils, however, were not too much pleased by this kind of treatment and retaliated by invasions of the plain country, reestablishing their contact with dominant races (Rajputs), though their strongholds it is said could mostly be found only among the Bhils and in the forests where greater security and better means of defence were offered by nature.

Some of the neighbouring races finally overcame their reluctance and prejudices and intermarried with the Bhils, though this admixture of races was never considered particularly recommendable, in as much as the proud Rajput families carefully tried to avoid the introduction of any foreign element, whilst the Bhils showed a certain anxiety to prove that Rajput blood is, at least partly, circulating in their veins. Moreover, the Rajputs attitude is excusable; the very fact that an admixture of fair coloured races with member of less fortunate dark races usually results in particularly dark offspring, proves that some kind of a colour bar existed already in ancient times. Those Bhils who had intermarried with Rajputs etc., developed, in their turn, a high degree of snobbishness which led finally to a distinctions among the Bhils. New classes, clans, tribes and sub-tribes sprang into existence, forming the nucleus of the present order.

No wonder that the Bhils differ, in their outer appearance, so much from each other. Small, light limbed, fair and active men form a contrast with stunted wild woodmen with African features who are again classified worlds apart from the well-made, tall and handsome members of certain tribes. It is however, typical that the same kind of dress is in favour with all the various tribes; the loin cloth is universal. A bracelet, necklace and a pair of earrings are the ornaments worn though gold is seldom represented. The Bhils are too poor to afford costly ornaments, silver and brass became fashionable. Strings of glass and stone beads were liked since time immemorial and are still in great favour today. A few glass-bangles, cheap but colourful, are a sign of enviable prosperity. The village belle wears sometimes a nose ring, though this type of ornament is classified as extreme luxury and denotes a high degree of extravagance. The turban is an indispensable requisite of every man; the women favour embroidered bodies, completed by a never too clean a sari.

The dialects spoken are innumerable. Every village has its own dialect, every hamlet boasts of some kind of a slang not understood in places some miles away. Occasionally one comes across some strange form of speech which seems to point to an original language now lost. The Bhils never developed a written language of their own; if anything has to be recorded refuge is taken to a script resembling Gujarati, Marathi or Hindi, according to the fluctuating nature of the dialects spoken in the very district.

Little is known about the exact number of tribe and clans. The Bhils are almost, in conformity with Hindu custom, very fond of dividing themselves in innumerable clans and groups, though the differentiation does not equal the proper Hindu caste system. It is difficult to explain why the Bhils took to so great fondness of dividing every group into countless subgroups; the historians, at least, mention that such a system was not known among the Bhils of ancient days. A strain of foreign blood, miscellaneous origin, the father's name, a favourite settlement or occupation, private pursuits and membership of domestic organizations support the view that many reasons existed and inspired the early Bhils to separate and differentiate. Those who eat beef have, naturally, to form a different group, the tribes concentrating on hunting keep aloof from cultivators, whilst customary differences in worship, dress, the habits of eating or preparing food alone are inducement enough to create certain distinctions. Rituals, ceremonies and festivals are an additional cause; the pure and impure cannot mix on such occasions. Untouchability, however, is hardly known. Members of the many fold clans inter-dine, but certain restrictions are imposed on inter-marriage.

During the long centuries of decline, the spirit of the Bhils was only partly broken. Poverty, laziness and the loss of power of resistance have hastened the down fall; original tribal life, however, remained strong. The Bhils are not degenerate nor do they foster misanthropic inclinations and it is quite possible that customs may undergo a revival which, when to some extent modernized, able to contribute to the uplift of the whole community.

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