

RAJ GONDS WITHIN GOND TRIBES OF CHHATISGARH

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The Bell Metal or Dhokra is one of the earliest methods of metal casting which date back to pre-historic time. This is an excellent piece of Metal Casted image of Gond King of Chhatisgarh

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The horizontal division of Indian societies into hierarchically ranked castes and sub-castes has been the subject of a considerable literature, and recent anthropological studies of individual villages have largely concentrated on analyzing the function and interrelation of such caste groups. The internal organization or vertical divisions of endogamous castes have, on the other hand, received little attention. The Raj Gonds, whose unilineal descent groups, it is proposed to discuss in this paper, are not a Hindu caste, but the structural principles underlying their complex system of exogamous phratries, clans, sub-clans, and lineages are comparable to those operative in the internal organization of many Hindu groups, even though there are basic differences between a segmentary tribal society and a stratified caste-society.

A feature distinguishing the Gond system from other systems in the Indian field is the correlation of the existing social structure with a mythology which provides a conceptualization of the social order, sanctions ritual and social relationships, and allows the Gond to view his society as an integrated whole. It is described that this mythological tradition in *The Raj Gonds of Chhatisgarh*, in the following pages it will be referred to that account for details relevant to the social structure of the tribe.

The Gond tribes are an aboriginal population of a total strength exceeding 3,000,000, but in the present article it will be dealing mainly with the 70,000 Raj Gonds of the Chhatisgarh. Much of this account applies, however, equally to the Raj Gonds of the adjoining districts of Madhya Pradesh.

Phratries (*saga*)

Gond society is vertically divided into four major exogamous, patrilineal groups known as *saga*. Using a term current in anthropological writings on the American Indians and the aboriginals of Australia it is described that these *saga* as phratries. Seen from Gond perspective the phratries are not divisions in the sense of sub-castes or tribal segments, but the constituent parts of a social organism which cannot function except by their continuous interaction in marriage relations and ritual undertakings.

The four phratries are referred to as *Yemen Saga*, *Sartuen Saga*, *Siwun Saga*, and *Nalwen Saga*, *Wen* is a Gondi term applied to a category of primordial male ancestors, and *yer-*, *sar-*, *si-*, and *nal-*, are abbreviations of *yering*, *sarung*, *siyung*, and *nalung*, the Gondi numerals 'seven', 'six', 'five' and 'four'. The myths recount how four groups of *wen*, numbering seven, six, five, and four *wen* respectively, emerged from the cave in which they had been imprisoned by the god Mahadeo and how subsequently they married the twenty-two daughters of the four gods of the underworld, and became the forefathers of the Gond race.

According to the myths, the original *wen* and their wives divided into four exogamous groups, the prototypes of the present *saga*. At first all four *saga* lived in one locality, but later as numbers increased, the *saga* separated and the members of each *saga* founded its own village. The names of these first villages occur in many legends and some clans identify present-day localities with one of the mythical phratry homes. The numbers of original ancestors (*wen*), from which each *saga* traces its descent are reflected not only in the *saga* name but also in the use of numerals as phratry symbols. On many ritual and ceremonial occasions the number of persons, actions, or objects customarily involved in the performance corresponds to that of the number of *wen* of the celebrant's phratry. Similarly each *saga* is associated with an animal species mythologically linked with the *saga* ancestors, and hence revered by all members of the phratry.

An asymmetric feature of the four phratry system is the accretion of a fifth *saga*, known as *Sarpe Saga*, which is believed to be descended from the human son of a tigress, and is thus genealogically unconnected with the original Gond *wen*. For exogamous purposes, however, the *Sarpe Saga* is included within the *Sarwen*; though it is heir to a different mythical tradition its accommodation within the structural system necessitates only minor adjustments in inter-phratry relations, and these, it shall have to ignore in this context. Mention may, however, be made of the fact, that the four phratry system does not extend to all branches of the Raj Gonds. Of the Chhatisgarh and the Satpura Region. There are some indications that a dual organization of this type may at one time have existed in areas where now four phratries occur. Much points to a special connexion between the Seven *wen* phratry and the Five *wen* phratry, and some Gonds assert that originally these two phratries did not intermarry; several of the Five *wen* clans are even today debarred from intermarriage with Seven *wen* clans, but there is no comparable link between the Six *wen* phratry and the Four *wen* phratry. Though all members of a phratry claim descent from common mythical ancestors, their dispersal over several ten thousands of one kilometer, and the absence of a common political or religious authority preclude the possibility of any organized corporate action of all or even a majority of *saga*-members. The mainspring of phratry solidarity lies in the ritual sphere, and is closely linked with the cult of a deity (or deities) known as *persa pen* ('

great god') and worshipped by all the clans of the phratry. In *The Raj Gonds*, it is described that the nature and the cult of the *persa pen* in detail, and here it need only repeat that this cult is not organized at the level of the phratry but at the level of clan or sub-clan, and that for this reason it is referred to the *persa pen* as clan-deities, though it might have been more accurate to call them phratry-deities. Intimately linked with the cult of the *persa pen* is that of male and female ancestors, represented by stones known as *kamk* and *sati* respectively which are located at the cult-centre. The *persa pen* is believed to preside over the company of ancestors and departed and though the mythologies offer a somewhat different explanation of the *persa pen's* nature, there is much to suggest that fundamentally the *persa pen* cult is the worship of deified saga-ancestors.

All worshippers of the same *persa pen* regard themselves as agnatically related kinsmen and use the same kinship terms as those who can trace a genealogical relationship. Hence the character of the phratry as the principal exogamous unit is deeply anchored in Gond consciousness; marriage with a *saga* member is forbidden and extra-marital sexual relations between phratry members are considered incestuous.

To the Gond society appears divided into two groups: one is made up of the members of his own phratry, to whom he refers as *saga*, using the same term for individuals and for the whole phratry and the other group consists of the members of all those phratries with which his own *saga* entertains marriage-relations; these real and potential affines and cognates it describes with the collective term *soira*.

Phratry solidarity manifests itself on numerous ceremonial and ritual occasions, when all members of a *saga* present automatically act in unison. This collaboration between people who in daily life share few economic or emotional interests is one of the basic features of Gond society. Participants at weddings, funerals, or religious rites are constantly reminded of their phratry affiliations, for these determine their appropriate roles in the proceedings. In *The Raj Gonds*, it is shown how at the sacrificial rites in honour of a *persa pen*, the ritual requires the co-operation of the members of at least two phratries. While the priest (*katora*) of the clan gathered for the worship of its *persa pen* ministers at the prayers and sacrifices, men of a phratry standing in a *soira*-relationship to the celebrant clan render ritual assistance by dressing the *persa pen* idol and cooking the sacrificial food.

During certain phases of a Gond celebration the assembly divides simply into *saga* and *soira*, the latter including persons of all the three phratries other than the phratry of the celebrants. For the ritual meals, however, the guests divide into four groups: the men of the four phratries sit down in separate rows, and are served in a prescribed order. This order of precedence coincides with the sequence of the *wen's* emergence from the primeval cave. No status difference is involved in this traditional sequence. The complete equality of all four phratries is a characteristic feature of Gond society, and there is no suggestion of any hierarchic order.

Corporate action of *saga*-members is prescribed also on occasions which initiate the individual into a new relationship with a social group other than his own, such as, for instance, on the occasion of marriage-negotiations. The formal support of all phratry-members resident in the village can be claimed as a right, and during the ceremonial negotiations every villager is required to join his phratry-brothers, the only alternative being to absent himself from the proceedings as well as from the subsequent feast. Although the negotiation of a marriage alliance or the payment of a bride-price affect materially only two families, the fiction is maintained that the issue is one which concerns two phratries. In the formal negotiations the names of the prospective bride and groom may never be mentioned, but the negotiators speak only of a boy and a girl of such and such *saga* as if the two phratries were negotiating the terms of a marriage alliance as an affair of group interest.

The unity of the phratry as a putative descent group with a maximal span is mirrored in the rule that for ritual purposes a person may be replaced by anyone of the same sex and generation who belongs to a clan of the same phratry. Thus at a marriage performed in the absence of the groom's own agnatic kinsmen, any couple of suitable age belonging to the groom's phratry may assume the ritual role of 'bridegroom's parents'.

This principle of substitutability operates also in the relations between the Raj Gonds and their hereditary bards, the Pardhans.¹ If on any ritual occasion no Pardhan traditionally attached to a Gond clan or sub-clan is available, his place may be taken by any Pardhan of the same *saga* irrespective of clan-affiliation.

Clans (*pai*) and Lineages (*kita*)

While the four exogamous phratries form the conceptual framework for the functioning of social forces, it is the



The Boramdeo Temple reflects the rich culture of Gonds of Chhattisgarh

clans, known in Gondi as *pari*, which provide the principal basis for the organization of ritual activities. The *pari* are the major segments of the *saga* and the members of a *pari* claim descent from a mythical founding ancestor standing to the forefathers of the other *pari* of the phratry in a brother-relationship. In the case of the Seven *wen* phratry, the number of the constituent clans is seven and each takes its name from an ancestor, believed to have been one of seven Panior brothers associated with the legendary home of the *saga*.² Among the other phratries, however, there is no such correlation between the original number of *wen* and the number of constituent clans.

The clans of each phratry are arranged in an order of seniority, believed to have originated in the birth order of the clan ancestors. This order of precedence regulates behaviour on certain ritual occasions, a concrete instance being the rule that on the occasion of the annual First Fruit Eating all members of a *saga* resident in a village must congregate in the house of the senior member of the senior most *pari* represented among the villagers. Group-relations between senior and junior *pari* are modelled on those customary between elder and younger brothers. Thus no member of a senior *pari* should marry the widow or divorced wife of a member of the junior most *pari* within the phratry, for such a marriage is considered analogous to the marriage between an elder brother and a younger brother's widow, which is contrary to tribal custom.

Nowadays Gond clans are dispersed over large areas, and most of the *pari* found in Chhatisgarh occur not only in widely separated parts of the districts but also among the Raj Gonds of Madhya Pradesh. No Gond has any conception of the actual distribution or numerical strength of his *pari* and clan-solidarity is not based on localization of descent-groups or face-to-face relations between their members, but on the common acceptance of certain symbols of clanship. The most important of these is the clan-name and a Gond sees in every man bearing his own clan-name a co-heir to the same mythological tradition and to the same social and ritual obligations. In Gondi, as in other Dravidian languages, the clan-name precedes the personal name and a Gond meeting a fellow tribesman will usually put the question: 'What is your clan?' (*batal pari* ?) rather than 'What is your name?' (*batal parol* ?). For the clan-name determines the social relationship of the two men and the kinship terms by which they should address each other. As the average Gond is usually conversant with the position of the *pari* within the phratry-framework enquiries as to *saga*-affiliation are seldom necessary. A widespread uncertainty about the affiliation of clans to the major groupings such as was found among the Kachins is unthinkable in the more clear-cut descent-group system of the Raj Gonds.

Clan-members consider themselves as agnatically linked kinsmen, but they lack an explanation for the division of the clan into several parallel lineages known as *kita*. The *kita* cannot be regarded as the products of mechanical segmentation resulting from the normal growth of a *pari* for, unlike lineage-segments which owe their existence to a simple process of fission; they are not of equal order. These components of a *pari* include invariably a *katora kita* or priestly lineage, a *patla kita* or guardian lineage, and a number of *kutma kita*. Among the *kita* of some clans we find also a *raja* or chiefly *kita*, as well as lineages known by certain hereditary Maratha titles (e.g. *mokaski* and *deskruk*) at one time bestowed on several minor Gond chiefs. The special position of the *Katora*- and the *patla*-lineage is closely associated with the cult of the *persa pen*. A member of the *katora*-lineage ministers as priest at all *persa pen* rites, and is responsible for the preparation and the conduct of the annual festivals usually attended by many, if not the majority of clan-members. In this task he is assisted by the *patla* as the guardian of the cult objects and ancestor-shrine. The members of the *kutma*-lineages, on the other hand, constitute the congregation of worshippers, whose duty it is to attend the rites, and provide offerings for the god.

Ideally a clan is a ritual unit, holding in joint possession a set of ritual symbols, representative of the *persa pen*, and a common cult-centre where the clan-members gather for the worship of the *persa pen* and the cult of the ancestors and departed of the clan. This cult has been described in *The Raj Gonds* may be noted only that the *katora*, as the executive organ of the clan in all ritual matters, has also the task of arranging for the funerary rites of any clan-member who dies without heirs or close agnatic kinsmen, and of joining every departed clan-member to the *persa pen* and the company of the ancestors.

As the right as well as the charismatic ability to minister at the worship of the *persa pen* are exclusively vested in the members of the *katora kita*, this lineage must be conceived of as basically distinct from all other lineages. The roles of the *patla kita* and the *raja kita* are not so narrowly defined, but their distinction from the *kutma*-lineages adds to the complexity of *pari*-composition.

The appropriateness of the term 'lineage' to describe the Gond *kita* may be questioned by those who define a lineage as a corporate, closely knit descent group, which is locally anchored and in possession of a demonstrable, though not

necessarily historically accurate genealogy. The Gond *kita* neither provides for corporate action outside the ritual field, nor can its members trace exact genealogical links. But as the Gonds themselves regard *kita* as meaning 'line', the use of the term 'lineage' appears justified provided we are aware of the different connotation of a Gond 'lineage' and a lineage of the type encountered in African societies.

Sub-clans (*khandan*)

Most of the clans occurring among the Gonds of Chhatisgarh are sub-divided into smaller putative descent-groups known as *khandan*.¹ whereas the configuration of *saga* and *pari* seems to have long been stabilized, the proliferation of *khandan*, which are the flexible products of recent organic growth, is a continuing process. The *khandan* must be clearly distinguished from the *kita*. The latter is an integral part of a clan, dependent on the interaction with other *kita* for the performance of ritual activities. The *khandan*, on the other hand, is a replica of the *pari*, comprising a complement of lineages undistinguishable from that of an undivided clan.

The ritual focus of a *khandan*, like that of an undivided *pari*, is a set of ritual objects symbolizing the *persa pen* of the *saga*. A new *khandan* can only come into being if a member of a *katora* lineage supported by several members of other lineages acquires such ritual objects and with them sets up a new cult-centre together with a shrine for the mythical ancestors. Those members of the *pari* who adhere to this new cult-centre form a separate *khandan*, which for all practical purposes equals in status the truncated parent-pan. The residual group of part-members then assumes the character of a *khandan*, and after the passage of some generations no one may know which of the two cult-centres is the more recently founded. The members of both *khandan* are referred to by the common pan-name, and their adherence to separate *khandan* is mentioned only in the context of the organization of ritual activities. There is no agreed order of seniority of *khandan* comparable to the order of precedence of *pari* within the *saga*, and the segments resulting from repeated fission are all of similar status.

This example demonstrates that a *khandan* can never be a group of people descended from a single historically traceable common ancestor. For any new cult group setting up a cult-centre must consist of several lineages, one of which must possess the hereditary right to priestly office. Though the man of *katora* line who inaugurates a cult-centre with a new set of ritual objects may be regarded as the 'founder' of the new *khandan*, many worshippers will inevitably belong to *kutma* lineages, and the initiative leading to the establishment of a new cult-centre may well lie with a prominent and ambitious man of *patla* or *kutma* lineage, motivated by the desire for status and prestige, or by the incentive of personal rivalry.

The foundation of a new cult-centre does not imply the inception of the cult of a new deity, for the deities worshipped under the name of *persa pen* at clan and sub-clan level are the deities of the phratry of which *pari* and *khandan* form part. Though the establishment of a new centre is symbolic of the emergence of a new ritual unit, cleavage at *khandan* level has social and not religious motives.

Only a few *pari* in Chhatisgarh have remained undivided with only one cult-centre and one *katora* lineage. But whether a cult-group is regarded as an undivided pan or as a *khandan* of a *pari*, its basic configuration is identical. There are always a *katora* lineage, a *patla* lineage, and several *kutma* lineages. Neither the *katora* nor the *patla* lineage will admit direct genealogical links with each other or with any *kutma kita* and the interrelation of the various *kutma* lineages is undefined. Gonds of *kutma kita* questioned as to their relationship to a member of the agnatic group of whose exact genealogical position vis-a-vis their own they are ignorant, will reply that although they have *pen* and *katora* in common, they belong to different 'houses' - (*ron*).

Most *kutma* lineages are unnamed and genealogical links beyond a depth of three generations are likely to fall into oblivion. In some *khandan*, however, special names are attached to certain *kutma* lineages. Most of such names seem to have originated as nicknames attached to a lineage ancestor, while others refer to a locality traditionally associated with the lineage. Members of such named lineages retain the consciousness of special genealogical links longer than those of unnamed *kutma* lineages, but lacking any form of ritual or economic co-operation at lineage-level, such consciousness does not express itself in any prescribed pattern of behaviour.

There are among the Gonds no 'attached' lineages, such as are characteristic features of certain African lineage systems, in the sense that lineages admittedly of different ancestry are accepted as accretions and granted the same social and ritual privileges as genuine segments of the clan. Distinct from this principle of 'attachment' yet also resulting in heterogeneous groups acting for certain purposes as corporate bodies, is the relationship between Gond

clans and their hereditary Pardhan bards and chroniclers, who play a vital role in Gond ritual.

Attached to every *khandan* (or undivided *pāri*) is a lineage of Pardhans, described by clan-members as *Rota Patau* or House Pardhans. These Pardhans are known by the same clan-name as their patrons, worship the same *persa pen* and have the important function of preserving by oral tradition the myths and legends of the clan, which they recite on ritual occasions. For ritual purposes the Pardhan bard is an active member of the *khandan*, but socially he does not enjoy equal status and is not a full member of the community of clansmen: Gonds do not extend to Pardhans the right of commensality and connubium, and Pardhans may not enter Gond houses. The distinction between Gonds and Pardhans, which is an ethnic one as well as one of status, might suggest that should regard their ritual association as the traditional co-operation between corresponding but independent clans of two distinct tribes. But such an interpretation would be misleading. The Pardhans of *khandan* of the Atram clan, for instance, do not constitute a clan of independent existence, but are part of the *khandan*, and cannot worship their *persa pen*, except through the Gond *katora* of the *khandan*. They regard themselves and are regarded as members of the Atram clan, which for this purpose must be conceived of as a multi-ethnic cult-group rather than as a major descent group.

The senior man among the Pardhans attached to the *khandan* has the specific task of maintaining contact with all the families constituting the sub-clan. He must visit each family at regular intervals and it is he who keeps the *katora* informed of births, deaths and marriages, and of movements of households from village to village.

The Clan Membership of Women

While a man's membership of his natal clan is clear and immutable, a woman's clan status is indeterminate and subject to change. Before marriage she is not a full member of her natal clan, and the Gonds say that 'an unmarried girl has no *pāri*'. She is spoken of as a 'daughter' of her father's clan, e.g. as Atram *mīar*; and throughout her life her position in the system of intermarrying groups remains dependent on the phratry-affiliation of her natal clan. Her indeterminate status is reflected in the ritual sphere; unlike the men and boys of her father's clan and the women married into it, she is not required to participate in such rituals as the eating of the first fruits. During the marriage ceremonies the bride is accepted into her husband's clan and at the first *persa pen* rites her husband attends after the wedding a newly married wife must be formally introduced to the clan-god. After her death she is ritually joined with the *persa pen* and the clan-ancestors of her conjugal clan, and by this sacrificial act performed by the *katora* her integration into the community of the husband's *pāri* becomes final. The link between a woman and her first husband's *persa pen* can never be entirely obliterated and it is for this reason that a woman should remarry within her husband's clan or at least within his phratry; for a second marriage within the same *saga* does not involve a change of allegiance in so far as it concerns the *persa pen*. No child can be adopted into the mother's natal clan and the child of an unsanctioned union is considered a member of the presumptive father's clan. A *pāri* extinct in the male line is doomed and no device can save it from total eclipse.

Clan Cohesion

The focal point of a clan's or sub-clan's unity is the cult-centre of the *persa pen*, and in view of the traditional location of certain of these centers on permanent sites, the question arises whether the clan was ever a territorial unit. The evidence of the clan-legends would seem to speak in favour of the assumption that at one time Gond clans had territorial associations. Many legends contain accounts of *persa pen* feasts, and in none of these is there a suggestion that the worshippers were summoned from distant settlements. The inference is always that they lived in one compact group, but within easy travelling distance of territories inhabited by affinal clans. Not only legendary traditions, but also present-day usage seems to reflect a state of affairs when there was no complete disassociation between residential and descent groups. The fiction that every bridal procession must appear to have come from another village, suggests that in previous times marriages within the village were not customary and with cross-cousin marriage as the preferred type of marriage such village-exogamy is plausible only if the inhabitants of a village were normally members of a single exogamous unit.

Today this is no longer so. Every village-community consists of members of different phratries and clans, marriages are frequently uxorilocal and there is a marked preference for brothers-in-law to settle in one village. The concept of 'clan-land' which is a vital force among some of the Gonds of Bastar is almost dead among the Raj Gonds of Chhatisgarh. But certain clans, dominant in an area, still claim a special link with the land surrounding the seat of their *persa pen*. Such areas are referred to as a clan's *watan*, a Marathi term commonly used in the sense of a hereditary estate, and in the highlands of Chhatisgarh there are several such clan-watan. Any system of legal joint-ownership of

land on a basis of clan-membership would certainly have been obliterated by the introduction of the regular land-tenure system of Chhatisgarh State, but apart from the vague memory of a common clan-land, there are other indications that the clan or sub-clan was at one time the maximal property holding group. One of these is the practice that when a man dies without male heirs or close agnatic kinsmen, the *katora* of his clan or sub-clan takes possession of his property in the name of the *persa pen*. A daughter may receive a share of her father's property at the hands of the *katora*, but this is considered a privilege rather than a right, and there can be little doubt that in the act of disposing of a clansman's property in this way the clan-priest assumes the role of an executive organ of the clan as a property holding group.

The *katora* exerts also a measure of control over the members of his *khandan*. He can debar a man living in an unsanctioned union or otherwise defying tribal custom from participation in the *persa pen* rites, and after the death of a man who has persistently neglected his obligations to his *persa pen* and absented himself from the clan feasts, the *katora* may refuse to perform the sacrificial rites necessary for the deceased's well-being in the Land of the Dead.

The power of the *katora* to impose sanctions and enforce conformity and a minimum of solidarity between clansmen reveals the clan or sub-clan as a social unit capable of preserving its integrity by the exercise of discipline over its members.

As the co-operation of clan-members lies mainly in the ritual field so the sanctions imposed by the clan-priest are of a ritual nature. Clanship ties do not involve economic collaboration, and, apart from the cult of their *persa pen*, clan members share few common interests. In panchayats dealing with secular matters no alignment according to clan membership is discernible, and it would seem that kinship ties and the common interest of co-villagers outweigh the solidarity of clan or sub-clan. Kinship in the male line necessarily coincides with clan-membership, but if the biddings of clan-ties run counter to the obligations towards cognates or close affines, the claims of kinship are likely to prevail.

Gond kingdoms in Chhatisgarh

The Raigarh State was prominent Gond kingdom of Chhatisgarh, earlier had area about 1486 square miles. In its South there was Sarangarh (Gond kingdom of Chhatisgarh State), in North Jashpur (Gond kingdom of Chhatisgarh), Udaipur (Gond kingdom of Chhatisgarh) and Gangpur states and in East only Gangpur State was there. Its ancient history is not well known but on basis of some historical informations the state was related to Gond dynasty of Chanda. The Raigarh state was established by Madan Singh who came here from a small village Bairagarh of Chanda District. After reaching Raigarh how he established his kingdom it is not known. After his death Takhat Singh, Beth Singh, Dilip Singh and Jujhar Singh, Devnath Singh, Ghanshyam Singh, Bhupdev Singh became kings one by one.

The Gond Kingdom of Bilaspur, Chhatisgarh, lying just west of the Arpa River. Bilaspur was the capital of a Gond kingdom until captured by the Marathas in the 18th century. Just north lies Ratanpur, an ancient Hindu capital of the Haihaya.

Apart from Garha-Mandla covering the area around Jabalpur and south of the Narmada to Mandla itself, two other historic Gond centres are notable: Deogarh, whose Gond Raja Bakht Buland founded Nagpur at the dawn of the 18th century, and, farther south in Maharashtra towards the borders of Bastar, Chandrapur (Chanda). From here the Kawardha Khairagarh, Kelhari, Janakpur Raj Gond dynasty traces its antecedents via the Pandaria Raj to the west of Bilaspur.

Always protected to a degree by their wild and impenetrable hills and forests, the Gonds nevertheless were touched by the waves of imperial movement that swept up and down peninsular India for many centuries. Their Dravidian language itself indicates a southern connection and their tribal religious practices, with strong vestiges of serpent worship and pre-Vedic animism, suggest links to a more ancient and unrecorded past.

Gond dynasty was ruling in the latter part of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with its capital at Amrakantaka, which extended in Kosala area and also occupied some parts of the ancient Akara (the area around Bhopal). This area is famous in history for the chivalry of Rani Durgabati who gallantly opposed the Mughal Governor Asaf Khan, who had invaded her kingdom on 1564 A.D. Her father-in-law, Sangram Shah had issued some gold coins of about 167 grains. The obverse of his coins has a crested lion in a square.

Conclusions

The analysis of the Raj Gonds' descent group system presented above enables us to isolate several basic factors

characteristic of Gond society and other segmentary tribal societies of Central India.

Foremost among these is the principle of the unity and indivisibility of Raj Gond society; a principle explicitly affirmed in mythology and epic poetry, and acted upon in the realities of social behaviour. Gond society is conceptually a total system, and no group, whatever its composition, can contract out of the basic framework of phratries and clans. Whereas most Hindu castes have an inherent tendency to split up into endogamous sub-castes of differential status, no section of Raj Gond society could establish itself as an independent endogamous unit short of complete repudiation of all ties of tribal solidarity. Although there were Gond ruling houses which at one time equalled many a Rajput dynasty in power and prestige, the members of these chiefly lineages do not constitute an endogamous aristocratic class. Nor is the absence of horizontal stratification in the internal organization of phratries and clans a historic accident. It is inherent in the indivisibility of Raj Gond society as a total system of interacting parts fundamentally equal in status.

Another feature is the immutable position of the major exogamous groups, which comprise within their limits the complex ramifications of clans, sub-clans, and lineages. This immutability ensures the overall stability of Gond society, while segmentation into groups of narrower span allows for the dynamics of organic growth. No amount of fission at the level of minimal segments can affect the equilibrium of the structure as a whole.

A principle of far reaching consequence for the configuration of Gond society is the constant equality of segments. Although the birth order of mythical ancestors determines the precedence of groups on ritual occasions, all *saga* rank equally with other *saga*, and all *pari* with other *pari*. If *pari* X divides into two *kandan*, A and B, and A remains undivided whereas B divides into c and d, and the latter divides into a and the segments A, c, a, and B will all rank as *khandan* of equal status, each comprising several functionally differentiated lineages and ritually focused on a cult-centre of its own.

The egalitarian principle basic to Gond society has made it possible to include status-differentiated groups within segments putatively descended from a common ancestor. Many clans and sub-clans contain Raja-lineages as well as lineages of commoner status, and the Gond sees no inconsistency in the special hereditary social and ritual status of raja-lineages—a status carrying with it e.g. the power of purifying persons in a state of ritual pollution—and the fiction that all members of a *pari* are agnatic kin. In other words, status derived from sources outside the lineage system is not expressible in terms of the basic social structure.

On a different level is the unusual phenomenon of including ethnically heterogeneous communities, such as the Pardhans, within the framework of groups otherwise based on common agnatic descent.

Compared with the classical clan and lineage systems studied by anthropologists in other parts of the world, the descent system of the Raj Gonds is of low effectiveness as a principle of political and legal organization. In part this may be due to the establishment of territorial states by autocratic chiefs who, as many a legend tells, derived their authority from force of arms rather than from their position as the heads of lineages. The authority of these chiefs would seem to have cut across the jurisdiction of ritual and descent groups, and included the exercise of supreme judicial powers and the right to collect taxes and to exact various types of tribute. With the fall of the Gond kingdoms political power did not revert to local groups based on descent, but passed to authorities outside the tribe.

Although until recently a good deal of delegated power was wielded by the feudal Gond chiefs styled rajas or bearing *sach* Marathi titles as *mokaski* and *deshmuk*, political and judicial powers have been out of the hands of the agnatic descent groups for so long that all traces of clan or sub-clan authority have been obliterated. There is no institution of clan headship, and even the senior men of the raja-lineages do not hold any position of authority in regard to the members of the other lineages of their group.

The dissociation between the organization of secular authority and the lineage-system manifests itself even at village-level. The position of village-headman is not necessarily held by a member of the clan most strongly represented in the locality, and the economic co-operation of villagers is not determined by clan-membership. Indeed, the village as the principal face to face group is uncorrelated with the clan-system, and it is not unlikely that the lack of coincidence between descent-groups and residential groups is in part responsible for the ephemeral character of the Gond village.

Considering that the system of clans and sub-clans operates effectively mainly at ritual level, its persistence as the principal integrating force in Gond society is remarkable. Even after the two decades which have witnessed the eclipse of chiefly authority, the rigidity and strength of the Gonds' descent group system has remained unimpaired, and this stability continues to counterbalance the extreme liability of the residential pattern. Whereas the composition of residential groups is fluid and Gonds have on the whole little attachment to localities, the position of every individual in

the framework of descent groups is undoubted and immutable, and this stability in a vital sphere of social relations provides the psychological and social security which has enabled the Gonds to retain their tribal identity in the face of political subjugation and prolonged pressure from materially more advanced neighbours.