

10.5.16.

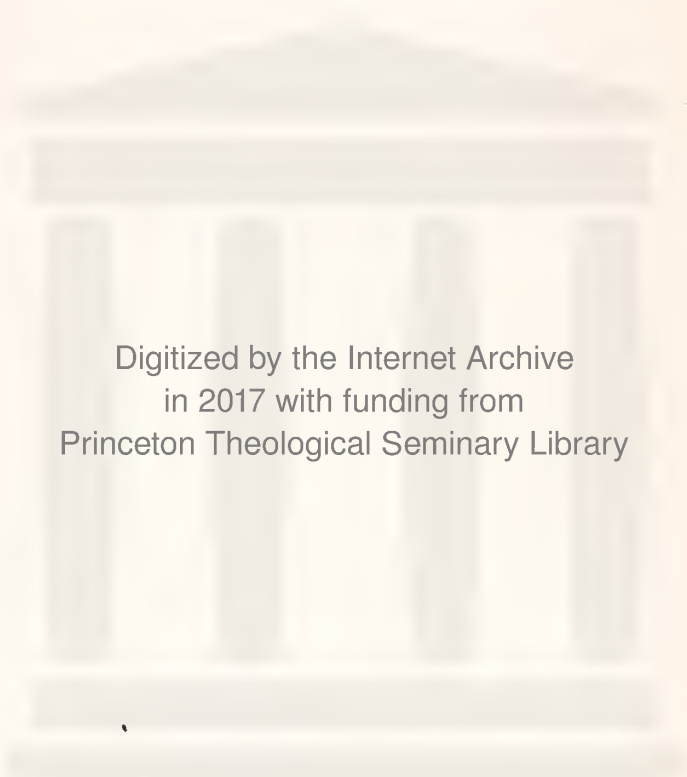
Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

Purchased by the Mary Cheves Dulles Fund.

Division.....DS 430

Section.....R 96

v. 7.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

THE TRIBES AND CASTES
OF THE
CENTRAL PROVINCES OF INDIA



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA
MADRAS • MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO
DALLAS • SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

THE
TRIBES AND CASTES
OF THE
CENTRAL PROVINCES
OF INDIA

BY
R. V. RUSSELL
OF THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE
SUPERINTENDENT OF ETHNOGRAPHY, CENTRAL PROVINCES

ASSISTED BY
RAI BAHADUR HĪRA LĀL
EXTRA ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

*PUBLISHED UNDER THE ORDERS OF THE CENTRAL
PROVINCES ADMINISTRATION*

IN FOUR VOLUMES
VOL. II

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1916



COPYRIGHT

offered the gift to various Brāhmans, but they all refused it. So he made a man of clay, and blew upon the image and gave it life, and the god then asked the man whom he had created to accept the gift which the Brāhmans had refused. This man, who was the first Bāri, agreed on condition that all men should drink with him and recognise his purity of caste. Parmeshwar then told him to bring water in a cup, and drank of it in the presence of all the castes. And in consequence of this all the Hindus will take water from the hands of a Bāri. They also say that their first ancestor was named Sundar on account of his personal beauty; but if so, he failed to bequeath this quality to his descendants. The proper avocation of the Bāris is, as already stated, the manufacture of the leaf-cups and plates used by all Hindus at festivals. In the Central Provinces these are made from the large leaves of the *māhul* creeper (*Bauhinia Vahlii*), or from the *palās* (*Butea frondosa*). The caste also act as personal servants, handing round water, lighting and carrying torches at marriages and other entertainments and on journeys, and performing other functions. Some of them have taken to agriculture. Their women act as maids to high-caste Hindu ladies, and as they are always about the zenāna, are liable to lose their virtue. A curious custom prevails in Mārwar on the birth of an heir to the throne. An impression of the child's foot is taken by a Bāri on cloth covered with saffron, and is exhibited to the native chiefs, who make him rich presents.¹ The Bāris have the reputation of great fidelity to their employers, and a saying about them is, 'The Bāri will die fighting for his master.'

Basdewa,² Wasudeo, Harbola, Kaparia, Jaga, Kapdi.—

A wandering beggar caste of mixed origin, who also call themselves Sanādhyā or Sanaurhīa Brāhmans. The Basdewas trace their origin to Wasudeo, the father of Krishna, and the term Basdewa is a corruption of Wasudeo or Wasudeva. Kaparia is the name they bear in the

¹ Sherring, *Tribes and Castes*, i. pp. 403, 404. papers by Mr. W. N. Maw, Deputy Commissioner, Damoh, and Murlidhar,

² This article is compiled from Munsiff of Khurai in Saugar.

Anterved or country between the Ganges and Jumna, whence they claim to have come. Kaparia has been derived from *kapra*, cloth, owing to the custom of the Basdewas of having several dresses, which they change rapidly like the Bahrūpia, making themselves up in different characters as a show. Harbola is an occupational term, applied to a class of Basdewas who climb trees in the early morning and thence vociferate praises of the deity in a loud voice. The name is derived from *Har*, God, and *bolna*, to speak. As the Harbolas wake people up in the morning they are also called Jaga or Awakener. The number of Basdewas in the Central Provinces and Berār in 1911 was 2500, and they are found principally in the northern Districts and in Chhattisgarh. They have several territorial subcastes, as Gangāputri or those who dwell on the banks of the Ganges; Khaltia or Deswāri, those who belong to the Central Provinces; Parauha, from *para*, a male buffalo calf, being the dealers in buffaloes; Harbola or those who climb trees and sing the praises of God; and Wasudeo, the dwellers in the Marātha Districts who marry only among themselves. The names of the exogamous divisions are very varied, some being taken from Brāhman *gotras* and Rājput septs, while others are the names of villages, or nicknames, or derived from animals and plants. It may be concluded from these names that the Basdewas are a mixed occupational group recruited from high and low castes, though they themselves say that they do not admit any outsiders except Brāhmans into the community. In Bombay¹ the Wasudevas have a special connection with Kumhārs or potters, whom they address by the term of *kāka* or paternal uncle, and at whose houses they lodge on their travels, presenting their host with the two halves of a cocoanut. The caste do not observe celibacy. A price of Rs. 25 has usually to be given for a bride, and a Brāhman is employed to perform the ceremony. At the conclusion of this the Brāhman invests the bridegroom with a sacred thread, which he thereafter continues to wear. Widow marriage is permitted, and widows are commonly married to widowers. Divorce is also permitted. When a man's wife dies he shaves his moustache and beard, if any,

¹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, xvii. p. 108.

in mourning and a father likewise for a daughter-in-law ; this is somewhat peculiar, as other Hindus do not shave the moustache for a wife or daughter-in-law. The Basdewas are wandering mendicants. In the Marātha Districts they wear a plume of peacock's feathers, which they say was given to them as a badge by Krishna. In Saugor and Damoh instead of this they carry during the period from Dasahra to the end of Māgh or from September to January a brass vessel called *matuk* bound on their heads. It is surmounted by a brass cone and adorned with mango-leaves, cowries and a piece of red cloth, and with figures of Rāma and Lakshman. Their stock-in-trade for begging consists of two *kartāls* or wooden clappers which are struck against each other ; *ghungrus* or jingling ornaments for the feet, worn when dancing ; and a *paijna* or kind of rattle, consisting of two semicircular iron wires bound at each end to a piece of wood with rings slung on to them ; this is simply shaken in the hand and gives out a sound from the movement of the rings against the wires. They worship all these implements as well as their beggar's wallet on the Janam-Ashtami or Krishna's birthday, the Dasahra, and the full moon of Māgh (January). They rise early and beg only in the morning from about four till eight, and sing songs in praise of Sarwan and Karan. Sarwan was a son renowned for his filial piety ; he maintained and did service to his old blind parents to the end of their lives, much against the will of his wife, and was proof against all her machinations to induce him to abandon them. Karan was a proverbially charitable king, and all his family had the same virtue. His wife gave away daily rice and pulse to those who required it, his daughter gave them clothes, his son distributed cows as alms and his daughter-in-law cocoanuts. The king himself gave only gold, and it is related of him that he was accustomed to expend a maund and a quarter¹ weight of gold in alms-giving before he washed himself and paid his morning devotions. Therefore the Basdewas sing that he who gives early in the morning acquires the merit of Karan ; and their presence at this time affords the requisite opportunity to anybody who may be desirous of emulating the

¹ About 100 lbs.

king. At the end of every couplet they cry 'Jai Ganga' or 'Har Ganga,' invoking the Ganges.

The Harbolas have each a beat of a certain number of villages which must not be infringed by the others. Their method is to ascertain the name of some well-to-do person in the village. This done, they climb a tree in the early morning before sunrise, and continue chanting his praises in a loud voice until he is sufficiently flattered by their eulogies or wearied by their importunity to throw down a present of a few pice under the tree, which the Harbola, descending, appropriates. The Basdewas of the northern Districts are now commonly engaged in the trade of buying and selling buffaloes. They take the young male calves from Saugor and Damoh to Chhattisgarh, and there retail them at a profit for rice cultivation, driving them in large herds along the road. For the capital which they have to borrow to make their purchases, they are charged very high rates of interest. The Basdewas have here a special veneration for the buffalo as the animal from which they make their livelihood, and they object strongly to the calves being taken to be tied out as baits for tiger, refusing, it is said, to accept payment if the calf should be killed. Their social status is not high, and none but the lowest castes will take food from their hands. They eat flesh and drink liquor, but abstain from pork, fowls and beef. Some of the caste have given up animal food.