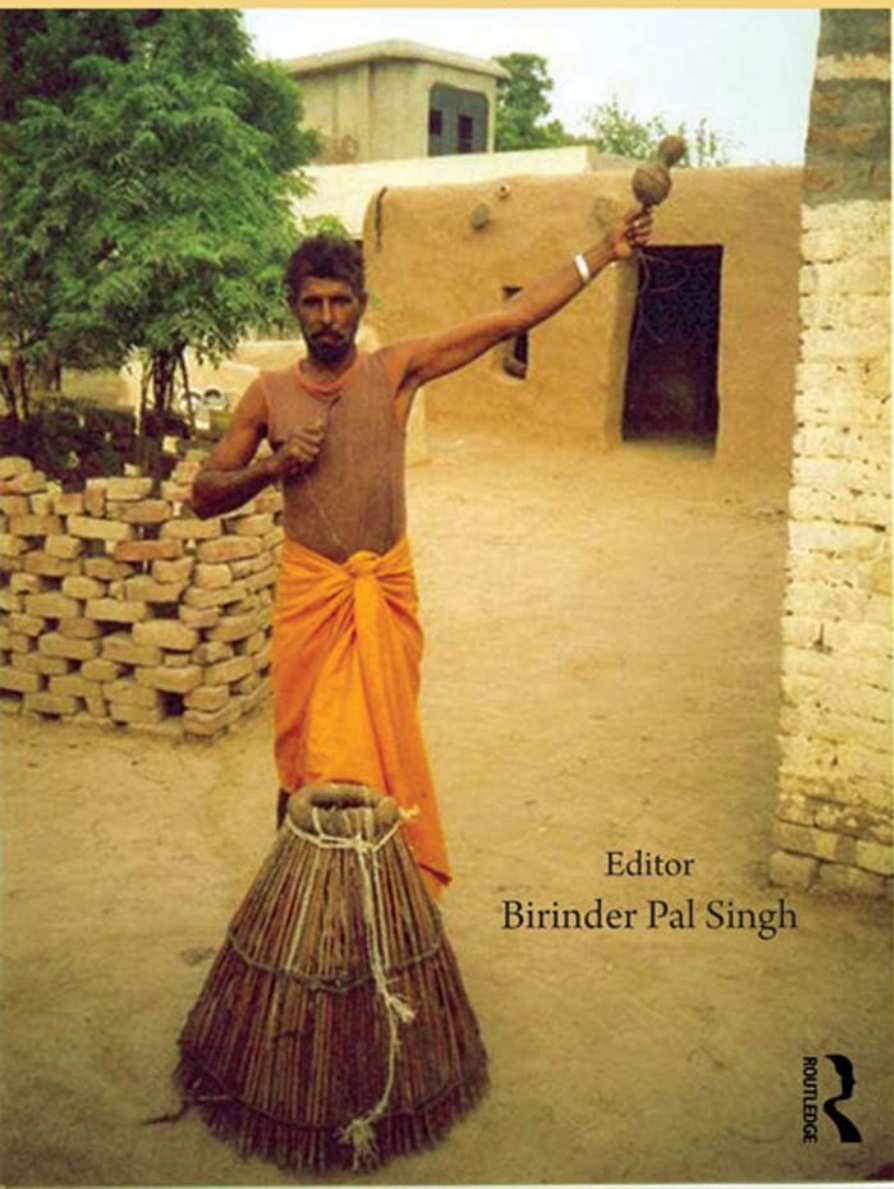


'Criminal' Tribes of Punjab

A Social–Anthropological Inquiry



Editor
Birinder Pal Singh

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*To all
the tribespeople
of Punjab*

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Preface

The Government of Punjab, at the behest of the Central Government, granted a project, *An Ethnographic Study of the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes of Punjab* to the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology (DSSA), Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, to ascertain the tribal character of certain communities. In the original letter from the Punjab Government the department was given a list of 15 communities, but these were in fact only 12 as alternative names of certain communities were also included in the list such as Nayak, Aheria and Naik. The field investigation informed us that these were actually one, that is, Naik, in the universe of this study. Similar was the case with the Gadaria and Pali tribes. Thus we had five communities in all. Five teachers from the DSSA and one from the Department of Correspondence Courses of the Punjabi University were assigned two communities each. Each teacher was to supervise the collection of ethnographic details of the two communities assigned to him/her. As one investigator left the project mid-way, the data collection was delayed by a few months.

The present volume focuses on seven communities — the *Bauria*, *Bazigar Banjara*, *Bangala*, *Barad*, *Gandhila*, *Nat*, and *Sansi* — that were declared ‘criminal tribes’ by the British Administration. The alleged notoriety and large size of three of these was a fascination for us, and prompted us to look into their ethnographies in an attempt to make some sense of their alleged ‘criminality’. What had really gone into their becoming criminal, if at all, would certainly be a still more fascinating exercise, as also understanding their cosmologies analysed semiologically. But these are independent projects that do not fall within the scope of the present volume.

Another compelling factor to document these ethnographies is that since Denzil Ibbetson and H.A. Rose’s *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* there is virtually no information available on these communities, let alone a detailed one. This study was based on the *Census* operations of 1881 conducted by Ibbetson. The data was compiled by Rose and published in 1883. (It was reprinted in 1970 by the Languages Department, Punjabi University.) However, even the Ibbetson–Rose study concentrated primarily on one tribe, the Sansis (*ibid.*: 362–79); all others were accorded minor accounts, largely introductory and superficial. *Bauria* is, however, an exception (*ibid.*: 70–79).

K. Suresh Singh's *People of India (Punjab)* also has limited information on each of these tribes that have been classified as 'Scheduled Castes' in Independent India. This information too does not go beyond short, general descriptions. According to the *Census of India (Punjab) 2001*, there is no 'Scheduled Tribe' population in the state at this time. In the absence of any detailed information on these tribes/communities, the present volume assumes significance.

Another advantage that we had was the fact that a number of our respondents were of or above the age of 80. They could inform us in detail of the traditional practices, beliefs and legends of their communities. Moreover, at this point in history, tradition has been preserved due to the presence of these people, and the closed nature of their social structure. The younger generation is given to modern ways of life and occupations. The details of their traditions would, as a result, not be available to us after the death of the older generation. Thus, the present volume gains importance as a repository of traditional beliefs and practices.

The data was recorded in Punjabi; translations have been done by the editor into English without observing linguistic technicalities such as diacritics, etc. It is easy to understand and appropriate for this volume, which is not an exercise in language. For the translation of vernacular words, the *Punjabi-English Dictionary* (1994) published by the Punjabi University, Patiala proved useful. The translation is literal to capture the meaning of the word, as when said in Punjabi, even if it is an odd expression in English. To break the monotony of the text and translation, and also where the vernacular had been used commonly, the English translation is, sometimes, given in parenthesis.

This work would not have been possible without the support of numerous persons and organisations. We are thankful to the Secretary, Department of Social Welfare of the Punjab government who provided us with the opportunity to work on such an oppressed section of Punjabi society, whose living conditions are worse than the poorest of the poor in the state. Numerous respondents went on record saying that this was the first time that some one from the government had come to 'ask about them'. We are thankful to the Director, Social Welfare of the Punjab government and especially the Deputy Director, R. R. Karkhal, who was always forthcoming, assisting us whenever necessary. We are especially thankful to the Department for not forcing us to hurry the project, as is customary with government offices.

I am also thankful to the Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University, Swarn Singh Boparai, who never held back the file whenever it reached him. His co-operation was extremely useful in organising a national-level conference the “‘Tribes” of Punjab: A Social Anthropological Inquiry’, held on 1–2 March 2007.

All the delegates at the conference, who spared time for us and travelled to Patiala to enrich our understanding tribal research, must not go unmentioned. It is not possible to name each and every scholar, but I must thank Professor Suresh Sharma, Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, who gave the inaugural address and R. K. Jain, Professor Emeritus of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for his valedictory address.

This research could not have been conducted successfully but for the support, inputs and co-operation of the leaders and office-bearers of various organisations of the Vimukt Jatis in Punjab. They responded to each and every call we made to them, soliciting their help. They were also very helpful to our research investigators in not only identifying the households of the members of their respective communities, but also in escorting them and the concerned teachers when they were in the field. It is not possible to mention the names of all but the few are Inder Singh Chalokia, Malkit Singh, Gurdev Singh Charan, Jagir Singh Khalsa, Principal Nidhan Singh, Shingara Singh, Nanku and Vijay Bhatt. They were also kind enough to present their views at the conference.

The quality of any work depends on the sincerity and commitment of the fieldworkers, who, in this case, collected data with great seriousness, working against all odds — including the non-cooperative respondents, and the hot and sultry weather they had to endure. This team included Buta Singh, Lovedeep Kumar, Jagpal Singh, and Hardeep Singh.

Needless to mention, I am also thankful to all my colleagues from the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Punjabi University, Patiala, namely Malkit Kaur, H. S. Bhatti and Deepak Kumar, and Harinder Kaur (Lecturer in Sociology) of the Department of Correspondence Courses of this University who not only travelled far and wide into the field but also took pains to give a final shape to their respective reports.

It would not have been possible to finalise this study without the unfailing support and work of my office staff, Swaran Prabha, Savita Devi, Balwinder Singh, and Jaswinder Singh. Gurdeep Singh worked hard to do the computer settings of the files, photographs and other related technicalities of the study. Rattan Singh Rana of the Department of Geography was also kind enough to spare time to help with these. I am personally indebted to him.

I am thankful to the proverbial lady behind each work, and my family members, including my aging parents who spared me time for this project.

I owe thanks also to Omita Goyal at Routledge for letting this volume see the light of day. Her suggestions and the comments of an anonymous referee have added to the quality of this work; I thank them too.

Birinder Pal Singh

Introduction

Birinder Pal Singh

A white man's rat has driven away the native rat so the European fly drives away our own, and the clover kills our fern, so will the Maoris disappear before the white man himself.

Maori proverb (cited in Sharma 1994)

Where the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal.

Charles Darwin (cited in Bauman 2004: 38)

The present state of Punjab is a small fraction of the total area that it initially covered, and was spreading right up to the border of Afghanistan in the West, Jammu and Kashmir in the North, Uttar Pradesh (present-day Uttarakhand) in the East and Delhi/Rajasthan in the South. The people of this vast area have extremely diverse demographic characteristics, comprising all the dominant Indian religions, numerous communities, castes and tribes. Historically too, this area was the gateway to India that witnessed people and communities of different racial stocks and cultural traits visiting and inhabiting this part of the Indian subcontinent. Punjab was located on the war route for many invaders and the trade route of innumerable merchants till 1947, when the borders between India and Pakistan were sealed.

The Indian subcontinent has been characterised as a sleeping society by Marxist scholars and a cold society by structural anthropologists. The commonly-held idea is that this society has remained unchanged for centuries in terms of its sociocultural practices and systems of production. The growth of population has never disturbed the order in society as new settlements were established, reproducing similar forms of production and social relations. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that if we did not change, it was due to the wisdom of our sages that we were able to retain and maintain the social as well as the moral order of our society. All through Indian history, numerous invaders from Europe to Central Asia came and settled here without disturbing the existing order. They left

behind something of their own, others who stayed took something from here and the result was a fine blend of cultures, religions and values. The episteme of resemblance was dominant. Till recently, the differences between 'us' and 'them', 'we' and 'they' were not highlighted.

The invasion of imperial Britain was characteristically different from all previous ones. Unlike their predecessors, who either returned home after plundering or like the Mughals made the region their home, the British were interested in ruling India and sending the loot home regularly. Thus their interests were different. As Niharranjan Ray notes:

for long, at least up to 1887, there remained the primary obligation of British mercantile colonialism, to make the military conquest as complete as possible from one end of the country to other, east to west, north to south, and if possible, to go even beyond, to Burma in the east, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet in the north, and Afghanistan in the north-west. This called for, internally, a political and military policy that demanded maintenance of a strong thrust into all the resistance areas including the forest depths and hill-sides and hill-tops. (1972: 18)

Such a stringent control on the country's territory and its population created a turmoil never experienced before. The British were not only racially different but also culturally hostile to this part of the world. They came here to plunder and enrich their own nation-state back in Europe. Hence they debunked everything they encountered here, be it culture, customs, values, beliefs, social, and religious practices, virtually everything. Macaulay's remarks on our civilisation are not without meaning: that the whole wisdom of this country is equivalent to two shelves in an English library. Since they viewed our tradition as absurd, they wanted us to adopt their ways of doing things to become 'modern'. Numerous Indians too joined them in this pursuit, with the notable exception of Gandhi who not only criticised their ways of politics, administration and production, but also admonished us not to follow the dangerous path of modernisation. But that was not to be. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, his trusted lieutenant and confidante, did not follow the Gandhian path of building a new India.

Besides many projects that the imperial government launched, one of the most important was to prepare a detailed demographic profile of the Indian population, i.e., their subjects. *Census*

operations were thus launched in the last quarter of the nineteenth century throughout the country. British administrators could not understand the cultural pluralism of the Indian people and the sense of accommodation and adjustment with different religions and communities prevalent in the country. For instance, when the respondents returned replies that they were Hindu–Muslim or Hindu–Sikh, the officers were at a complete loss. How could one be both? They were looking through the glasses of modernity where, as Foucault says, the episteme of difference has taken precedence over the episteme of resemblance. We were and are still, to quite an extent (especially the tribal, rural and poor people) a collectivity-oriented society where individual differences are not only not highlighted but rather, are kept in the background.

The imperial rulers also could not understand, for instance, the meaning of nomadism, which was at the time the way of life of a large number of communities in India and outside. It was not only an occupation and lifestyle but also a philosophy of life. Why stick to one place? Why own property? Why not enjoy the diversity of nature? Why not be a part and parcel of nature? Why change nature and interfere in its matters? It is mentioned in Ayurveda that when people settle down in places, big or small, it leads to the spread of diseases and epidemics.

Thus, such classes of people and communities, who lived with and in nature, practising nomadism, were not understood by the imperial rulers and administrators. They considered these people not only uncivilised and uncultured but also savage and barbarian, who were a potential threat to the law and order of society. Since they were poor and lacked definite means of production to earn a living, they were assumed to be thieves and dacoits. Thus they were dubbed 'criminals'. According to David Arnold, the Criminal Tribes Act was used against 'wandering groups, nomadic petty traders and pastoralists, gypsy types, hill- and forest-dwelling tribals, in short, against a wide variety of marginals who did not conform to the colonial pattern of settled agricultural and wage labour' (1985: 85). The prescriptions of Captain W. H. Sleeman and others connected with the Thuggee and Dacoity operations in Central India had proved to the rulers that such people, without a permanent hearth and home, were a threat to society. This led to the enactment of Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, following which the Punjab administration readily asked for its implementation in

the state. It was then that a number of communities in Punjab, chief among them the Bauria, Bazigar, Barad (often spelled as Barar), Bangala, Gandhila, Nat, and Sansi, including their numerous, sub-groups were declared 'criminals'. These nomadic communities were forced to settle down on government lands or on the peripheries of villages and towns. They were also issued identity cards which were made mandatory for them to carry whenever they moved out of their settlement. For instance, the Bauria males were made to carry with them a *chittha*, an identity card contained inside a metallic pipe. Its absence was an unbailable offence for which one could be arrested then and there without any warrants. These people were roll-called three times a day by the local *chowkidar*, *lambardar* or at the police post. They could move out of their settlement only after furnishing full details of their destination and purpose of movement.

The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 was modified in 1911 to include certain draconian recommendations, such as getting finger prints and also registering these communities properly. It was noted during the fieldwork among the Bauria who mentioned: 'It was only our men who were made to give thumb impressions by rolling the whole thumb from left to right. It was no simple thumb impression as taken from men of other communities'. About the amendments in the Criminal Tribes Act from 1871 to 1911, Meena Radhakrishna writes:

The needs of practical governance led to a search for a 'social scientific' explanation of crime in India, connecting Indian criminality to the introduction of the railways, the new forest policy, repeated famines and so on. (2001: 6)

Sandria B. Freitag also concludes:

The language of the revised Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 reflected the imperial refocus from the countryside to the urban landscape. Though the fictional label of 'tribe' was retained, the groups who could be proclaimed and imprisoned without establishing individual guilt now included any collection of persons — that is, 'gang' — who had engaged over time in premeditated collective crime. (1991: 260)

The imperial authority's criteria for characterising a community as 'criminal' were, however, lopsided and methodologically flawed, which is why they created more problems rather than solving the issue. Anand A. Yang argues that

official descriptions of criminal tribes were also static and ignored the historical dimension. Banjaras, for example, were treated as a criminal tribe without any comprehension of their past. As recent research indicates, most Banjaras were not involved in illegal activities, and for those that were, it was as a result of nineteenth century developments which made their regular means of livelihood redundant. (1985: 116)

Andrew J. Major too notes:

In 1835 Sleeman reached the conclusion that the Thugs and the criminal tribes were one and the same people; in 1852 H. Brereton, the Superintendent Thuggee Investigations, Punjab, reaffirmed this linkage, observing that Thugs in the Punjab, although mostly Mazhabis (the Chuhra section within the Sikh community), were recruited from the general criminal class: 'Chuhra thieves, Sainsee burglars, and Child Stealers, and Jat dacoits'. But the linkage, in terms of a common origin, was erroneous for the simple reason that the Thugs were a professional organization of individuals, recruited from the whole spectrum of society, not a tribe or community. (1999: 662)

Major also cites the proceedings of the Legislative Department:

The Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab then wrote to the seven Division Commissioners to obtain their views. Not surprisingly, the seven were unanimous in agreeing that a system of surveillance, which had since annexation been in operation against the Mazhabi 'Thugs', should be applied to tribes like the Baurias and Sansis: in the words of one Commissioner, 'the existence of a criminal class, living notoriously on robbery, is an outrage on civilized society, and their suppression is urgently called for.' Consequently, in 1856 the Judicial Commissioner issued Book Circular No. 18 which provided for the system of surveillance and control that would take effect in the rest of India only after 1860. Under the authority of this Circular all Sansis, Harnis and Baurias were to be registered at the local *thanas* (police stations), the *lambardars* of the villages in which these tribes nominally resided were to be answerable for their conduct and movements, registered tribesmen were not to be allowed to sleep away from their villages without a ticket of leave from the *thanedar*, and any tribesman found absent without leave was to furnish security for good behaviour or, failing that, be sent to jail. (Ibid.: 665)

One may note the promptness with which the administrators of Punjab agreed to such a proposal, which would give them and lower officials such powers as to exploit, harass and intimidate all the marginal communities throughout the state. During the field work we encountered numerous stories and personal anecdotes from the members of such communities who had been harassed, especially by the police, over the years. They repeat the following as evidence of the police terror that exists in their minds till date.¹ An old Bauria, man quipped: '*Bauriye hale vi police nu dekh ke seham jande ne*', that a Bauria person still gets scared at the very sight of a policeman. This is one reason why it is hard to ascertain the true identity of the members of these communities even today. They fear that some old cases pending against them might be raked up again.

The Criminal Tribes Act remained active even after the country won independence in 1947. It shows the lackadaisical attitude of the Indian political elite to not let these large sections of our population taste freedom, thus forcing them to launch their own struggle in independent India. Finally they got 'independence' on 31 August 1952 when the tag of criminality was removed from all the criminal tribes of the country. Now they are called Denotified Tribes or Vimukt Jatis. It is ironical that these communities celebrate this day as the day of their independence and not 15 August. They have ever since then been struggling to get themselves included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. The issue becomes grim as no uniformity has been adopted in the characterisation of Scheduled Tribes (STs). One community in some state has Scheduled Tribe status whereas in another, the same community has Scheduled Caste (SC) status or vice versa. Milind Bokil explains:

The DNTs are not categorized as a class under the constitutional schedules like the scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). Some of them have been included in the respective state lists of SCs and STs but there is no uniformity across the country. For example, in Maharashtra, the 'Phanse Pardhis' are included in the STs, but their counterparts, the Haran Shikaris or Gaon Pardhis are categorized under the VJNTs (Vimukta Jatis and Nomadic Tribes, as they are called in Maharashtra). Similarly the Kaikadis in the Vidarbha region are grouped under the SCs but those from the rest of the state are under the VJNTs. The same Kaikadis are categorized as STs in Andhra Pradesh. One of the most populous tribes, the Banjaras or Lambadas (and their sub-sections) are included in the VJNTs in Maharashtra but categorized as SCs in Karnataka. Such anomalies are plenty. (2002: 1)

Roy Burman tries to explain this anomaly:

Scheduled Tribes is an administrative *political* category created under Article 342 of Constitution of India. This Article enables the President (and the Parliament, in modification of the initial notification issued by the President in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state) to specify not only tribes and tribal communities but even parts of groups within any tribe or tribal community, as belonging to the category of Scheduled Tribes. (1993: 176, emphasis added)

He continues that if this Article is seen along with Articles 342(2) and 341 of the Constitution, 'it becomes obvious that listing of Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes is an instrument of policy' (Ibid.: 176). Thus, he writes,

it is possible that some communities, who are treated as tribals by the anthropologists do not find mention in the list of Scheduled Tribes: on the other hand the list may include many communities whose status as tribals is debatable.... The Constitution has not laid down any criteria for specification of communities as Scheduled Tribes'. (Ibid.: 176)

Virginus Xaxa also confirms:

Many studies have shown that there is little scientific basis on which the present categorisation of Scheduled Tribes may be defended. But since the list is linked to the extension of administrative and political concessions to the group concerned, the exclusion or inclusion of a particular group reflects political mobilisation rather than a neutral application of criteria'. (2003: 376)

Andre Bêteille too gives his explanation for the perpetuation of this anomaly: 'The problem in India was to *identify* rather than *define* tribes, and scientific and theoretical considerations were never allowed to displace administrative or political ones' (1999: 59, emphasis added).

It was this administrative expediency and political opportunism in independent India that created greater confusion rather than resolving the issue of the definition and identification of tribespeople. Consequently, the Vimukt Jatis established an All India Denotified Tribes (Vimukt Jatis) Sewak Sangh in 1982 to coordinate the activities of its state units and articulate the demands of the member communities at various levels of politics and administration. Its Punjab

unit has also been raising the voice of seven Denotified Tribes in the same manner at various levels. Their main argument is that these communities had hitherto been called 'tribes' and had been declared as Denotified Tribes, why then had they suddenly been clubbed with the Scheduled Castes? According to the Annual Report (2003–2004) of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, there is no tribal population in the state of Punjab.

These communities resent their Scheduled Caste characterisation as they believe themselves to be Kshatriya Rajputs. Hence their grouse is at two levels: first, government policy is denying them their genuine or traditional social status and degrading them by clubbing them with the lowest castes from whom they maintain social distance. This aspect becomes clear from the ethnographic details about most of these tribes. Second, it is also withholding their right to a separate quota as prescribed in the Reservation policy of the country. They lament that since they have been clubbed with the Scheduled Castes, the creamy layer — Balmiks and Chamars — takes all the benefits and they are left with nothing. Consequently, their organisations have been raising these demands at various levels.

METHODOLOGY

The state of Punjab is the universe of this study. It has three main sociocultural geographical tracts — Malwa, Majha and Doaba. An attempt has been made to track the communities under study all through the length and breadth of the state by a team of five investigators and five supervisors. The field investigators were given a week-long orientation course to acquaint them with the techniques of data collection, especially the qualitative aspects, and the perils and limitations of such an enterprise. They were also made aware of the probable lapses on their part that could mar the objectivity of the information collected. Having apprised them of the aims and objectives of the ethnographic study, they were equipped with a detailed interview questionnaire. They were asked to fill up a minimum of 50 questionnaires for each community, keeping in consideration the distribution of their population over the three major tracts of the state. Since these communities are believed to be closed ones, the investigators were asked to be particular about the differences, if any, across the three tracts.

Once dispatched into the field they were keenly supervised by the respective supervisors. The latter not only cross-checked the places

their investigators visited and the respondents contacted, they also acquired a feel of the field. By personally interacting with the respondents and community leaders, the teachers obtained a deeper insight into the problem, which helped them enrich the data collected by the investigators. The Chief Coordinator himself went into the field in different parts of the state with similar objectives in mind. The investigators were recalled twice to the headquarters from the field, first after they had filled about 10 interview questionnaires, and later, when about two-thirds of the data had been collected, to share their experiences of the field and the problems faced therein. Feedback from the field and dispelling the investigators' dilemmas and queries proved very fruitful.

To ascertain the tribal character, which is the aim of the project, a sample of 50 respondents from each community — given the homogeneity of the universe — was considered sufficient. At times it seemed to us that even 50 was a large number because there was a high incidence of repetition. However, despite the fact that the investigators complained of boredom and repetition, and that 'everyone gives the same information', we stuck to the minimum limit of 50 interview questionnaires, if not more, for each community.

Before starting the fieldwork we invited the leaders of the All India Denotified Tribes (Vimukt Jatis) Sewak Sangh and other organisations, the representatives of various communities and their local and regional leaders to the Department to obtain information at two levels: one, the nature and type of the problems and demands they had been articulating for all these years; two, to know the distribution of their population in the state. Such meetings, held twice, proved very useful. Both the teachers and the investigators remained in touch with these people throughout the fieldwork. Their identification of the respective communities' location was authentic.

We also took the help from K. Suresh Singh's *People of India (Punjab)* and *Status of Depressed Scheduled Castes in Punjab* (1996), a report prepared by the Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh, in this regard. We also advised our investigators to take leads from the concerned respondents and follow the trajectory suggested by them to trace and identify the members of their family, clan or community elsewhere.

Locating the concerned community was not an easy affair as many a time we found that local people too were ignorant of the true credentials of a community. For instance, one of our research investigators was sure that the Gandhilas were settled for

a long time on the periphery of his hometown. Everybody there believed so, but when the investigator himself approached them, they were found to be Bangalas and Sansis. This story was repeated in numerous places. People usually characterise a community on the basis of certain traits they appear to possess. In this case, they might have seen donkeys there and hence thought the associated community to be Gandhilas. Else they would identify a community on the basis of their familiarity with one that is numerically large, like the Sansi or Bauria, whose names are often used as an abuse, such as *Sansi jeha*, meaning 'like a Sansi' or a *Bauria*. Thus people's information was more impressionistic than authentic, just as in Punjab all labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were earlier called *bhaiyas* and now Biharis, and all south Indians are labelled as 'Madrasis'.

Another problem in identification is their past criminal record. They deny their identity, fearing that some old police case pending against them might have been re-opened. That is why our investigators had to take along some leader or his representative to a given community to obtain information. It was observed that till they were assured of the confidentiality of data and coaxed by their confidante, information was not forthcoming.

Since a headcount of the population of these communities was not the object of this study, it was decided to take into consideration those respondents who were knowledgeable — male or female — about the sociocultural practices of their communities. Some old men (women were not forthcoming) were asked about the historical aspects of their community. Their leaders and other representatives were also asked to fill the interview questionnaire, thus helping us obtain wide ranging information on the various dimensions of these communities.

A detailed research questionnaire was prepared to collect all the necessary information. Since we were asked to ascertain the tribal character of the communities that required obtaining a detailed ethnographic account of them, we looked into the criteria adopted under the *People of India* project. We retained the basic format of that questionnaire but made modifications, wherever necessary, to suit the objectives of our study. As we required first-hand detailed information on a community's ways of acting, thinking and feeling, we framed open-ended questions.

The questionnaire, originally framed in English, was translated into Punjabi, both for the convenience of the investigators and the respondents. The latter could respond only in Punjabi.

Hence, Punjabi was used to ask the questions as well as to fillup the questionnaire. Besides getting information from the respondents, the investigators were also asked to take down extensive field notes, in Punjabi only. This helped us obtain the word or phrase typically used by the members of a community without losing its content in translation. The investigators were directed to note the phrase(s) literally, without translation and interpretation. The verbal data was further enriched with the help of still and video photography both by the investigators and their supervisors, especially the latter. This was not all. All the teachers remained in touch with their investigators till the respective reports were finalised to fill up any of the gaps and lacunae that existed in the data.

As already mentioned, the leaders of these communities had been articulating their demands at various levels, and we obtained documents and files from them to look into their problems, aims and objectives. These have provided useful information. We were also shown a file of their case decided by a judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, concerning their tribal status. Besides these pamphlets and handouts, census reports and gazetteers, other documented works on and about these communities by academic and other scholars were also consulted to obtain a deeper insight into the nature and character of these communities.

After the data had been collected by the investigators and the supervisors had partially organised it into their respective reports, the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology (DSSA), Punjabi University, Patiala, organised a two-day national conference on 1 and 2 March 2007, on the theme of the research project, namely “‘Tribes’ of Punjab: A Social Anthropological Inquiry’. We, invited more than two dozen scholars from various disciplines, like Sociology, Anthropology, History, Language/Literature, and Linguistics, all specialising in tribal studies. The officers of the Social Welfare Department of the Punjab government were also invited besides the leaders of numerous Vimukt Jatis and other organisations from different parts of the state representing most of the communities under study.

The idea was to share our views and observations with those community leaders and scholars who had immersed themselves in this area of study. The conference was intellectually stimulating and proved very useful in clearing many issues thrown up during our research and fieldwork. One of the highlights of the conference was a live show of acrobatics and puppetry by the Nats, Nanku

and Vijay Bhatt and their respective troupes, who had come from Ludhiana. In this respect the conference benefited us immensely, bringing together the subjects of our study, their community leaders, researchers and scholars, as well as administrators.

PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

In the project granted to the DSSA the definition of a 'tribe' was given to us researchers, in whose light we were supposed to examine whether a given community qualifies as a 'tribe' or not. It stated certain features prescribed by the Government of India, such as indications of primitive traits, a distinct culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. This definition seems to be an abridged version of the one given by the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in his report of 1952:

1. They live away from the civilised world in the inaccessible parts lying in the *forests and hills*.
2. They belong to either one or *three stocks* — Negritos, Australoids or Mongoloids.
3. They speak the same *tribal dialect*.
4. Profess primitive religion known as animism in which the worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element.
5. Follow *primitive occupations* such as gleaning, hunting, and gathering of forest product.
6. They are largely *carnivorous* or flesh and meat eaters.
7. They live either *naked or semi-naked* using tree barks and leaves for clothing.
8. They have *nomadic habits* and love for drink and dance. (emphasis added)

One can only wonder at the ingenuity of the Commissioner, and that too a non — Englishman to define a tribe in such terms in the middle of the twentieth century in independent India. Mathur's comments are apt:

Personally, I feel it is a typical case of fiction-creation by the government officers. Perhaps in a romantic mood, exotic aspects of tribal culture were magnified and sought to be perpetuated, thus defeating the very objective of the Constitution in providing the safeguards, viz., 'the leveling up of the tribes' so that eventually

they become integrated with the Indian population. Majumdar has categorically stated that with the exception of the tribes in Eastern India, everywhere ethnic strains have criss-crossed in the subcontinent. (Mathur 1972: 460)

Such a simplistic articulation of the notion of tribes given by the Commissioner and now adopted by the Punjab government does not even qualify as a working definition to identify tribes in the state at the turn of the twenty-first century. There is no doubt that some minimum characteristics have to be identified to explain their social reality but these cannot be made so simplistic and distant from the present situation as to render its conceptualisation meaningless. *The Basil Blackwell Dictionary of Anthropology* says:

The word 'tribe' has a long and ignoble history and remains one of the most variably used terms within and outside of anthropology. Anthropologists often use it as a catch-all substitute for 'primitive', avoiding the invidious comparison of 'nonstate'. But most who use the term analytically narrow it to mean some form of *political unit*, as distinct from 'ethnie' or 'nation', which suggest a cultural identity. (Barfield 1997: 475)

Maurice Godelier, following an exhaustive review of the existing literature, starting from L. H. Morgan to later day neo-evolutionists and functionalists, is grossly unhappy with their attempts to give a suitable definition of the term tribe. He notes:

In short, it seems that the concept of 'tribal society' covers a group of external features found in the functioning of many 'primitive' societies.... The vagueness of these criteria is such that we could apply this concept to a vast number of primitive societies juxtaposed in large congeries without clear boundaries. The most surprising thing in the history of this concept is that it has varied little in basic meaning since Lewis H. Morgan (1877). The innumerable discoveries in the field since then have only aggravated and accentuated the imprecision and difficulties without leading to any radical critique, still less to its expulsion from the field of theoretical anthropology. (Godelier 1977: 89-90)

He criticised not only the anthropologists for not developing the concepts clearly but referred also to the inherent limitations of the discipline of anthropology in not letting this happen the way it should. He concludes:

...in explaining the concept of tribe and summarising its history, we have stirred up from the depths of anthropology's discourses and texts, a contradictory and theoretical dead end, involving habits of thought which are quietly accepted and reproduced; but which for the most part are roads leading absolutely nowhere. Yet the concept of tribe appears in profusion in the writings and thoughts of anthropologists, basic to the most delicate problems, the fiercest polemics in anthropology. The reality is, in fact, somewhat different. The *concept of tribe continues to remain ill-defined*, despite a few abstract definitions common to a large number of so-called 'primitive' societies. (Ibid.: 93–94, emphasis added)

Anthropologists have not yet arrived at a precise definition of the concept called the tribe. But there is some consensus amongst them that this is, in all probability, a consequence of modernity, and that too from a point in time when the European imperialists went out to confront the rest of humankind, inhabiting Asia, Africa, North and South America — regions where people's ways of living were starkly different from their own. The North and the South American, as well as the Australian continents had been successfully colonised by white Europeans who drove the Red Indians, the Bororo, the Nambikwara and the Aborigines (an Australian tribe, believed to be the oldest living human society) into reserves. In these cases, this was possibly made simpler by the vast vacant hinterlands and sparse local inhabitants there. But the situation in the other two continents — Asia and Africa — was different. These continents are not only much larger than the two Americas and Australia, but were also thickly populated, limiting the possibility of tribal populations' complete exclusion into reserves.

Once the imperialists landed there to establish their rule and the trade, they encountered resistance not only from the local elite but also from the indigenous people at large. There are graphic details of how the Red Indians fought tooth and nail against the colonisers when they were laying the railway-line across the United States or when they were forcing them to give up the ownership rights of the land in their territory. A tribal chief's remarks are worth noting:

How can I give this land to you? It does not belong to me? It is God's wealth. It belongs to all of us.' In India too 'there have been series of ethnic (tribal) rebellions during the early days of the British Rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the Sardar Larai (1885) and Birsa movement (1895–1900) among the Munda; Ganganarain

Hangama (1832) among the Bhumij; Kol Rebellion (1832); Santal Rebellion (1857–58); Rebellion of the Kacha Nagas (1880) and so on. (Sinha 1972: 410)

Hence the need was felt by the imperialists to understand these 'primitive' people, giving rise to Anthropology as an important discipline in British universities. That was when the sun never set on the British empire.

Jaganath Pathy also suggests:

During the nineteenth century, colonial expansionism faced a formidable challenge from those 'peoples' who were later named as tribes. After an initial phase of repression, the colonial power implicitly acknowledged the capacity of these people to fight for independence, and initiated a series of protective legislations as well as special administrative devices in favour of them. By 1833 Chhotanagpur and gradually other areas were made non-regulated with the avowed intention of protection and paternal despotism. In 1874, the process further formalised with the Scheduled District Act. Meanwhile, tribe as a social category, distinct from the Hindus and the Muslims, got crystallised through an oversimplified assumption that the former were animists while the latter were not. In course of time, the food gathering communities and shifting cultivators were also added to the list of tribes. (1984: 2)

Roy Burman holds that 'this perspective is in conformity with Weber's characterisation of tribes as organised anarchies and Burman's own projection "of their historical role as bridge/buffer communities"' (1993: 177).² Pathy is also critical of the concept of the tribe as advocated in traditional anthropology and further used and applied by anthropologists in India. After tracing a short history of the concept he suggests an alternative approach that uses tribe 'to denote a stage in the evolution of social and political structure' as suggested by Fried, Sahlins and Service (Pathy 1984: 8). He upholds Marx and Engels' attributes of primitive society — name, dialect, endogamy, mythology and rites, mythical ancestor, small size, and low level of technology — coupled with communal ownership of land especially as a distinguishing feature (*ibid.*: 9). Pathy adds to the latter 'different forms of cooperation of labour', which may reveal different forms of primitive society.

Pathy also upholds Meillassoux's notion of 'kinship relations' to characterise a community as a tribe (*ibid.*: 11). Subsequently, he

lists a number of axiomatic propositions in tribal research in India, viz. isolation, ahistoricity, homogeneity, exploitation by non-tribals, access to special benefits to tribals, etc., and debunks each one of them, arguing that such notions hinder the scientific interpretation of primitive societies. Having exhaustively critiqued the literature in terms of how and how not to define a tribe, he himself does not provide a precise definition either. But when we look at his discussion as a whole, three elements may be identified as the distinguishing features of a tribe: as a stage in evolution, common institutions including land with different forms of co-operation of labour, and kinship relations.

One thing is certain, that the very rise of this concept of a 'tribe' owes itself to confrontation of the West with the rest of the world, when the intruding Westerners tried to define the latter as the 'uncivilised other'. They were addressed in a variety of pejorative terms like 'primitives', 'savages', 'barbarians', 'aborigines', 'uncultured', 'uncivilised' etc., all with a common refrain of inferiority vis-a-vis white European people. The nineteenth century was also the century of biology and Evolutionism. Two Englishmen, Charles Darwin, biologist/naturalist, and Herbert Spencer, an engineer-turned-sociologist, influenced academia and the political elite tremendously, both with respect to evolution in nature and in human society.

Spencer not only claimed to have formulated his theory of Evolution in 1853, six years prior to Darwin, but also that his was more comprehensive than the latter's. He suggested that like the growth and expansion of organic and inorganic matter, human societies (super-organic matter) also evolved along similar principles. He concluded thus that families made up clans; clans made the tribe; and tribes in turn made the nation. Likewise, societies progressed from simplicity to complexity, homogeneity to heterogeneity — from undifferentiated to clearly differentiated societies.

This particular conception of the 'tribe as an agglomeration of clans' persisted among imperialists, even though anthropologists were at variance with one another in arriving at a consensus. Roy Burman notes:

As observed by Sengupta, for Buchanan the term 'tribe' was only an English word for groups with common ancestors. But in the use by Dalton (1872) of expressions like 'wild tribes', 'pastoral

tribes', 'agricultural tribes' along with such terms as 'aborigines', 'primitives' there was a marked categorisation in conformity with the intellectual environment of the era. *Since 1872, the Census of India has been carrying out the task of listing of tribes by and large informed by the same evolutionary perspective, mediated by political considerations....* The same in its turn provided the basis for the listing of Scheduled Tribes under the provision of the Constitution. On the whole, Sengupta seems to argue that listing tribes as a distinct category, during the colonial period was reflection of motivated intellectual miasma, nurtured both by the colonial rulers and sections of national elite. In the post independence period, *the intellectual miasma has been allowed to continue apparently for political convenience.* (1993: 176–77, emphasis added)

Political considerations and administrative suitability have also been noted in the case of Punjab by David Gilmartin. He cites C. L. Tupper, who prepared the first official compendium of customary laws in 1881 and writes:

In analyzing Punjabi customs, Tupper argued that one 'native institution' was at the centre of rural Punjabi social organization: the 'tribe'. As the foundation of the rural social order, the concept of *tribe* proved central to the definition of customary law. Nevertheless, the term remained, for most British analysts, extremely vague. For some, 'tribe' differed little from the 'castes' found in other provinces of India... 'Tribes' varied... from the 'local tribe of the frontier, with its known leader or council' to the 'village clans of the central Punjab, still acknowledging a common tribal name. (Gilmartin 1988: 14–15)

The British were interested in such exercises in order to be able to effectively rule indigenous communities and intended to evolve and strengthen such institutions that could help them relate effectively both with the people and the state. In the case of this region, Gilmartin writes, 'Punjabi custom,... thus represented an independent, tribally based "system" of rules and principles that structured the personal relations of rural Punjabis' (ibid.: 16). He quotes Tupper:

If you weaken the sense of tribal fellowship, the only thing that could be put in its room would be religion... that by inspiring enthusiasm would generate a sense of brotherhood: and here the British Government could take no part. (cited in ibid.: 16)

Hence,

... in basing the law on Punjab's 'tribal' structure, however, the British forestalled such a danger. They tied their authority to a structure of social organization central to Punjabi life, but one defined and systematized, through British social analysis, by the state itself. The protection of Punjab's 'tribal' structure became, in effect, a central principle of and justification for the imperial rule. (Ibid.)

It is such political convenience and administrative considerations that have dominated the listing and delisting of communities in India as Scheduled Tribes for the past 60 years. It is a consequence of this political dilly-dallying that the cakes have been distributed according to the electoral suitability of the ruling political party to include or exclude certain groups and communities from being labelled 'tribal'. That is why we find, as mentioned earlier, that one community has the Scheduled Tribe status in one state of the country and Scheduled Caste status in another, and vice versa. It is this mis-match that is the main grouse of many such communities at present, all over the country. There is, no doubt, much difficulty in defining the tribe very precisely, but in the social sciences it is not the only concept to have varied or flexible connotations. This is a perennial problem with almost all concepts: trying to capture the essence of social reality in scientific terminology. Therefore, a variety of connotations or even an allusion to these variations is not an inherent weakness of concept of 'tribe'. It is relevant here to quote S. C. Dube from his *Tribal Heritage of India*:

In the Indian context the term tribe has never been defined precisely and satisfactorily. It was used, at one time, to denote a bewildering variety of social categories that were neither analogous nor comparable. The Rajput and the Jat as well as the aboriginals, for example, were categorized as tribes. In later usage it tended to be restricted only to the autochthonous, the aboriginals, and the primitive groups. *At no stage, however, did we have a set of clear indicators of tribalness.* Most popular definitions of the term tended to see in the tribes some, if not all, of the following characteristics:

1. Their roots in the soil date back to a very early period: if not original they are the oldest inhabitants.
2. Live in relative isolation of hills and forests.

3. Their sense of history is shallow for, among them, the remembered history of five to six generations tends to get merged in mythology.
4. Low level of techno-economic development.
5. In terms of cultural ethos—language, institutions, beliefs and customs—stand out from others.
6. If not egalitarian at least non-hierarchic and undifferentiated.

At best, these are rough indicators and very few of them can withstand a critical scrutiny. (1977: 2, emphasis added)

In his attempt to sort out the confusion regarding the concept of tribe with reference to India, Bêteille tries to examine the history of the concept in its various oppositions with the caste, state, civilisation etc., and concludes:

I prefer the historical to the evolutionary approach in the definition and identification of tribes. Where tribe and civilisation co-exist, as in India and the Islamic world, being a tribe has been more a matter of remaining outside of State and civilisation, whether by choice or necessity, than of attaining a definite stage in the evolutionary advance from the simple to the complex. (1999: 76)

He also lays stress on the permeability of the boundary between tribe and non-tribe, which obliges us to adopt a flexible rather than a rigid attitude towards the definition of tribe (Ibid.).

Suresh Sharma also intervenes to suggest that attempts to construct a scientific definition of 'tribe' have

yielded very little beyond elaborate reiterations of and references to theoretical debates in Europe concerning the precise content and significance of 'pre-capitalist' societies. It makes no attempt to *examine the relevance in relation to India* of the basic assumption that, if only precise identification of the level of Man–Nature equations reflected in production techniques could be worked out, a scientific scheme to provide for the correct placement of all pre-capitalist formations could be formulated. (1994: 86, emphasis added)

With regard to technological mediation Sharma points out that 'pre-modern conquest sought mastery over Man, modern conquest seeks mastery over things' (ibid.: 26).

The problem of conceptual confusion has increased with the increase in research. As we subject more and more communities to anthropological inquiry, a larger range and greater diversity is

encountered, thereby adding to the complexity of the definition of a tribe rather than solving the already existing confusion over it. In the words of K. Suresh Singh, former Director, Anthropological Survey of India:

The most important development in the field of tribal research over the last 25 years has been the generation of an enormous amount of data on tribes, which has not only often bewildered us but also provided *a deeper insight into tribal formations*. Around the first seminar in 1969 we thought of tribes as *a relatively homogeneous category and of tribal regions as of a piece*. Today we are sharply aware of the complexities, diversities and variations in the study of tribal people and in dealing with tribal matters. (1993: 6, emphasis added)

On the face of it, Dube's definition seems to solve the problem of confusion though he is too skeptical about its real-life application. To my mind, this definition, like others, is fraught with serious lapses due to its heavy reliance on the evolutionary perspective. The first three characteristics of tribes — oldest inhabitants, relative isolation and shallow history — mentioned by Dube, lean heavily on this side. For instance, when we consider tribal people as 'if not original,... the oldest inhabitants' who 'live in relative isolation of hills and forests', do we mean that immobility is the defining trait of a tribe? Do we not know that not only ancient man but hordes of tribes have been moving and shifting places all over the world and across history? Niharranjan Ray notes that 'By far the largest number of foreigners that entered India, in wave after wave and over a period of about 1500 years, was that of the Central Asian nomadic and pastoral-nomadic peoples' (1972: 12) Nomadism had been an important feature of the ancient people. The Australian aborigines too are believed to have originated from Central Africa. It is now also believed that early man migrated from there and settled in different parts of the world. If this is so, then how can being sedentary or immobile be the defining criterion of a tribe. This notion is imbued with evolutionism as it is modern man who is believed to be 'mobile', following the modern means of transport and communication. Even though these — transport and communication — are two different means of carrying 'bodies/persons' and 'words' across space, they are interdependent and interrelated.

Dube's third feature — 'their sense of history is shallow' — also flows from the same source. It is not a question of history but

rather what kind of history that is in question — linear, circular or spiral; factual or mythical. Unfortunately, it is the linear dimension of history that has become a hallmark of modernity. It is only modern man who thinks this way, others do not. This leaves us with the three remaining characteristics, which by themselves are not sufficient to define 'tribe'. The political aspect is completely missing, which is and ought to be, an important element in its definition. The *Dictionary of Anthropology* notes that Elman Service (1962) followed a long tradition in positing the tribe as a stage in political evolution falling between bands and chiefdoms; Marshall Sahlins (1968) saw tribes as evolutionary predecessors of states, unified and bounded by kinship or other ties; Morton Fried (1967, 1975), on the other hand, disputed the evolutionary existence of such bounded groups, arguing instead that tribes arose from interactions with existing states. 'Despite their differences, all three agreed that boundedness of tribes was a result of external conflict or war' (Barfield 1997: 475).

Politics, to my mind, is an important component of the tribe, both morphologically and structurally speaking, in its form as well as in its content. Politics should not only mean to define the tribe as a unit vis-à-vis ethnic or nation as suggested by the *Dictionary* above or in relation to the notion of state, but should be seen rather in terms of a defining variable explaining the *boundedness* of a group of people called tribe. Dube's defining characteristics, points 4 to 6 above have politics built into them. How do low-level technology, a powerful cultural ethos and non-hierarchic and undifferentiated elements come into being if not decided and implemented by the tribal elders or wise men? It is pertinent to quote Gandhi from his *Hind Swaraj* in this context:

It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. (1938: 61–62)

And when the tribal people maintain restraint on the development of the forces of production or fear the alien and do not appreciate any intrusion from outside, it is nothing but a political decision to keep a check on the productive forces and the outsiders, because they pose a potential threat to the tribe's political and social integrity.

Political considerations also imply the subjective orientation of the tribes' people, their own self-perception. Do they consider themselves to be tribal or not? As Mrinal Miri argues:

We are interested in tribal identity in the sense of its being determined by strong evaluation (à la Charles Taylor) — in the sense in which “allegiance to the tribe’ becomes a value for the tribesmen which overrides other values in a fundamental way. That tribal identity, in this sense, can become a powerful reality we all know. (1993: 172)

It is unfortunate that earlier the colonial authorities defined ‘the tribal’ and now our own government does so without giving any space to the subject’s self-perception. No doubt such self-perception is presently steered or motivated by certain policy decisions of the State, as with regard to ‘reservation’ etc., but it is nevertheless crucial for the community in question. The subjective aspect should therefore be held important, along with other objective criteria. Such considerations would help define a tribe properly.

Besides politics and subjectivity, the dimension of relativity is also crucial. By this I mean that in characterising a population as tribal, its surrounding people and their socio-cultural characteristics should be taken into consideration. In other words, the characterisation of a people as tribal is not only time but also space-specific. A community to be labelled a tribe should stand out, displaying tribal characteristics vis-à-vis the surrounding communities. For instance, the Bauria of Punjab should be seen relative to rural Punjab’s dominant community, the Jutt Sikhs or the Scheduled Castes, rather than comparing them to their counterparts, say in Orissa or Maharashtra. It is most likely that Punjabi Bauria may appear non-tribal, or even modern compared to those elsewhere. They may be higher on the socio-economic status scale too.

It is a consequence of classical orientation to define the tribe ideal typically that much of the mess has been created in their classification and identification. A more flexible criterion should be adopted for this purpose, rather than following a rigid and dogmatic approach. For instance, if one goes by the criterion of geographical isolation there is no segment of population, at least in Punjab, that remains aloof from the rest of society. With the development of a network of main roads and link routes and means of transport and communication, with a changed economic

system and political institutions, how can any community remain in isolation in this state? Moreover, Punjab has less than 6 per cent forest area, including plantations along the highways. How do tribal communities, hitherto living and surviving on forests, make their living now? An apparent change in their lifestyle of not living in forests or engaging in forest-related production processes should not lead us to construe that they are no longer tribal. It is pertinent to note Baidyanath Saraswati's propositions regarding tribal lifestyle that may be applied to label such a community as tribal:

1. Tribes are the masters of their microworld.
2. Their lifestyle reflects man's primal vision and vigour.
3. The rhythm of tribal life is aesthetically perfect.
4. Their lifestyle changes within an unalterable form beyond which they perish.
5. The claim that a tribal culture can be deconstructed and reconstructed at will and yet without losing its essence and identity is untenable. (1993: 23)

These features too, however, are applicable to a tribe in its classical form rather than in the present-day context of, say, Punjab. What is important here is to feel and observe the presence of these characteristics in some form, even if as weak remnants or vestiges. For instance, I have noticed that in certain villages where the Bauria have one or two households, they do not mingle and remain to themselves only. The village people too remark: '*Eh kise naal gal-baat nahin karde.*' Literally, they do not 'talk' to others, that is, remain aloof. This is also true of the Gandhila community, who tend to live among themselves. A villager aptly summed up their social type: '*Eh lok sungad ke rehna pasand karde ne!*' These people prefer living in closed communities.'

The whole question of precise definition becomes murky due to the inevitable processes of social change which have become very rapid since the middle of the twentieth century and more so over the last decade. This does not mean that change is a recent phenomenon. The difference is that earlier its pace was so slow and gradual that changes in the form and substance of all the institutions of society were virtually imperceptible. Thus the changing elements got so well synthesised and blended with one another that they appeared normal and natural rather than odd and abrupt, like they do today. Therefore, even when changes had taken place, the

lifestyle of the people and especially of the tribal population and their *weltanschauung* could remain intact. And, a prominent character of tribalness is the preservation of this very trait. The Iroquois remained tribal even at the outskirts of New York, but this does not mean that they remained totally immune to their proximity to a world-centre.

Defining reality is always a difficult proposition as it is not possible to encapsulate all the varied features of its dynamic nature within a few words. This is definitely true more so for social reality as compared to the physical one. Therefore we should aim for a working definition only, rather than 'a definition' to exhaust all social reality. That would surely be a self-defeating exercise. The nature of this reality is such that it calls for time and space-specific definitions as mentioned above. What was true in the early twentieth century is not true now. What is true of Punjab is not true of Bengal. Therefore, formulating a working definition to account for as many components of reality as possible should be the objective of a social scientific study.

A historian amidst anthropologists, Niharranjan Ray in his 'Introductory Address' at the seminar on the 'Tribal Situation in India' presented a different argument based on his understanding of Indian history. It is necessary to quote him at length:

I do not propose to go into an analysis of these definitions, but would like to approach the question from an altogether different point of view. I would suggest to myself that if along the arrow-line of history there was something in our society analogous to what is called 'tribe', and if the communities of people in India recognized it as such, we should have in our Indian languages including Sanskrit and Prakrit, a term for it. Was this term known as *jana*? The term *jana* and *jati* are both derived from the root *jan* which means 'to be born', 'to give birth to', and hence has a biological meaning, we know for certain. We know also that there were *janas* or communities of people like the Savaras, the Kullutas, the Kollas, the Bhillas, the Khasas, the Kinnaras and a countless number of many others whom today we know as 'tribes', bearing almost the same recognizable names. By what term and concept were they known... Not by what anthropologists and sociologists of today call 'tribe'... This term, to my mind could be no other than *jana*, meaning 'communities of people'. (1972: 18-19)

These *jana* occupied definite territories called *janapadas*. He continues:

Jana therefore, seem to have been, to my mind, the term for what we have been taught to know as 'tribe', and *jati*, the socio-economic *cum* economic organisation that was supposed to sustain the *jana* and keep the given community of people together (Ibid.: 9)

He argues further that analysis of the long list of *janas* in epic Buddhist, *puranic*, and secular literature up to medieval times makes clear

that hardly any distinction was made, until very late in history, between what we know today as 'tribes' and such communities of people who were known as the Gandharas and Kambojas... there is hardly anything to suggest that these communities of people belonged to two different social and ethnic categories altogether... there is hardly any evidence to show that in the collective mind of India's communities of people there was any consciousness of a difference between the two sets of *janas* except in the matter of *jati*, that is, in the matter of socio-religious and economic organisation alone. These *janas* whom we have been taught to call 'tribes', were indeed different from the other communities of people only in the sense that they continued to remain ... outside the control of the *jati* system of social organisation. (Ibid.: 9–10)

He reasserts that *jati* is not caste nor is it just a socio-religious system; it is also an economic system, hereditarily and hierarchically organised according to groups recruited by birth (Ibid.: 21).

One common feature that emerges from the above discussion is that a majority of the tribal communities have always been victims of technologically superior communities, both from outside and within the country. Tribes have thus been marginalised throughout history, which is why they have been pushed to more and more secluded areas though many of them have been absorbed or made a part of the dominant stream of the victorious forces or communities. Indian tribes have been experiencing this adoption and acculturation since the time of the Aryans right up to the imperialist British. After them, modern India too is trying hard to bring them into the so-called national mainstream. This had been one of the main objectives of the tribal policy in India since independence.

Over the last decade and more the onset of the process of globalisation has affected these people more severely. The attention of the State is drawn more towards national and multi-national companies for the development of special economic zones (SEZs) rather

than ameliorating the living conditions of the poor in Punjab and elsewhere. Their condition has worsened over the years because the regulatory and emancipatory character of the newly independent State has given way to nepotism and corruption in matters political and administrative. The autonomy of the political and absence of accountability of both political leaders and the administrators have allowed rampant growth of economic corruption. They are busy amassing wealth and property rather than steering the traditional society in the direction of modernisation and supporting those sections of society that have hitherto remained marginalised.

In the case of Punjab for instance, right up to 1970s, government schools were providing cheap and quality education to urban and rural people alike. The poor too could get good quality education and climb the ladder of success, the very essence of a liberal democratic society and the key to national development. Since then, these very schools have been in the doldrums. The public education system has collapsed. There are neither teachers to teach nor the infrastructure to support teaching. According to a 2005 Education Survey report on Punjab, 552 government schools do not have a single teacher, 2,500 have one teacher each and in 7,000 primary schools there are only two or three teachers. Each day 36 per cent primary school teachers are absent from work. Of the remaining 64 per cent, only half go to class. What then is the fate of poor people in the rural areas and more so, of these tribal communities who constitute the poorest of the poor in an apparently developed and affluent state? Those living in the urban areas are worse off. They have no place they can call their own, not even a small patch of land for making a make-shift hut. They 'settle' on government land or vacant plots from where they can be pushed out at any time by the property owners. Their living conditions are far below sub-human. Heaps of garbage and foul smell are characteristics of their settlements.

This process of marginalisation has paradoxically quickened with modernisation, becoming more intense since the onset of globalisation. Jairus Banaji cites the following data:

There are about 40,000 natives left in Australia as opposed to 2,50,000 at the beginning of the 19th century, most, if not all, of them hungry and disease ridden, threatened in their deserts by mining plants, atom bomb testing grounds and missile ranges. Between 1900 and 1950 over 90 tribes have been wiped out in

Brazil.... During the same period 15 South American languages have ceased to be spoken. (1970: 85)

He argues: 'The other part (Africa, China, South-East Asia, South Asia) has suffered the impact of capitalism with profound modifications of the traditional social structure, or moved completely out of the orbit of world imperialism' (ibid.: 85) This has resulted in the rapid disappearance of the 'primitive totality', the 'tribal microcosm' and 'will, within a few decades, entirely cease to exist' (ibid.)

The twin processes of modernisation and globalisation have only added to the speed with which the tribal communities are going to witness their own death. There is absolutely no chance of their survival under the given socio-economic and political conditions prevailing not only in Punjab or India, but the world over. There could be some respite in a socialist system of politics, but there too it is impossible because socialism is also given to modernisation and development, which inadvertently debunks tradition, the hallmark of tribal or primitive communities. When large chunks of population, at least in the western world, have already become hi-tech and modernised in form and spirit, it would be unethical to keep reserves for the tribal people just as we keep the endangered animal species since their living spaces are being increasingly encroached upon for developmental purposes by the profit-seeking corporations. The tribal living space, their 'territory', a chief defining characteristic, is shrinking similarly.

DEFINING THE TRIBE

On the basis of the above discussion concerning various aspects of the problem of definition, an attempt is made here to suggest that a tribe should have some of the following characteristics depending on its location in space and time. None of these individually can be used as a defining criterion but only as a cluster, some may be dominant and others subordinate in one context and vice versa in other:

1. Cohesiveness
2. Political consciousness (insider vs outsider; power/authority)

3. Social differentiation without hierarchy; egalitarian (cf. jana not jati)
4. Preponderance of kinship relations
5. Productive forces simple; absence of exploitative production relations
6. High incidence of poverty (cf. present times)
7. Low-level of literacy
8. Belief in folk religion and deities
9. Distinct mythology (of origin) and holistic cosmology
10. Common language/dialect
11. Stringent cultural practices and belief system
12. Dependence on nature for existence and subsistence

This is a very crude attempt to identify certain tribal characteristics, especially in the light of the aim of the present study to determine the 'tribal' character of certain communities in Punjab. As mentioned earlier, it is not possible to have a universal definition of any segment of social reality, as is expected of modern scientific disciplines. Nevertheless, some contextual working definitions may be constructed, with the limited purpose of trying to understand the social reality, that may be necessary for policy-making and comparative understanding. Defining the term 'tribe' precisely is difficult, in fact impossible, as it is an attempt to capture the features of communities that have been in existence for more than 30,000 years. It would not be an exaggeration to state that, initially, the whole world was tribal. All through human history these communities have been experiencing changes in form and content. Vestigial tribal traits, therefore, may be starkly conspicuous in an otherwise modern community of people.

A tribe is a dynamic living entity, which is why we may have tribes with diametrically opposed characteristics, and why tribal features may be manifested in or overlap with other social categories like caste, ethnic group and even certain modernised communities, for instance, the Jutts of Punjab. Irfan Habib thus writes:

We have seen that in Sind the Jatts (read Jutts) had been a large primitive community based on pastoral economy and with an egalitarian or semi-egalitarian social structure. They had 'neither rich nor poor', nor 'small nor great', in the words of two quite independent accounts. (1976: 95)

The pastoral tribe of Sind, living on either side of Indus, gradually moved to Punjab between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. They settled in this region at the beginning of the later century when they encountered the Persian Wheel. This converted them into cultivators. But socially their status was still lower (ibid.: 98) In contemporary Punjabi society and elsewhere, the Jutts are still labelled 'tribal' by 'the urbane' and 'the cultured'. Hence any attempt to formulate a universally applicable definition would be an utterly futile exercise on the part of any social anthropologist.

THE CASE OF EX-CRIMINAL TRIBES (VIMUKT JATIS) IN PUNJAB

The latest count for all the seven Denotified Tribes or Vimukt Jatis — Bauria, Bazigar Banjara, Bangala, Barad, Gandhila, Nat, and Sansi — according to the Census of India (2001) stands at 4,36,809 persons. Bazigars³ have the highest population (2,08,442) followed by Sansis (1,05,337) and Bauria (1,02,232). Nats (1,071) and Gandhila (3,283) have the lowest population. All of these Jatis have their districts and localities of concentration, though they may be distributed fairly well in other parts of the state. Some of these communities, however, do not have a single person in some regions. For instance, Baurias have a large population all over the state, but not a single person in Amritsar district. Barads are also missing from Muktsar, and Nats from the Nawanshahr and Ropar districts. Gandhilas are an exception in this regard. These people are completely missing from Gurdaspur, Kapurthala, Nawanshahr, Fatehgarh Sahib, and Muktsar. They are mainly concentrated in Jalandhar and Ludhiana.⁴

These erstwhile nomadic communities have been relevant to others in one way or another, directly and indirectly, but they neither adopted the culture of Punjabi society nor mixed with them intimately till they were forcibly made to settle down by the colonial government. Since they had no permanent abode, these communities were suspected to pose a threat to law and order, not only as a dissenting voice against the imperialists but also as thieves and burglars endangering the property and security of life of the well-off middle class, who were taken to be the pillars of the Raj. These people thus were interned in the reformatory — industrial and agricultural settlements — where 'they should be provided

work and compelled to work for their living' (Government of Punjab, n.d.: 122). The special features of these settlements were as follows:

1. There was one Reformatory Settlement at Amritsar where hardened criminals of these tribes were detained for a period of 5 to 10 years. It was practically a jail.
2. Industrial settlements were meant for criminals of lesser degree. The members of criminal tribes were provided work either in forests, factories or railway workshops.
3. At various places, in agricultural settlements,¹⁰ acres of government land was allotted 'free of cost' to each member of the criminal tribe who had not been convicted of a non-bailable offence or absence during the last 10 consecutive years.
4. The members of criminal tribes were also given land on *batai* (share-cropping) system and the government share was collected in the form of produce.
5. In the Reformatory School at Amritsar, children of these tribes, between the ages of 9 and 18 years, were removed for imparting education and industrial training. (Ibid.: 12–23)

As mentioned above, Vimukt Jatis had been struggling since India's independence, first to remove the tag of criminality attached to them during the colonial regime and, subsequently to acquire the status of Scheduled Tribes. They have formed numerous state- and All India-level organisations to spearhead their struggle at various levels. Some of these are All India Denotified Tribes (Vimukt Jatis) Sewak Sangh, All India Tapriwas and Vimukt Jatis Federation, Uttari Bharat Vimukt Jati Sangh, All India Nomadic Tribes Sangh, All India Tribal Communities Dal, and Punjab Scheduled Tribes Dal. These federations have been celebrating 31 August as their Independence Day. They organise such gatherings in an attempt to bring more people into their fold in order to strengthen their struggle. Political leaders of the ruling party who might be able to facilitate this process are also roped into these functions. Besides, they had been making representations to the central and the state governments persistently.

Despite their consistent efforts they have succeeded only in making the Punjab government agree that their correct identity be mentioned on their 'caste certificates'. A letter to this effect was issued by the Department of Welfare on 6 September 1996. It reads:

'State Government has considered this matter and has decided that the competent caste certificate issuing authorities will specifically indicate that these communities (list enclosed) belong to Vimukt Jatis while issuing the caste certificate to them.' (No. 10/1/96/2 SCW 1/7143). It was realised later by the Jatis that outside Punjab these certificates had no validity. During field work, I interviewed some young men from these communities who had been rejected by the Indian Army on the grounds that the 'caste certificate' they were carrying did not tally with the list of Scheduled Castes the Army personnel had. Fellow Scheduled Caste youths from the Balmik or Ramdasia castes got selected, but not them.

These 'tribal' organisations had basically been raising one demand; that (i) the Vimukt Jatis had been wrongly placed in the category of Scheduled Castes. They saw this as not only an attempt to denigrate them but also as adding insult to injury, since they claim Rajput ancestry; (ii) they are in fact tribal people, hence should be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. They are contesting for tribal status so that they have a separate reservation quota for jobs, promotions, admissions, scholarships, and other benefits announced from time to time by the government. Since they are clubbed with the Scheduled Castes (Ramdasia and Balmiks), the so-called 'creamy layer' takes all the benefits. Their illiteracy and backwardness are coming in their way to garner the benefits of the reservation policy.

In 1975 a civil writ petition was filed by Buta Ram Azad and 17 others against the Union of India and the State of Punjab in the Punjab and Haryana High Court at Chandigarh, challenging the Constitution, (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 for their caste status. Justice Ajit Singh Bains, on examining the criteria of the Government of India for defining a Scheduled Caste (extreme social, educational, and economic backwardness arising out of traditional practice of untouchability) and a Scheduled Tribe (indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness) concluded:

The argument of the learned counsel for the respondents (Government) that the petitioners' tribes do not fulfill the criteria for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes is misconceived. The petitioners' Vimukt Jatis are not untouchables... I am of the view that the Vimukt Jatis to which the petitioners belong have been wrongly included in the list of the Scheduled Castes. In fact they should have

been included in the list of Scheduled Tribes and the Government of India may consider their deletion from the list of the Scheduled Castes and they may be included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes. (Bains 1982: 3)

Despite the political mobilisation and rallies over the last many decades and the judgement of the High Court in their favour, the Vimukt Jatis could not achieve their goal. They attribute this failure to their people being illiterate and poor, as well as being scattered all over the state. They do not have a population concentration in certain pockets that could have influenced electoral results to an extent that political leaders would have to take them seriously. 'We have no political leader. Of the 29 reserved constituencies (in Punjab) there is none reserved for us', the leaders lament. 'Thus we could neither influence the Government nor get the decision of the High Court implemented.' Their leaders allegedly hold the view that the politics of the Punjab bureaucracy was more responsible for their plight than the apathy and inefficacy of the political leaders.

When we look back at the problem of the 'correct' identification and classification of these tribes by the government, the lack of seriousness on the part of the administration becomes obvious. It is the root of the problem. For instance, in the Report of the Evaluation Committee on Welfare Regarding the Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and Denotified Tribes in Punjab State for the period commencing from 15 August, 1947 (December 1965–August 1966), except for one chapter, No. 16 on the Vimukt Jatis, the whole Report is devoted to the issues and concerns of and information about two dominant Scheduled Castes — Balmik (Bhangi) and Chamar (Ramdasia/Ravidasia). It is not easy to comprehend how those 11 communities — (i) Bangali, (ii) Barar, (iii) Bauria, (iv) Nat, (v) Gandhila, (vi) Tagus of Karnal, (vii) Dhinwara and (viii) Mina of Gurgaon, (ix) Bhora Brehmans of Kangra, (x) Mahatams of Mamdot and Fazilka, and (xi) Sansis with all their 'sub-castes' — listed under the Vimukt Jatis were also listed as Scheduled Castes. It is mentioned: 'Of these, those at serial nos. (i) to (v) and (xi) are scheduled castes and others fall under the category of backward classes' (Government of Punjab, n.d.: 124).

Interestingly, in the Annexure to the above-mentioned chapter, there is a statement about the Vimukt Jatis' position as consolidated on 25 February 1965 following the criteria: 'Whether the tribe possesses tribal characteristics, viz., love of isolation (geographical,

social, cultural), community way of life such as their own folk-lore, dances, etc., primitive way of life' (ibid.: 129). Once again, this leads to further confusion rather than a resolution. Sansi, Bauria, Nat, Bangali (Bangala, as they call themselves in Punjab), Barar (or Barad), and Gandhila (there is no mention of the Bazigar Banjara tribe), included in the present study, are also stated to be tribes positively. It is also mentioned that 'these tribes do not mix with other communities'. It is further qualified that

All denotified tribes except Mahatams have a tendency to live separately amongst themselves. Their customs of marriages, etc., are as heretofore. Even amongst themselves, they do not mix up and no *inter se* marriage takes place. They are fond of hunting and 50 per cent of their population has not left the years old evil habit of begging. Sansis are prominent beggars. Although commission of burglary is rare yet it has not vanished altogether. (Ibid.: 131).

Just two pages later, some of these — Sansi, Barar(d) and Bangali(a) — are referred to as castes: 'Economically, socially and educationally all these castes are at the lowest rung' (ibid.: 135). The report also mentions: 'As for the economic upliftment schemes of the Vimukt Jatis, which are *similar to* the schemes of scheduled castes, the Committee would make analogous recommendations as done in favour of scheduled castes with following *variations*' (ibid.: 127, emphasis added). If tribe and caste are to be used interchangeably, then why are the two used as separate concepts in the same Report? Why is there a separate chapter on the Vimukt Jatis?

The Institute for Development and Communication's 1996 report, titled *Status of Depressed Scheduled Castes in Punjab*, has also used the government's system of classification, hence allowing the confusion to perpetuate. It does refer to the Vimukt Jatis, and also recommends their inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes, but for its own research purposes calls them 'depressed castes'. Stephen Fuchs also refers to this confusion between caste and tribe. He writes:

There are numerous castes of jugglers, tumblers, snake-charmers and the like, each with a different name, but all connected, at least in upper India, under the general term of Nat or Bazigar. It is difficult to state how far the term Nat is the designation of a caste or a function. In Punjab, for instance, Nat is usually held to be a caste, and Bazigar is a sub-division of the Nat. (1992: 117)⁵

Is this confusion between caste and tribe a legacy of some streak in anthropology or is it a result of non-seriousness on the part of administrators and/or researchers? In the present case, the latter seems more likely, as is seen in the above-mentioned report. Is it a legacy of the political usage in vernacular of the term '*jana-jati*', adopted as such in academic and administrative reports. I would like to suggest that when the political leaders used this term in their post-Independence harangues, they were referring to two distinct populations — '*jana*' and '*jati*', that is, tribe and caste. The clubbing of these terms, thus coalescing them into one concept, was probably done only while writing administrative reports and policies. As has already been mentioned above, *jana* and *jati* are two different concepts with markedly different connotations, and, as suggested by Niharranjan Ray, the difference between the two helps sort out the confusion in definition. The tribes are the *jana* and the castes are *Jatis*.

This distinction helps us sort out the matter in the present study, even though there are critics of this formulation:

Today we are not sure of this position because such categories appear to be rather amorphous in a fluid social situation, with frontiers continually shifting.... Therefore any attempt to identify the *jana* with the present day tribe is not free from difficulties. (Singh 1993: 5)

Thus we may say that besides other characteristics, one dominant feature of a tribe is that it neither has a caste-like hierarchy within its social structure nor does it operate within the caste system. As a matter of fact, it operates outside mainstream caste society or on its periphery. The patron–client relation characteristic of caste is absent within and outside the tribe' as well as in their relations with other communities. An old man very aptly puts the relationship of his community with other communities as that of *mangan–khan di sanjh*, literally a tie or bond of begging to eat.

In the context of the Denotified Tribes or *Vimukt Jatis*, two observations in the Report are important. One refers to the peoples' perception about them. It says:

They are looked down upon as criminal tribes. It is stated that those who have to watch or keep control over the commission of crimes actually exploit these people for the commission of crimes. Some of these persons have built their thatched houses and indulge in

criminal acts forced by their social and other environments as and when there is an opportunity. (Government of Punjab, n.d.: 125)

The other statement is:

There had been, of late, a good deal of criticism both in the Press and in the Legislature regarding the implementation of these schemes and, by and large, it has been felt that corresponding benefit has not accrued *to the individuals or the community as a whole, due to erroneous execution and inefficient implementation in the field*. It has been accepted at all hands that the pace of progress has been rather slow and the correct implementation is further obstructed by inefficiency and lack of consciousness among the field officers in the department. (Ibid.: 1, emphasis added)

Over the past 40 years the situation has deteriorated further significantly. It would be no exaggeration to state that their 'backwardness' at all three levels — economic, social and political — has only worsened beyond description. It only shows weaknesses and improprieties in the system, that despite all the paperwork and allocation of funds, the target individuals, households or communities have not got their due. The 'erroneous execution and inefficient implementation' have remained constant over the last 40 years (ibid.).

The *Status of Depressed Scheduled Castes in Punjab* (1996) was an attempt to study the impact of the government's welfare schemes on these sections of society. Of the different Vimukt Jatis, the study only includes the Bangali, Bauria, Bazigar, and Sansi. It throws up a very dismal picture of the depressed castes, especially of the four Vimukt Jatis amongst them. Of the 13 depressed castes, only 10 per cent owned a house, out of which only 2.4 per cent houses were *pucca*. 97 per cent households were landless and 84 per cent were living below the poverty line. A community-wise break up shows that 80 per cent Bangali, 96.7 per cent Bauria, 73.8 per cent Bazigar and 92 per cent Sansi live below the poverty line (See IDC 1996: 12, Table 2.3 [a]). The over all literacy rate of these castes is 20.4 per cent, while that of the Vimukt Jatis among them is abysmally low. Bangali and Bauria have 10 per cent each, Bazigar 12.31 per cent and Sansi 14 per cent only (ibid.: 14, Table 2.5).

It is dismal to note that despite the three-fold increase in the Annual Special Component Plan for the Scheduled Castes from

Rs 71.15 crore (71 million) in 1990–91 to Rs 205 crore (2,050 million) in 1996–97, the benefits reaching the target groups are negligible. A survey has revealed:

Lack of awareness about government schemes for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes was one of the important reasons for very few respondents availing themselves of these schemes. It was found that only 8 % of the respondents had availed themselves of the schemes. Out of these 8 %, only 5.2 % had benefited from the schemes. (Ibid: 43)

The study points out that the formulation of welfare schemes for the upliftment of Scheduled Castes is not enough. What is equally important is their dissemination to the beneficiaries, as more than 60 per cent of the respondents were not aware of the schemes.

Under such circumstances of political indifference towards these communities, and the launching of projects of modernisation and development targeted principally at the middle class, the very bases of the tribal peoples' survival are getting wiped out. The situation in Punjab is alarming. The forest cover, on which these communities were highly dependent, has already dwindled much below the critical level. It was 5.82 per cent at the start of the twenty-first century, far below the bare minimum of 33 per cent.⁶ The availability of consumer goods manufactured in industry has robbed these communities of whatever meagre sources of production and income they had from their traditional occupations. The media revolution, similarly, has not only invaded their cultural strong-posts and posited before them the lure of a modern lifestyle, it has also robbed the performing communities from the pittance they could earn from traditional arts. Thus, there is no alternative before them but to follow the majority, the so-called mainstream, and make a space for themselves in the present system of socio-economic development.

There is no employment potential in Punjab except in agriculture or as daily-wage labour in rural and urban areas. Only some of these communities, such as the Bangalas, still earn their living by snake-charming and selling traditional herbal medicines. The younger generation is, however, turning away from their traditional occupations. Nats still earn their living by performing shows and Bazigars too follow their traditional occupations to an extent, but all others are given to daily-wage unskilled labour in villages and

towns, rag-picking, scrap (*kabad*) collection or selling petty goods as *pheriwalas*. In all the communities that we have studied, only an insignificantly small section is working in the services sector, more than 98 per cent are given to petty jobs and errands. What is the future of these communities under the existing conditions? What is their strategy for survival? There is only one way that their leaders seem to have understood — obtaining the status of Scheduled Tribes. There is no other option before them to enjoy the benefits of Reservation policy which are presently being usurped by the creamy layer.

CONCLUSION

A perusal of the ethnographic details collected from each of the seven ex-criminal tribes, now called Denotified Tribes or the Vimukt Jatis viz., Bauria, Bazigar Banjara, Bangala, Barad, Gandhila, Nat, and Sansi, shows that as far as these are concerned, they definitely meet all criteria of 'tribes'. The standard definition of the Government of India and those of the social anthropologists differ little on this issue. The *Report of the Evaluation Committee on Welfare* of the Punjab Government has also certified these communities as tribes. Besides, the judgement of Justice Bains of the Punjab and Haryana High Court has not only upheld the Rajput status of these communities, but also declared their inclusion in the list of Scheduled Castes wrong. He further recommended to the government to include them in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

After examining various definitions given by social anthropologists and critically scrutinising various ethnographic reports prepared by different researchers and allied information in the light of the defining parameters suggested by the Government of India, I tend to conclude that all of the above mentioned seven communities have been historically differentiated and isolated from mainstream rural or urban society in Punjab. One very strong element that strengthens their characterisation as tribal is their nomadic and semi-nomadic nature. By virtue of this very feature alone, they do not become a part of the village or city community and hence of the caste system that integrates a community, howsoever peripheral or marginal, within mainstream society. Their bonding with society is only need-based and is not permanent. That is why a tribal old man's characterisation of his community's relation with the main society is very apt — *mangan-khan di sanjh* — a relation of begging

to survive. They also supply the villagers or city-dwellers with items of domestic use that were either not available there or in which these communities specialised. For instance, even to day Bangalas supply various types of medicines for the eyes, skin and joint ailments etc., to people. Earlier it used to be some kind of grain, now they take cash payment. Similarly, Barad, who excelled in the manufacture of *kanghi* (comb) for spinning purposes, used to sell these for a living. They also supplied brooms and *innu* (cushioned loop for head to carry load), etc. The Labana or Bazigar Banjaras were traditional salt-traders, doing business across India. At the local level, Bazigars sold small needles (*suian*) and large ones (*gadhuian*). They also sold meat, as they were voracious non-vegetarians. People preferred *tokrewala* meat to any other. Besides providing consumer good, the Bazigars and Nats entertained people by performing *bazi* and acrobatic shows as well.

I do not deny the tag of criminality that is historically attached to these tribes, though I doubt the intentions of those who did give them this label. However, noted scholars like Ibbetson and Rose have also doubted the criminal character of some tribes:

The Bangalis are a small group, but are in constant communication with the Saperas and other criminal tribes of the plains. They live by begging, exhibiting snakes, hunting and pilfering, but are *probably not addicted to serious crime*. (1970: 57, emphasis added)

Almost similar views have been expressed regarding the Sansis:

The Sansis are the most criminal class in the Punjab; and they are registered under the Criminal Tribes Act in nine districts. Still, though the whole caste is probably open to *suspicion* of petty pilfering, they are *by no means always professional thieves*. (Ibid.: 363, emphasis added)

I earnestly believe that there must have been strong reasons to make these tribes turn to this kind of deviant activity. Foremost among these must have been their expulsion from their native regions — hearth and home — at some point in time. This argument is often reflected in their oral history, as all the ex-criminal tribes or Vimukt Jatis believe themselves to be either direct descendants of the erstwhile rulers of Rajputana or at least respected people in those kingdoms. That is why these communities are very sensitive about their Kshatriya past, and the honour and valour associated with the ruling classes, which is why they still practice untouchability

with the Scheduled Castes. Re-induction into the community after being 'polluted' by contact with these castes takes place only after purification with *Ganga-jal*, water from Ganga. It is the very fact of social ostracism that they resent most, being clubbed with those people from whom they have historically kept a distance.

Another important element is their marshal reputation, their bravery as the indigenous people who fought against the invaders, that is, the Mughals, both for their own political autonomy and also saving the honour of the country and the community. They did not let the rulers forcibly take away their daughters. The Bauria, Sansi and Gandhila are the principal protagonists of this viewpoint. The first two are also the dominant communities in the state. This might be a historical fact or an idealised reconstruction of their past, especially after they had been forcibly settled by the colonial power, and were made part and parcel of the village community where caste and varna systems were (and still are) strongly entrenched. Once non-hierarchical made to confront the high and the low, pure and polluting, they started looking at their own position or social status vis-à-vis the dominant community. Hence they made an attempt to situate themselves in the overall hierarchy and claim Kshatriya status. K. Suresh Singh mentions in the *People of India*:

The tribes have generally remained outside the varna system. Therefore, only 11.8 per cent of them recognize their place in it. Another 31.6 per cent are only aware of the varna system. Among those who recognize their place in it nearly 8.3 per cent claim to be Kshatriya, 7.5 per cent Shudras and 0.9 per cent Brahman.... When it comes to the self-perception of a tribal community in the regional hierarchy we find that 171 tribes, that is, 26.9 per cent see themselves as being of a high status, while 298 tribes (46.9 per cent) perceive themselves as being in the middle position. About 25.3 per cent, that is, 161 tribes see themselves as being of low status. (Singh 1994, 2001: 7)

The tribal communities' tendency to glorify their past by claiming to belong to the Kshatriya varna is quite understandable. It is quite plausible that their present-day leaders are forcefully articulating their Kshatriya past vis-à-vis the Scheduled Castes and of being indigenous people vis-à-vis the Mughals to make a stronger appeal to the government. They also play up their nationalist stance of being anti-British, who labelled them criminal.

A related issue with this glorification of their past is the problem of criminality. What was the nature of crime they had committed or were committing? What were the objects of their thefts? Were these people or some notables among them Robin Hood-ing? Or they were indulging in indiscriminate looting and arson? Before we proceed with this discussion, it would be relevant to note the viewpoint of Thomas Aquinas, a great Christian theologian, on the subject:

When a poor person out of his need, steals, he is not committing a sin and should not be punished by the church. The bread he stole was *due* him from the rich man; and if the poor man stole, it was because of the rich man's hardness of heart. (Quoted in Ellul 1969: 18)

A peep into their oral history would reveal that having been pushed into the forests by the Mughal rulers, these otherwise settled people were coerced into becoming nomadic and survived by hunting for almost 'three centuries'. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to ascertain if their 'rebellion' in the form of loot and arson, individually or collectively, against the authorities, first the Mughals and later the British and propertied classes, can be interpreted as acts of nationalism and patriotism or as problem of law and order. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, the primitive rebels:

are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported. (1959: 102)

Referring to the marauding pastoralists in seventeenth-century Punjab, Chetan Singh also writes:

This last method (marauding) of procuring non-pastoral goods often placed the tribes in direct confrontation with the powerful Mughal state which *increasingly encroached upon their traditional lifestyle* as cultivated area expanded. (1991: 269, emphasis added)

Thus it may be understood that for the authorities it was always convenient to classify such acts of theft as problems of law and order and label the individuals or groups involved, and subsequently the

whole community, as 'criminal'. Should the stealing of grain or domestic animals for an individual's survival be interpreted as an act of theft? During the British period, two Bauria men — Teku and Panju — were known for being adept in running away with sack loads of grain from the running train. The skill of theft was developed to steal grain not gold or other valuables and therefore to ensure survival. The two brothers known for their skill at breaking open the locks, excited the Maharaja of Faridkot to challenge them to steal from his treasury. Once promised that they would not be subsequently punished, they succeeded in their mission. The Maharaja not only kept his word but rewarded them with 10 acres of land each.

Bhargava's observations on Bawaria (Bauria) criminality give credence to the above formulation. Referring to them as being mostly illiterate and scattered all over India, having a distinct language, customs and code words, he writes that

they are able to be in close communication with the entire tribe throughout India and Burma.... They are particularly notorious for committing thefts from camps *especially of Government officials* and are probably the most clever of camp-robbers and tent-cutters to be found in India. (1949: 20, emphasis added)

He also mentions about their adeptness in *nakabzani*, i.e., removing goods from a building through a hole made for the purpose and a then of throwing three small stones, one after the other at the house they wanted to burgle:

According to them if a man gets up on this warning, it shows that he has earned money by hard and honest labour; if he continues to sleep, they conclude that he has acquired money by dishonest means. Hence if one does not wake up, they consider themselves *justified in robbing him and distributing his wealth* among those who have a better claim to it. (Ibid.: 20–21, emphasis added)

Shail Mayaram's observations about the Mina community's criminality are relevant here too:

the stereotype of Mina criminality is equally problematic and needs investigation... the 'evidence' of crime was often assumed rather than established.... Attributing an intrinsic criminality to various groups masked the inroads made by colonialism into the livelihoods

of various groups. So-called tribal peoples belonging to forest communities were inducted into systems of settled agriculture as landless labourers and in unequal trade relations that led to debt bondage. Administrative and ethnographic reporting merge crime and resistance. (2006: 141)

She also mentions the case of Pratap C. Aggarwal, a major social anthropologist of the Meos, who

describes their 'anti-social activities' and their 'vocation' of 'stealing cattle and looting pilgrims'. In a later work he confesses his naïve acceptance of the colonial 'bias' without indicating what made him abandon his earlier views. (Ibid.: 137)

Looking at the history of the itinerant community of Madras Presidency, the Koravas, traditional salt traders, Radhakrishna writes about the prejudices of the administration:

since the Koravas were an itinerant community, the administrators found it difficult to shake off some of the prejudices they carried with them regarding European gypsies, and they seem to have simply superimposed some of these on the Indian counterparts. Moreover, the bulk of their own prejudices were shared by the high caste landlord sections. (2001: 12)

These prejudices meant that Koravas were seen as itinerants who had an 'insatiable lust for *wandering aimlessly*', that they were idle and lazy, 'lacking of *any* social norms, especially regarding their women' and known for their 'ostensible criminality' (ibid.: 12–13, emphasis added).

The problem of Banjara criminality is no different. Writing about north Indian Banjaras, Robert Varady mentions:

Banjaras have been on the Indian scene for more than seven hundred years. While others have crumbled, these nomadic communities have demonstrated their versatility by surviving several onslaughts against their way of life.... In the nineteenth century, Banjara *tandas*, confronted with extinction, evolved modes of adaptation which featured permanent settling, criminality, and the development of the draft oxen trade. Through emphasis of strengths and alterations of lifestyle, they entered the twentieth century with renewed vigour. (1979: 11–12)

These citations and examples from numerous researches make it amply clear that labelling tribal communities as 'criminal' was not based on any serious attempt to characterise them and their society, but mere articulation of the British administrators' pre-conceived notions regarding them, their work and lifestyle. It was not peculiar to the colonial authority to label the local people, especially those who posed resistance, but this was equally true of the Mughals as well. Mayaram shows how by a sleight of language, the invading group becomes 'defensive', and the subordinated people become 'oppressors' and 'plunders', violators of the contract whereby revenue is to be paid to the rulers. A quote from Babur's from *Tuzuk-i-Babari* makes the point clear:

Every time that I have entered Hindustan, the Jat and Gujjars have regularly poured down in prodigious numbers from their hills and wild, in order to carry off oxen and buffaloes. These were the wretches that really inflicted the chief hardships, and were guilty of the severest oppression in the country. (Quoted in Mayaram 2006: 94)

As a matter of fact, these were the 'primitive rebels' of Hobsbawm, who were posing problems of law and order to the property of the rich and the traders. The terminology used by the colonial administrators to refer to them in their reports speaks of their attitude towards these communities. It is not one of conveying difference and distance but smacks of contempt and hatred. Major Sleeman calls the Bauria a 'predatory tribe', 'infesting the lower Doab...' (quoted in Major 1999: 664). Major further quotes from *A Handbook of the Criminal Tribes of the Punjab* that Sansi men were 'generally dark in complexion with bright sparkling eyes', their faces were 'cast in the aboriginal mould' and are said to be 'very foxy' in expression; often eating vermin, they could 'always be detected by their smell, which is said to be a combination of 'musk-rat and rancid grease'; and their religion, mostly a form of Hinduism, was 'of very primitive, mixed and debased nature' (ibid.: 671).

It is quite likely that the element of persecution reflected in the oral historical description of the respondents' own community 'of being hunted out for the last three centuries' is actually an infiltration into their residential and economic space, first by the Mughals and later the British authorities, for whom the forest was a source of great revenue, more so for the latter than the former, especially in the wake of increasing trade and commerce. It becomes clear from the following quote:

In the seventeenth century rural Punjab it was not only agriculture which was commercialised. The extent to which trade had become part of the ethos of Punjab is indicated by the *Guru Granth*. It reveals to us the idiom in which a large section of society... expressed its economic values and social aspirations. From its passages it appears that both the rural and urban value systems were strongly influenced by a consciousness intimately connected with trade and commerce. (Singh 1991: 259–60)

Let me suggest that under the prevailing conditions of socio-economic inequality and the existing political structure of the Indian State (including Punjab), even if the Vimukt Jatis and/or other communities succeed in getting listed as Scheduled Tribes, it is not going to make much difference to their present social status or economic condition. It will only be a cosmetic treatment of their problems, giving them the illusion of redressing their grievances without actually leading to any real benefits for the community as a whole, with the creamy layer emerging on top there as well. But there seems to be no alternative according to their leaders either, except to ask and struggle for Scheduled Tribe status such that their people may obtain some benefits, howsoever meagre and partial under the prevailing circumstances and the current Reservation policy of the Government of India.

The government, however, should take such decisions of giving or withdrawing tribal status to certain communities carefully. I fear a potential volcano-like situation if the grievances of these and other such communities are not carefully and properly attended to. Presently, a few leaders of these communities are spearheading their struggle for tribal status, but in the years to come, an entire younger generation will possibly become aggressive and volatile given their exposure to mass media. Their literacy rate is also bound to rise, which will make them that much more conscious of their human and civil rights, as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Not only this, economic conditions are also going to be more dynamic than at present due to the opening up of the Indian and Punjab economy. Its ill effects are already becoming manifest and stare in the eyes of any new visitor to these settlements.

The media revolution is another important factor that would heighten the notion of relative deprivation, both with respect to the rich as well as the marginalised communities. It is clearly reflected in the rising incidence and intensity of conflict to obtain the constitutional benefits that are due to them. The escalation

in violence in Rajasthan in June 2007 is a pointer to the coming events. Gujjars were not only pitted against the government but also got entangled in conflict with a fellow community, the Mina. The former were asking for Scheduled Tribe status while the latter, who enjoy this privilege, do not want to share the benefits they enjoy. I must share my apprehensions on this. If such situations are not handled dexterously by the government, the sociopolitical milieu will become even more volatile.

It would be apt to conclude the discussion with the concluding remarks of Andrew Major:

Interestingly, Act VI of 1924 provided for individual provinces to repeal the Criminal Tribes Act within their territories if they wished, but the Punjab Government never took up this option, even after 1937 when a Unionist ministry came to power.... A reading of the Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates for the period 1937–46 is instructive...: during these years no elected Punjabi politician officially questioned the need to retain the Act, and while several assemblymen did query the registration of specific criminal tribes in particular districts, an equal number rose to put questions concerning the communal distribution of posts within the Criminal Tribes Department. For the Punjabi elite, there were clearly *more important issues* at hand *than the social salvation of the criminal tribes*. For the criminal tribes, on the other hand, there must assuredly have been something faintly suspicious about the freedom's ever-louder clarion call. (1999: 687–88, emphasis added)

It is dismaying to note that the role of the elected representatives in post-Independence Indian Punjab is no different 60 years hence. It has still not swung in favour of the Vimukt Jatis and allied communities in letting them have their due in the sovereign, socialist, democratic, republic of India.

NOTES

1. Bauria men have numerous anecdotes of how the police used to harass them. They were made to sit at the *thana* (police station) or *chauki* (police post) for hours together and asked to do *begaar*, which included odd jobs like doing domestic or agriculture work for the police officers without remuneration.
2. Weber's definition has the following elements: a fixed territory, lack of occupational specialisation, absence of social ranking with reference to a larger community, presence of a political association, presence of

exogamous sibs but no clear-cut endogamy of the tribe as a whole; and the absence of commensality rules (Weber 1958).

3. The list of communities given to us included the Banjara only and not the Bazigar. When we went to the field, we could not find any Banjaras but Bazigars were present in significantly large numbers. We were informed that the two are synonyms in the sense that the former is an all-India name for this community, while they are called Bazigars in Punjab. Hence they are called Bazigar Banjara.
4. The Gandhilas' presence in Punjab is not clear. The Census of Punjab informs us that they are concentrated in Ludhiana and Jalandhar districts only. Our field investigators found them only on the periphery of the Patiala district, touching the Haryana border. Despite the best efforts of the concerned supervisor and other field investigators and leaders of the Vimukt Jatis and other organisations, we could not locate them elsewhere. Gandhilas themselves informed us that they were not to be found in other parts of the state.
5. Denzil Ibbetson subscribes to the idea that both Bazigar and Nat are acrobats; the former are Mohammedan and the latter Hindus.
6. *Statistical Abstract of Punjab 2004*, p. 156, Chart No. 3, 'Land Utilisation in Punjab 2003–04 (P)'. Elsewhere in the *Statistical Abstract of Punjab 2004* the figure stands at 6.12 per cent (p. 285). The *Abstract* clarifies that the gap in these figures is due to the fact 'that certain lands though not wooded, are taken as Forest by the Forest Department while these are not treated as such by the Director of Land Records, Punjab, *Statistical Abstract of Punjab 2004*, p. 155.

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Bauria

Birinder Pal Singh

The Bauria community, according to the *Census of India (Punjab), 2001*, is widely distributed in a majority of the districts of the Malwa tract of the state viz., Faridkot, Bathinda, Mansa, Moga, Ferozepur, Muktsar, Sangrur, and Ludhiana. They have a total of 102,232 persons, of which 53,336 are males and 48,896 females. In Faridkot district there are certain villages, like Bargari and Dod, where the population of this community is very large. In the Doaba tract there is only one such village, Mansurwal, in Kapurthala district. In the Majha and Doaba tracts this district has the highest Bauria population of 1,070. There is hardly any population in the Majha tract. Amritsar district does not have a single Bauria household. The district of Faridkot has the maximum population of 23,212, while other districts of the Malwa region have low population, with Fatehgarh registering only five Bauria households.

An erstwhile criminal tribe the Baurias were denotified on 30 August 1952. This day is celebrated by them as their independence day, and they owe their liberation to the Indian National Congress.

The community got its name from *baur*, the trap they used to lay to hunt animals. Being forest dwellers, hunting was their main occupation. It was this skill of theirs that made them invaluable to the rulers of the erstwhile princely states who engaged them in their hunting expeditions. Bauria men were very good at imitating the calls of animals. They were also experts at recognising their footprints. This made them excellent *khojis* or tracers, which is why the princely states sought their services for tracking down thieves, etc. Thus, the members of this community got the name *khura-khoj labbanwale*.

The Bauria are otherwise widely distributed throughout India, especially in the north-western states, where they are known as the Bawaria. The *Encyclopedia of Indian Tribes and Castes* has no entry on Bauria but two entries on Bawaira (sic) and Bawariya. The former are described as

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a hunting tribe who take their name from *bawar* or noose with which they snare wild animals. (The Mahtams hunt with similar nooses; but theirs are made of *munj* rope while the Bawaria nooses are made of leather). They set long lines of these nooses in the grass across the jungles: from this line they arrange two rows of scarecrows consisting of bits of rag and the like tied on to the trees and grass; they then drive the jungle, and the frightened deer and other animals, keeping between the lines of scarecrows, cross the lines of nooses in which their feet become entangled. In addition they make articles of grass and straw and reeds and sell them to villagers. The Bawarias are a vagrant tribe whose proper home appears to be Mewar, Ajmer and Jodhpur; in the Punjab they are chiefly found along the middle Satluj valley in Sirsa, Firozpur, Faridkot, Lahore, and Patiala, though they occur in smaller numbers in Hissar, Rohtak and Gurgaon, all on the Rajputana border. They are black in colour and of poor physique.

But though they are primarily vagrants, they have settled down in some parts, and especially in the Firozpur District are largely employed as field labourers and even cultivate land as tenants. (Channa 2004: 447–48)

About their criminality, the *Encyclopedia* records the report of a British officer:

Their skill in tracking also is notorious. They are by no means always, or indeed generally criminal, in this province at least; and in Lahore and Sirsa seem to be sufficiently inoffensive. But in many parts of the Panjab, and generally I believe in Rajputana, they are much addicted to crime...From these figures (of cases registered under the Criminal Tribes Act) it appears that the Bawarias are registered as professional criminals only in Firozpur and Ludhiana, and that in the former district only a small portion of the caste is so registered. Even where they are criminal they usually confine themselves to petty theft, seldom employing violence. (Ibid.: 448)

The entry on the Bawariya in the same *Encyclopedia* reads:

A hunting and criminal tribe practically found only in Muzaffarnagar and Mirzapur... It (Bawariya) is most probably derived from Hindi *banwar*, 'a creeper' (Sanskrit *bhramara*), in the sense of a noose made originally from some fibrous plant and used for trapping animals, which is one of the primary occupations of the tribe. (Ibid.: 448)

There are also the Western Bawariyas, of which there is a section called

the Kalkamaliya or 'black blanket people' who (especially the women) wear black blankets and are found chiefly among the Sikhs of the jungle and Malwa country....They are most numerous in Rajputana mid the districts bordering upon it, but extend up the Satlaj to Firozpur and Lahore....The Bawariyas are seemingly an aboriginal tribe, being of a dark complexion and inferior physique,....Many of them are fond of a wandering life, living in wretched huts, and feeding upon lizards, foxes, and other jungle animals, but they say they will not eat fish. In other districts they are known as a criminal tribe, but here many of them are fairly respectable cultivators, some are employed as village watchmen, and many of them are skilled in tracking. (Ibid.: 448-49)

About their methods of crime, B. S. Bhargava writes that though they were notorious for committing daylight robberies in the past, now they adopt less violent forms of crime.

They are particularly notorious for committing thefts from camps, specially of government officials, and are probably the most clever of camp-robbers and tent-cutters to be found in India. They are equally adept in nakabzani — removing goods from a building by gaining entrance through a hole made in the wall. (Bhargava 1949: 20)

About the Punjab Baurias, Andrew J. Major writes:

The Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab then wrote to the seven Division Commissioners to obtain their views. Not surprisingly, the seven were unanimous in agreeing that a system of surveillance, which had since annexation been in operation against the Mazhabi 'Thugs', should be applied to tribes like the Baurias and Sansis... 'the existence of a criminal class, living notoriously on robbery, is an outrage on civilized society, and their suppression is urgently called for.' Consequently, in 1856 the Judicial Commissioner issued Book Circular No. 18 which provided for the system of surveillance and control that would take effect in the rest of India only after 1860. Under the authority of the Circular all Sansis, Harnis and Baurias were to be registered at the local *thanas*, the *lambardars* of the villages ... were to be answerable for their conduct and movements.... (1999: 664-65)

The Bauria people believe that they are the descendants of Jaimal and Phatta of Chittorgarh in Rajasthan. They are Kshatriya Rajputs who became nomadic since their ancestors lost a battle to emperor Akbar. The story goes that Akbar wanted the hand of Jaimal's beautiful daughter, Sandali. Both her father and uncle

refused to comply and for this they were put behind bars. One day, a well-wisher advised them to agree to the emperor's proposal, otherwise they would simply perish in prison. It was their only way to escape. They agreed to his advice and finally were freed on the condition that they would go to Chittorgarh and make arrangements for the royal wedding. On a given day, Akbar reached there in pomp and splendour. To his surprise, he was challenged by the two brothers. There started a fierce battle that continued for a number of days. The Mughal army faced a stiff challenge.

It is believed that there was a small water reservoir (*baoli*) near the fort, whose water was not only sweet (*mitha*) but also sacred (*sucha/pavittar*). The injured were brought there. They would drink the water and become fit once again to fight. Someone informed the Mughal army of the secret of the Rajput warriors. Subsequently, pieces of cow flesh were thrown into the tank to defile it, which resulted in the loss of its sacredness and hence its power to rejuvenate the injured. The valiant fighters finally lost to the royal army. Both brothers were killed and Sandali too jumped from the fort and committed suicide. It is said that since they were fighting near a *baoli* they were called Baolias or Bawalias (of *baoli*) (Ibbetson and Rose 1970: 73).

There is another story in which one of the ancestors of the tribe fell in love with a beautiful Rajput maid of good lineage and the two got married. After some time, the young man returned to forest life, hence he was called *baola*, an imbecile, by the bride's relatives. William's account suggests that Bawarias were a military class fighting on the side of the Rajputs. They were

the *bandukchis* or musketeers. In this connection the Bawarias, although claiming Rajput origin, do not profess to have been the equals of the Rajput ruling class, but rather their vassals or feudatories. Some few Bawarias still wear the Rajput badge of metal *kara*, or ring, on the right ankle. (Ibid.: 73)

As the Mughal army was chased after and hunted them, they ran deep into the forests and discarded their traditional dress so as to remain disguised. They also developed a secret language, now called Bauri. This is a dialect of the Bhili language. (They are believed to be 'of pure Bhil blood' [ibid.: 75]). They use this language even now in their homes. In Punjab, settled here forcibly by the British for the last century, they speak Punjabi. They are shy and timid by nature and do not open up easily to outsiders.

There are no villages or settlements in rural areas that are exclusively Bauria, but they constitute a separate *vehra* (literally courtyard, but a neighbourhood or ward or *mohalla* in this case) on the eastern side of a village. When their population is large, there may be more than one such ward or *vehra*, but it is exclusively for this community alone. The eastern side is indicative of their non-Scheduled Caste status as people of low castes are generally to be found on the western side of the village.

There is another settlement of Baurias, in Khanna city of Ludhiana district. They have about 300 households, all settled along the railway line to Sirhind near the Samrala overbridge. They belong to the district of Muzzafarnagar in Uttar Pradesh (UP), spread over 12 villages there, such as Ahmedgarh, Khanpur Kalan, Chhedi Jalar, Alaudinpur, Rampura etc., to name a few of the larger ones. No doubt they originally belong to Chittorgarh in Rajasthan but have been settled in UP for over two centuries. The Bauria of Khanna have organic links with their ancestral villages and marry their sons and daughters there. Interestingly, they have no links with the Punjabi Bauria settled elsewhere in the state and have many social and cultural differences with them. For instance, none of them follow the Sikh religion, which is a common practice with the Bauria in Punjab. They also do not subscribe to Jagatguru Gosain, who is central to their Punjabi counterparts. However *gotras* like Dhabi, Parmar and Koli are common.

In their nomadic life, the Bauria used to make *sirkis* or huts for residential purposes. These were made with the help of split bamboos erected in the ground in a circle and covered with elephant grass (*sirkanda*). It was so well interlaced that not a drop of water could enter it. The mud was also raised around the bamboos. The entrance was closed with the help of a door made of interlaced reeds (*kanian*). The whole family used to live there.

A traditional *kulli* (hut) was made with the help of six wooden posts fixed in the ground. A long wooden bar was made to support the roof that would slant on both sides to drain off rain water. A similar structure, but more simple and crude in form, was raised for the animals. Sometimes a larger, two-storey *kulli* was made using broad stems of trees so that goats or sheep could be kept on the ground floor and the upper storey could be used for their own accommodation. A mattress made with bits of rags stuffed into it was laid on the floor to make bedding during the winters. Such *kullis* were not made to last long, at best a year, as the community would then move to a different place.

Dress and ornaments: The dress of these people, both men and women, resembles that of the Rajasthani people, which is also proof of their ancestral background. Men wear large-sized twisted (*marorewali*) turbans of white, pink and red. They wear white or flowered (*bootianwali*) long red, shirts (*kameez*). Earlier they would tie a *dhoti* but now in Punjab they wear a *chadra* (male body wrap for the legs). In their routine life they are not very particular about their clothes but for a wedding or while going to a fair they dress in their traditional robes. They are also fond of wearing large earrings (*mundran*) of gold and silver, silver rings on their fingers, as well as bangles.

Men are fond of tattoos. This is not very common now. Earlier tattoos of peacock, tiger, pigeon, dove, moon, stars, *til* (beauty spot), and Baba Gosain marked with black colour adorned their biceps (*daule*), arms, thighs, and the forehead. The youth, especially, were very fond of these.

Women are also very fond of dressing up. A shirt (*kurti*) studded with stars and pearls (*motian*) and a large *ghaghara* (long skirt), usually of red colour, are their favourites. The minimum length of cloth used in these skirts used to be seven yards. Some older women would have larger ones of about 15–20 yards. A long *dupatta* is draped over the head. An elaborate *ghaghara* is a prized possession of a Bauria lady that she brings with her from natal home at the time of marriage. It is given to her by her maternal uncle (*mama*). If a bride does not get one, it is considered inauspicious (*changa nahin samajde*).

Their ornaments include earrings (*kante-walian*), nose pin (*nath*), *tika* on the head, *gulukand* (necklace), *rani-haar* (large necklace), neck chain (*janjiri*), rings (*pipal-patian*), and bangles. They would also wear brace-lets (*kare*) on their upper arms. A respondent remarked: 'A well-decorated Baurian when walks like a snake (*supp vang mehldi hai*), the heart beats of the young stop.' Women also tattoo their upper arms, calves (*pinjanian*) and forehead with black coloured stars and flowers (*bootian*).

FOOD HABITS

The Bauria are both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. It was their forest habitation that made them eaters of *seh* (porcupine), *tittar* (partridge), rabbit, deer, etc. They used to hunt only wild herbivorous animals and roast the meat on coal (*lakkar de kolian te*). The fat

of the animal was stored in earthen containers. When meat was not available the fat was heated with salt and chilli and eaten with *chapattis*. When a calf of a buffalo (*katta*) was slaughtered, the remaining meat was dried and stored. On a festival or large gathering even camels were slaughtered to provide bulk quantities of meat. It is also a delicacy.

They are fond of meat but now eat less of it because of its decreased availability due to depleting forest cover, and of course the high prices. They are fond of mutton cooked in mustard oil and fried with spices and red chillies. The lamb (*bakra*) is sacrificed at the *dehra* (small structure of mud or bricks in a house for ancestors) on all important occasions and used as food afterwards. The guests too are offered mutton. They do not eat the meat of the calf of a cow, (*gau/katta*), which is eaten by the Bhatti Bauria only, both men and women.

Earlier, they would dig out the roots of trees, especially Bohar (*Ficus bengalensis*) and Jand (*Prosopis specigera*) for eating purposes. They used to carry these along with them on asses, etc., when they travelled. With permanent settlement there has been a change in their food habits. Since their settling in Punjab, they have become largely vegetarian. Cereals and pulses, especially *moong* and *masar*, are their staple food. They eat all kinds of vegetables, including roots and tubers. Mustard oil is commonly used as a cooking medium, though *til* (*Sesamum indicum*) oil is also used. They are also fond of pulses and green vegetables. They cook pulses in earthen vessels placed in earthen hearths (*hara*) using burning cow dung cakes as fuel. This keeps simmering for the whole day and is then mixed with a churner and fried with ginger, onion, chillies, and other spices. They cook turnip and radish after grating and boiling them. These are made into balls that are fried with different spices. They are fond of *gajrela*, made from grated carrots mixed with *gur*, *desi ghee* and milk. *Jalebis* made from *maida* and *gur* are also a favourite. Besides these sweet delicacies they are fond of *ladoos*, *besan*, *badana*, *shakarpare*, *gulabjaman*, and *bahushahi*. Of course they do not eat these on a daily basis but only on festive occasions of socio-religious significance or fairs, etc. Even though the Bauria are poor they are fond of eating. They make *karah* of wheat flour, *gur* and *desi ghee* as an offering to the *dehra* or the Gosain.

They are fond of *pakorās* made from *palak*, potato, cauliflower, *methi*, and *bathu* and fried in mustard oil. *Pakorās* made with *bhāng* are eaten on religious festivals like Holi or Shivaratri. In the words of one respondent: 'If some one eats *pakorās* of *bhāng* made by a

Bauria then he will return home only after going around the globe (*duniya da chakkar kha ke hi ghar mudu*)’.

They take intoxicants of various sorts (*kayee nashe karde ne*), like whisky, *bhang*, cigarettes, *bidi*, *zarda*, etc., but very few take to chewing *paan*. They are fond of country liquor made from *gur* that they distil at home. Water is put into an earthen pitcher and made to ferment for seven or eight days, buried preferably in a heap of animal manure (*roodi*). It is then distilled and stored in vessels usually buried in the ground. A cup or two makes the evening colourful. Bauria people maintain solidarity and do not inform the police. They also neither shriek (*khupp nahin paunde*) nor create a fuss after drinking. A guest is always offered drinks and meat as a mark of respect.

Cigarette and *bidi* smoking, the intoxicants of the poor, are very common among them. *Zarda* has recently been introduced to them by the *bhayias*, the labour force from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and local truck drivers. Earlier *huqa* was in vogue. The old people are still attached to it and it is claimed to be ‘a symbol of Rajput ancestry and honour (*Rajputi shan*)’. It is also offered to guests. The older generation takes *naswar* (shuff) but not the younger ones.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

There is no inequality in the Bauria community as such, which is divided into five main *gotras*: *Parmar*, *Chauhan*, *Solanki*, *Charan* or *Bhatti*, and *Dhandal* or *Rathod*. Out of these *gotras* Rathod and Chauhan are large while Solanki and Charan are small. The Chauhan have eight prominent sub-*gotras* — *Sanawat*, *Raghatwat*, *Matawat*, *Sadarwat*, *Chaplawat*, *Milawat*, *Darawat*, and *Nathawat*. No one *gotra* has been given a special status. All are considered equal. The purpose of their existence is to mark out people with whom one cannot marry as there is strict *gotra* exogamy.

Ibbetson gives an account of these groups though not of those in Punjab but in Rajasthan:

They are said to be divided into three sections: the Bidawati of Bikaner who trace their origin to Bidawat in Jaipur, do not eat carrion, disdain petty theft but delight in crimes of violence, will not steal cows or oxen, and affect a superiority over the rest; the Jangali or Kalkamli, also called Kaldhaballia — fr. *dhabla*, a skirt, the blanket, *kamal*, forming a petticoat, — generally found in the Jangaldes of the Sikh States, Ferozepore, and Sirsa, and whose women wear

black blankets; and the Kaparia who are most numerous in the neighbourhood of Delhi, and are notoriously a criminal tribe. The three sections neither eat together nor intermarry. The Kalakamia is the only section which are (sic) still hunters by profession, the other sections looking down upon that calling. The Kaparia are for the most part vagrant; while the Bidawati live generally in fixed abodes. (Ibbetson and Rose 1970: 70)

This account is corroborated by an interesting account of the tribes given by Williams of the Punjab Police, who offers details of the social divisions in a tabular form, giving information about their locality and occupation as well (see *ibid.*: 71–72. Also see pp. 74–75). Baurias had been further classified on the basis of their occupations as some are hunters only while others combine hunting with agriculture. But such details are not available for the community in the present state of Punjab.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is an important institution with strict rules to be observed. It is always solemnised within the community but outside one's *gotra*, i.e., outside the *gotras* of their father and mother. In earlier times child marriage was prevalent but not anymore. Earlier *muklawā* (second home coming [in-laws] after marriage) was performed about 10 to 12 years after marriage. Now the age at marriage for girls is around 15 to 18 years.

The sole criterion for the selection of a mate is the suitability of the match on the basis of equality between the two families and not better economic status. The parents select the mate; a mediator plays an important role in this process. There is no scope for love-marriages. If someone chooses their own partner then s/he stands expelled from the community. However, there is no restriction on re-marriage. A widower (*duhajoo*, literally a second timer) may marry an unmarried (*kuari*) girl. More often he marries his younger sister-in-law and a widow marries her younger brother-in-law (*deor or devar*), a younger brother of the deceased husband. It is called *chadar andaza* or *chadar pauna*.

Although the community claims equality of status for women, the scales are most certainly tipped in favour of men. Divorce is not a big problem but it is also not very common as in modern society. The status of a divorced women (*chhutad aurat*) is low.

The Bauria village panchayat grants divorce if the reasons are genuine. A simple procedure of pouring three *chulis* or handfuls of water over the heads of the husband and the wife legitimises divorce.

The marriage ceremony itself is very simple and austere. Earlier, the Bauria followed the Hindu pattern of *phere* (circumambulating the sacred fire), but now Anand Karaj, the Sikh marriage ceremony, is more prevalent. This is principally due to their adoption of Sikhism, the dominant religion in rural Punjab.

The most popular form of marriage is *mull da viah*, where a bride price is paid by the groom's family. Depending on the status of the family, a suitable price is fixed and the money is handed over to the bride's father. Needless to say, he spends it on the wedding only. *Punn da viah* is a marriage in which no bride price is given. Such marriages count for less than 1 per cent in the community. Another popular form is *vatte da viah*, that is, exchange of brides.

Dowry is now prevalent among the Baurias following the influence of local people (local *lokan di dekha-dekhi*), but it is never demanded, under any circumstance. It is arranged or brought by the relatives of the bride and all the items are handed over to the bride. Earlier, the entire expenditure of the girl's marriage was borne by the groom's family, but now the influence of Punjabi society has started showing its effects. The girl's family bears the expenditure, but this practice is still not very common.

The newly weds take up patrilocal residence at least for some time, this may extend up to about two years. Then the couple moves out and establishes its own household, the financial burden of course now lies on the husband. Sometimes, the situation of this demands that the new couple be separated earlier, either due to the quarrelsome attitude of the son or the daughter-in-law. Inheritance is patrilineal. Whatever is there in the family is distributed equally among the sons. Daughters do not claim any share in the property.

FAMILY

Nuclear families are now the norm in Bauria society. While earlier, joint families were prevalent, the economy now is forcing the community to opt for nuclear families. 'There is no discrimination against females in our society (*samaaj*),' community elders claim.

The birth of a daughter is considered auspicious as it is believed to be the arrival of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. If a family keeps giving birth to sons it begins to long for the birth of a daughter. The family is not considered complete without this.

As the status of women is claimed to be equal, both men and women go out for work. There is no hard and fast rule for gender division of labour but women are made to do lighter and easier (*saukhe kumm*) jobs, and men take up hard labour (*aukhe kumm*). Women and elders are respected in the family and society, but a woman is rarely the head of the household. The authority is vested with the oldest man. His demise transfers authority to his son, not his wife. Women are also not allowed to go near the *dehra* or *tharah* of Guru Gosain. During *dehra* worship seeking the blessings of the ancestors, if a woman climbs the *dehra* or if even her garments touch it, pollution is caused. According to a middle-aged community leader in Bargari: '*Aurat da tan sakwar da lar vi dehrian de chaurian nu nahin lag sakda.*' If it happens then the *dehra* is purified with a coat of cow dung (*gotha-mitti nal pochna*) given by men only. Women of the family also do not partake *prasad* (*thath*) offered to the *dehra*.

Relations between family members are usually cordial. Different families live together amicably and help one another as and when the need arises. Goods — flour and grain (*atta-dana*), milk and buttermilk, etc. — are exchanged between them. But this sort of exchange or cooperation takes place between the Bauria alone and not with people of other communities. It is rare that a family dispute goes to the panchayat. Be it the case of the division of property or discord between a husband and wife, it is settled amicably within the family itself. Cooperation rather than conflict is the norm. The families of a clan usually stay together in a *vehra* (ward) but now, due to the scarcity of land and rapidly growing families, residential choices are more flexible.

The cordial nature of family relations may also be gauged from their joking relationship. As is characteristic of the larger Punjabi society, Bauria too permit a casual joking relationship between certain categories of kinship relations like *jija-sali* and *deor* or *devar-bhabhi*. Husband-wife relations are also cordial as compared to rural Punjabi society where such jokes are never shared.

If wife gets delayed in getting breakfast (*bhata*) the husband says jokingly: ‘*Kise Jutt ne gher layi si; kinve sanh chadayi auni ain.*’ Literally, have you been held by a Jutt or peasant such that you are panting.

Wife replies: ‘*Gheran nu tun thodain...?*’ (Aren’t you enough to hold me...?)

Jija remarks: *Saliye paer boch boch dhar kidhre luck marora na kha jave.*” (My dear Sali you must tread carefully lest your waist gets twisted.)

Sali replies: ‘*Koi ni, jija sidha kar dayoo.*’ (Never mind, the *jija* will set it right.)

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Three rites of passage, namely birth, marriage and death, are important in the lives of Bauria people, as in any other community. Each rite of passage is marked with numerous rituals to highlight the significance of the occasion for the individual and also for the whole community, as these provide social legitimacy.

Birth: The birth of a child is an occasion of celebration for both the family and the community. At the time of birth the midwife cuts the *narua*, the umbilical cord. If a male child is born then she beats a *chhanna* to announce the news to the community. The same is not done in the case of a girl child’s birth. Traditionally, *gur* (jaggery) and *patase* (sugar bubbles) or *ladoos* are distributed on the birth of a son. Seven days after his birth he is made to wear *taragi* (*taragi payi jandi hai*) by his maternal grandmother (*nani*) (*kale dhage wich baur pa ke taragi bann de ne*). Water is placed in a vessel at the head of the mother’s bed. A small iron piece is also put inside it. A string of cassia leaves is tied at the top of the main door to ward off evil spirits.

After the seventh day the mother and child are brought out (*bahar vadhauna*). A formal feast (*bhandara*) of rice, *dal-roti* and *karah prasad* is arranged for the family members. The mother is allowed to stay in bed for a month and a quarter (*sava mahina*). After that *prasad* is offered at the *dehra* and she is allowed to cook (*chaunka charauna*) food for the family.

These rituals are followed by the naming ceremony (*namkaran*). There is no elaborate procedure for this occasion. Any senior person of the family or the community is asked to name the newly born child. There is no other religious ceremony.

The 'first Lohri' (*pehli lohri*) of the son is an important function that is celebrated fondly not only by the members of the family but the whole *vehra*. All the activities associated with this festival are performed as a routine (see below). In addition, all the relatives are invited and a lamb is sacrificed at the *dehra*. Country liquor is also served in plenty to the guests which includes all the members of the *vehra*. Singing and dancing continuing late into the evening mark the celebrations.

Marriage: The first step towards marriage begins with *rok*, a sort of booking or engagement with only one rupee. Then the boy's father and his close kin take *shagan* to the girl's family on a given day fixed at the convenience of the two families. The boy's father puts *shagan samagari* (*chhuhara*, coconut, *patase*, etc.) and a rupee in the girl's lap (*chohli*). Then he seeks her hand for his son. The girl's father makes the boy eat *chhuhara* and puts coconut, *patase* and one rupee in his lap. All the members present there give *shagan* to the couple, putting five to 50 rupees in their laps depending on the proximity of their social relation and economic condition. The issue of adequate bride price and other exchange items (*lain-den*) are settled between the two families. The date for marriage is also fixed. After the *shagan* ceremony the guests are given food, including mutton and liquor.

There are a number of steps that must be followed both for the boy's or the girl's marriage. First of all, both the boy and the girl are subjected to *mayian*, during which they cannot move out of the house for seven, five or three days till the marriage is solemnised. The sisters sing in chorus:

Kalla rukh ve veera is vele
Tainu kaun ve lodinda is vele
Mainu mama ji lodinda is vele.
 [Like a lonely tree, o' brother
 Whom do you need now?
 I need my maternal uncle,
 says he.]

After this *gana* (red colour cotton thread) is tied on the arm by the sisters-in-law while they are singing:

Shagan kaun ve manave ma de ladle da
Shagan bhabho ve manave ma de ladle da
Shagan bhain ve manave...

[Who shall offer money to the mother's dearest son?
Sister-in-law shall do so for the mother's dearest son.
Sister shall do the same for the mother's dearest son...]

A *halwai* is employed to prepare sweets (*ladoo*, *jalebi*, etc.) for the marriage. The first lot is offered to Guru Gosain and the *dehra* before any one else consumes it.

A day before the marriage relatives of the mother's family (*nanka mel*) arrive. They apply *hinnah* (*mehndi lagauna*) followed by *vatna malna*, a mix of turmeric, gram flour (*besan*) and curd on the body of the prospective bride and groom. Songs are sung appropriate to the occasion, naming various relations who have gathered around. For instance, on the marriage of a boy:

Sadde angan chikar, kis dohlia pani
Sadde dade da potra nahtia ve, jis dohlia pani
Bhaina da bhai nahtra ve, us dohlia pani.
[Our courtyard is muddy. Who has spilt water?
The grandson has taken a bath. He has spilt water.
Sister's brother has taken a bath.
It is he, who has spilt water.]

In this manner, all relatives of the boy/girl are named. Thus the final bath of unmarried lifehood (*kuarapan*) is given to both the boy and girl. The *nanke* are involved in this ritual too. After the bath the maternal uncle (*mama*) lifts the boy/girl from the bathing place. The boy is taken to a neighbour's house or some other place and made to stay there overnight.

He moves out with the marriage procession (*barat*) from there wearing new clothes and shoes. He dons a *sehra* (chaplet) on his head. It is tied by his sisters. All other women gathered there keep singing this song continuously, naming all the relatives who join the marriage procession:

Tere sehre ne lashkan marian ve veera
Chand chahriya nale chahrian tarian ve veera
Sadde rahan da reta khand banya
Mere veere da taya junn chahrya
Chache thehro ve mame aa lain diyo
Mame aaye ve junn sohni chahre.

The wedding procession moves to the beat of drums (*baje-gaje naal*). It is received at the girl's house and the *milni* (meeting ceremony)

is performed between different relations of the two families starting from the eldest and the nearest ones. Then the *barat* is taken to a village marriage place or *janj-ghar* where it is treated with *seerni* (sweetened water), *pakore* and tea.

Then the boy and the girl take seven *phere* around the sacred fire, as is the Hindu custom. The girl is made to hold the end of a long scarf put around the groom's neck by her father. This is called *palla pharauna*. Literally it symbolises entrusting someone to take care of one's beloved daughter. Taking *phere* was the traditional practice but as most of the Bauria settled in Punjab villages have taken to the Sikh religion, this has been replaced by four *lavan* (*phere* for marriage according to the Sikh rites or circumambulating the Guru Granth Sahib for marriage). During each round is recited a stanza from the scriptures. This, called Anand Karaj, is the most important component of the Sikh marriage.

Before the *baratis* retire to the resting place, the *janj-ghar*, for lunch (*roti*), they are shown the dowry (*khatt*) prepared for the bride. During meals country liquor and mutton are served.

At the time of departure of the *barat*, the bride's father ties the bride and the groom with *injadi* (a 2.5 metre piece of cloth). He walks up to the village boundary and hands over the items to be offered to the *dehra* of the in-laws (*dehre di rasad*). It includes, preferably, a lamb, wheat flour, roasted rice (*phulian*), *saugi* (dried grapes), and rice for his daughter and to be offered at the groom's *dehra* to seek the blessings of his elders on including the bride in their family. The poorer ones give flour or grain (*atta-dana*). The bride's relations and near and dear ones cry and sob (*varlap karde ne*) at the departure of the *barat*.

The groom's family, especially the ladies (as they do not accompany the *barat*), are now ready to receive the newly-weds. Before entering the house, the groom's mother is ready with a *garbi* (small pitcher-like metallic vessel) of water. Around its neck green grass (*dhoob*) or leaves of the *pipal* tree are tied with *khammani*, a red coloured band of coarse cotton thread. She waves it around the heads of the couple seven times and takes a sip of water each time. The groom's sisters and cousins stop them from entering the house (*bar rokna*). It is only after giving some money or valuables that the couple is allowed to enter. Then a small ceremony of untying the *gana* takes place. This is a bracelet of multi-coloured yarn studded with cowries tied to the right wrist of both the bride and the groom. Some families also practice *chhati khedna* (playing sticks) before retiring to the bedroom.

When a boy gets married a separate *sirki* (hut) is made for the newly-weds. Sometimes within the small *sirki*, a special enclosure is partitioned off with the help of reeds. This has a single bed for the couple which is decorated for them, called *pathar launa*. The bride is made to settle there and the bridegroom is asked to go there by his sisters-in-law (*bharjaian/bhabian*). Some times, when he is feeling shy, he is forcibly taken there.

The following day, the family prepares *karah* (pudding of wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter) from the material brought for this purpose and a lamb is sacrificed at the *dehra* after performing the requisite rites. The bride is not allowed to partake of *karah*, nor does anyone accompany her. No member of her *gotra* (clan) can take *prasad*. It is taken by all the members of the groom's family. This is called *got kanalan*. It is only after the *dehra* has accepted *prasad* thus offered that the bride becomes a part of the groom's family.

After this the bride's sisters-in-law and her husband's brothers wives (*daranian* and *jathanian*), make her eat, one by one, seven grains of barley (*jau*). Then they also eat barley. This is the first food of the in-law, house that is given to the bride to eat. When she gets up the next morning she touches the feet of all men and women elder to her, starting from the eldest man/woman of the family. They give her one, two, five, 10 or 50 rupees as a token of their love for her.

The next step in the custom of *got kanalan* involves taking the bride to the well or the hand pump to pay obeisance (*matha tikaya janda hai*). Then she is asked to make sweet *chapattis* (*mithian rotian*) cooked on a newly built *chulah* or hearth. First these are offered to all members of the family and later on are distributed in the community. She is also taken to the *tharah* (platform) of Guru Gosain for obeisance.

Death: The dead body is cremated but that of a child is buried. The body is first given a bath with curd and soap. It is made to wear a new set of *unlag*, (unused) clothes — *kurta* and *pajama* — and wrapped in a coffin cloth (*kaphan*), a five-metre-long white cotton cloth given by the in-laws of the deceased. Then it is taken to the cremation ground in the form of a funeral procession. The community's cremation grounds are usually separate from others. There the body is laid over the pyre. *Desi ghee* is put into the mouth along with *samagari* before showing fire to it, which is done by the eldest son. In the case of Sikh Bauria, *Ardas* (Sikh prayer) is recited by *bhai ji*, the Sikh priest. The remains (*asthian*) are gathered on the third day by the sons or nephews in the presence of other relations

and dear ones. These are immersed in the Ganga at Haridwar. Those who have adopted Sikhism go to Kiratpur Sahib in Ropar district. A religious ceremony (*bhog*) is held on the thirteenth day. In some cases it is also held on the ninth or eleventh day. Till then all members of the family sit and sleep on the floor. The eldest son of the deceased is tied a turban by the village panchayat. This passes on to him the responsibility of running the household.

Bachelors (*chhada*) and those who are childless (*aut*) are not cremated but buried. They are subjected to *keelna* (transfix) by nailing their eyes. This ritual is performed by the *chela* (shaman) of the community. Mustard seeds (*sarson*) are sprinkled over their dead bodies.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Barring a few individuals who have done well in life and perhaps occupy an office in the government, the majority of the community is by and large very poor. The traditional occupation was hunting wild animals for sale as well as for their own consumption. They were also known thieves who would steal grain and cattle (but not money or jewellery) and sold them in other areas. This used to fetch them a good price and helped them become less vulnerable to the police.

No Bauria, however, is presently pursuing these traditional occupations. An old person quipped: '*Eh tan puranian gallan ne, aj kal tan dasan nauhan di kirat kari di hai,*' literally, 'this is the old story. Now we do hard labour to make our living'. The present occupation is petty trading of various sorts. They sell vegetables, etc. on *rehris* or bicycles. The majority of the people, both men and women, do wage labour depending on the season, mostly in the agricultural sector and also in the grain markets. They harvest wheat and cotton and perform other field chores as demanded by the farmer. Women engage in threshing rice, hoeing cotton, harvesting wheat, and digging potatoes. Very few amongst them have land of their own. Others take some land from the farmer on contract for their subsistence.

The Bauria are very sensitive about the *jajmani* (relation between the client of a Brahman or a bard) system. This argument is used to prove their Kshatriya origin, hence they find it despicable to work for someone to make a living, to accept a subordinate status. One person said: '*Jajmani bare pata hi nahin ki hundi hai.*' 'We do not know what the *jajmani* system is.' Another made it clearer:

'Na Baurian ne kise di jajmani kiti, na hi Baurian da koi jajman banya.' 'Neither did we accept *jajmani* system nor can someone become our *jajman*,' thus implying that they are freedom-loving people. They would prefer working on contract (*thheke te*) or wages but not accept *seer* (partnership) like other low castes. One respondent of Bargari village (Faridkot) said: '*Bauria lok apni rozi-roti kamaun layi kise jutt de seeri lagan nu vi mara samajh de ne.*'

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Earlier some types of deviant behaviour witnessed were rape, fighting, murder, theft etc., but these were not rampant. Tribal (*kabila*) panchayats at the village level used to settle these issues. This practice still continues. The panchayat is headed by a *mukhia*, a wise person who is respected by the community. Traditionally no case would go to the civil courts but these days, sometimes when the decision of the panchayat is not acceptable to a party, it moves the civil court. The panchayat announces its decision in front of the whole community. And if the punishment is not accepted then the defaulter is fined. If the defaulter refuses to pay the fine as well then s/he is excommunicated (*huqa-pani chhekna*). If the defaulter still refuses to obey, then s/he is forcibly thrown out of the community and no one is allowed to communicate with him/her.

Besides the local village panchayat, there is now a larger organisation called the Samast Bauria Samaj, that has been established for the welfare of the people. This is a state-level organisation meant to articulate the socio-economic and political demands of the Bauria at various levels, besides undertaking some programmes or measures for their welfare.

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

The community traditionally holds in respect many gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion like Bhairon, Kali, Shiva etc., but the most revered of them is Guru Gosain at the village or the community level and the *dehra* at the level of a household. Guru Gosain has no form. He is believed to have covered the whole earth in two and a half steps. His name is mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib: '*Koi bole Ram Ram, koi khudai, koi sevae Gosainya, koi Alahe*' (Some call on the Lord, 'Ram, Ram' and some 'Khuda'/Some serve him as Gosain, and some as Allah) (Singh 1991: 2884).

Guru Gosain: His *tharah* (platform) is located at a common place in the village. It is a platform about two feet high with a conical structure in the middle that has the same items as the *dehra* in the household, namely a piece of fresh or unused cloth (*unlag*), grains of wheat, etc. On a particular day, twice a year, once in March after Holi and in October on the day following Dussehra, a *bhandara* (feast open to all and sundry) is organised at Guru Gosain's *tharah*, during which rice, *dal*, *chapatti*, and *karah* are prepared from the donations of all the members of the community. The *chela* (shaman) of Gosain is in communication with him. He 'plays' (*khedna*) at the platform and seeks the permission of the Gosain to grant certain favours to the community or an individual. The Guru 'tells' the *chela* to please him by offering a *bakra* (lamb) or more. The Guru accepts the question or the *prasad* at his will. Usually the Gosain accepts the sweet *prasad* only but sometimes, when he is annoyed, he asks for not one but many *bakras*.

To appease the annoyed Guru Gosain, women collect (*mangya janda hai*) flour from seven houses and mix sugar/jaggery with *desi ghee* to make a *prasad* which is then offered to Him. Men propitiate him by burning incense (*havan-dhoop*) on the platform. *Prasad* thus prepared is distributed among all members of the community but is not given to women. A woman is also not allowed to climb the *tharah* as she could pollute it owing to menstruation. She must bow before it only from a distance. Besides *prasad*, a *bhandara* of (*dal-roti*) is organised to please Gosain.

Dehra: A *dehra* is a small structure of mud or bricks built on one side of the house. There is no standard size for this mini room. It could be two or three cubic feet in size with a small door-like opening sometimes closed with proper wooden doors or using only bricks, though not fixed permanently. It has a small steel box or trunk containing *ratian* (grains of wheat), besides a fresh or unused (*unlag*) cloth, white or green or another colour which is supposed to represent the given clan. This piece of cloth is called a *dehra*, hence the name of the structure that houses it. On top of it is a small stick with a white cloth, a kind of a flag post. This is the place of the ancestors of a family whose members bow before (*matha tekna*) it every morning, showing obeisance to them. On all important occasions in the family, the *dehra* plays a central role where offerings are made to seek the blessings of the ancestors. On certain occasions a *bakra* is also sacrificed there and stains of blood are put on the cloth inside the *dehra* as an offering to the ancestors. A woman cannot

go near the *dehra* during menstruation. Even if any part of her garments happens to touch the *dehra* (*Je palla vi lag javé*), it gets polluted and has to be replaced by a fresh one.

The sacrifice of a lamb involves cleaning it before taking it to the *dehra*. Then a handful (*chuli*) of water is sprinkled over it. If it quivers then it is believed to have been accepted by the ancestors and is sacrificed (*halal*) with a sharp-edged knife. After the meat has been cooked its heart, liver, right kidney (*gurda*), neck and, two hooves of the right side are separated. This is called *thath*, the real *prasad* of the ancestors. This is given a *thuara*, that is, incense of *desi ghee* poured over a burning cake of cow dung. After offering it to the *dehra*, the ancestors, it is consumed by men of the community but not women. The *dehra* is pleased only after *thath* has been offered. At this time no member of the low castes should come near the *dehra* lest the *thath* gets polluted (*bhitti jandi hai*).

Besides these two there is no other major shrine or place that the community recognises except the Kali temple at Naina Devi. As per tradition their ancestors used to sacrifice the bull (*chohta*), camel, horse, pony (*khachar*), etc., there, but over time this practice has become confined only to bulls and it has now come to sacrificing only a calf of buffalo (*katta*). It is given a bath before bringing it in front of the Devi. Some pure (*sucha*) water is sprinkled over it. If the calf/bull quivers (*lui chhandna*) then it is considered acceptable to the goddess. Some 10–11 males lay the calf on the ground. With the help of a sharp knife his neck is cut (*halal*). The blood flows down into a small pit which is offered to the Devi. The people gathered there start dancing — men do the *bhangra* and women perform *giddha*. The meat is then cut into pieces and cooked for *prasad*. It is eaten with *chapattis*. This practice is prevalent among the Bhatti Bauria only. Other *gotras* of the Bauria only sacrifice lamb and eat it.

Williams mentions that the criminal members of the tribe have a special cult devoted to Nar Singh, to whom they offer their devotions in the following manner:

When planning a criminal expedition, a *chiragh* filled with *ghi* is ignited and a live coal placed beside it, *ghi* and *halwa* are added till both are in flame; on the smoke and fumes, called *hom*, arising, the persons present fold their hands and make supplication, saying: ‘He, Nar Singh, through thy blessings we shall succeed. Remember to protect us.’ (Quoted in Ibbetson and Rose 1970: 73–74)

Baba Kesaria: Every Bauria settlement must have a *tharah* of Baba Kesaria, believed to be able to cure those bitten by snakes.

It is represented by a long wooden post bearing a white cloth on top. A *trishul* and a *chimta* (long iron fork) are erected by its side. The place is cleaned and coated with cow dung. A small *dhoona* or fireplace is constructed where cakes of cow dung are burnt with incense for purposes of *puja* (worship) of Shiva: '*Aithe Shiva da dhoona dhukhaya janda hai.*' There could be one or more *bhagats* or disciples of Baba Kesaria who may grow long hair made into *jatan*. These *bhagats* can suck snake poison from the body of the victim. It does not affect them. On the contrary, when a snake bites them, it gets killed. They owe this prowess of theirs to the blessings of Gugga Pir. They undertake a fast for seven days on the day of *Gugga naumi* and recite the name of Shiva. They do not eat anything during this period.

Gugga Pir: There is always a *samadh* of Gugga Pir in every village of this community. Though this deity is different he is also enshrined at the same place as Baba Kesaria. All those who believe in it observe a fast for three days, from 6–8 Bhadon (August–September), and light fire in the fireplace (*dhoona*). They do not drink or eat anything but milk, taken early in the morning. After this they 'play' at the Gugga's place. They get possessed by the deity and frantically beat themselves with wooden sticks (*chhatian*).

Vermicelli (*seviaan*) made of wheat flour is especially offered to Gugga Pir, besides milk, rice, wheat flour, *ghee*, *gur*, etc. The ceremonies of propitiation and *khedna* are followed by *langar* where rice, *karah*, *jalebi*, *ladoo*, and *kheer* are served to all. It is prepared with the contributions of all members of the community. Someone who has pledged a lamb offers the same to the deity, which is also served there.

The Bauria *bhagats* of Gugga Pir do not go from house to house collecting alms (*dugdugi vaja ke Gugga nahin mangde*) as is the practice among other castes and tribes, for instance, the Scheduled Castes and Sansi, etc.

Holi: This is the most popular festival of the community and is celebrated for seven days. Earlier they used to play with sand and mud but now this has given way to colours and water. A fire is lit at a central location in which fuel wood and cakes of cow dung are put. A small green stick of the local native tree, *jandi*, is placed in the fire but as soon as it catches fire, a young man pulls it out and runs towards the village pond to throw it in the water (details below).

Lohri: This is another festival celebrated by the whole community. A fire is lit with fuel wood and cakes of cow dung. *Til* and rice are put into the fire wishing for the prosperity of each individual.

Bauria people have also started the practice of celebrating the 'first Lohri' of newly-weds as well as that of a son.

Jandi: It is a tree of the tropical variety, and has high sacred value for the entire community. No function of any real significance can be completed without propitiating it. During the nomadic life, the ceremony of marriage was simply performed by asking the couple to take seven rounds (*phere*) around Jandi. Ancestor worship was also done by lighting a fire near the stem of the tree.

Jandi is propitiated on the day of Holi when a number of boys in the village or *vehra* have remained unmarried. A small branch of the Jandi is erected in the ground and dry sticks of the cotton plant (*kapah dian chhatian*) and other fuel wood are arranged around it. Once the community people have gathered around it, fire is shown to it. As the wood catches fire the oldest unmarried boy is asked to pull out the Jandi stick and throw it in a nearby pond. Other unmarried boys too run after him. It is believed that this way the curse on the community is nullified.

Under the heap of fuel wood a few kernels of coconut (*thuthian*) are also buried. The following morning, after the fire has reduced everything to ashes, unmarried girls sprinkle unboiled milk mixed with water (*kachi lassi*) over the ashes and the kernels of coconut are dug out. They are cut open and distribute among themselves to eat.

When a boy is to be married, he is asked to take seven rounds around Jandi and take its branch home where it is kept in a corner. It is believed that this way the house is purified and evil spirits are dispelled.

After the marriage the newly weds are also taken to the nearest Jandi to pay obeisance (*mathha tekna*). The ceremony of *chhatian khedna* is also performed under this tree. To cure oneself from an illness the diseased person takes seven rounds of this tree and ties a cotton thread (*sooti dhaga*) to it. On the first Sunday of the month some milk is also sprinkled on its stem.

The Bauria have now largely adopted Sikh religion, which dominates rural Punjab. Some senior men of the community have also taken *amrit* and become the Khalsa or *amritdhari* Sikhs. However, when it comes to accept the verdict of Guru Gosain, then there is no compromise. His word is final.

INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES

Inter-community relations are reflected through interaction and participation in various social, cultural and other activities. The

Bauria are by nature shy and hence do not interact freely with outsiders. Those who have been settled in villages for quite some time now participate in the social functions of the villagers at an individual level. They have cordial relations with all the villagers — irrespective of caste or class — but tend to avoid the untouchables. They do sit and even eat with them but do not marry their children into their families.

The Bauria believe in the caste system as far as social interaction outside the tribe is concerned, but there is no caste or social hierarchy within the tribe. Since they are Kshatriya Rajputs they follow the practice of purity and pollution with the low castes, primarily the Scheduled Castes. '*Chuhre-Chamaran nal sir jod ke pand vi nahin bannde*' (We do not touch the scheduled caste labour even during the work.). People from the Scheduled Castes are not allowed to step into their *chulha-chaunka* (kitchen). They do not eat food from them either. If someone shares food with them s/he is excommunicated. If a utensil is given to them under some constraints then it is cleaned by putting it into the fire before it is used again. The lamb that is to be offered to the *dehra* should not belong to a Scheduled Caste person. Not only that, if he touches the lamb to be sacrificed, it gets polluted and his mere look can cause the same pollution. 'That is why when a lamb is to be sacrificed', according to a 90-year old respondent of Kot Shamir (Bathinda), 'a Scheduled Caste person is not allowed to enter the Bauria *vehra* (neighbourhood or ward).' A person who gets polluted with their contact is re-inducted into the community only after purification, that is, a bath in the Ganga (Haridwar).

There are numerous instances of this sort. Almost all the respondents have stories of their own regarding this aspect of untouchability. A 90-year-old respondent of Bargari (Faridkot) narrated that as soon as his mother tied a cow at its place (*kille te*), it died. The family thought that she (lady) had been polluted (*bhitti gayee*), so she was made to stay, and sleep as well, in an open area outside the house. She was given food, etc. there only and that too from a distance. Food placed in a *thali* was pushed to her with a long stick. During the winter nights she had to sleep in the animal shed. Only when the family was able to arrange some money was she taken to Haridwar. She was given a bath in the Ganga and offerings were made thereafter to facilitate her re-induction into the family.

Another respondent of Guru Sarsainewala (Bathinda) informed us that once daughter took water from the hand pump of an untouchable, she was separated from the family. Despite her

bitter weeping and loud cries she was made to sit outside and not allowed to come near other family members. She was taken to Haridwar and re-inducted only after necessary rituals had been performed.

In yet another case in this area, a daughter-in-law took tea from the farmer's 'servant', a tall handsome man, while working in a field. She thought it was the farmer's son. Later on when he was found to be a Chamar, everyone kept at a distance from her as she was considered to be 'polluted'. She was not allowed to enter the house and interact with the family. As she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy she went through a lot of trouble. Finally, she died unattended and uncared for; nobody dared to do anything good for her during her last days. This is the gravity of their feelings regarding pollution from lower caste people. A respondent of Mana Basti (Bathinda) said: 'Even Brahmins are inferior to us. How can we tolerate contact with the untouchables?' The above case pertains to this *basti* only.

They consider the dominant village community, namely the Jutts, as clever (*shaitan*), and call them *kangro* (crow). The Jutt and other high caste children in the school tease the Bauria children and address them as '*giddar khane*' (Jackal eaters), '*raulla*' (who eats too many *chapattis* or *rottian*), '*bhukhad*' (always hungry), '*petu*' (who eats too much), '*mirchan-khane*' (chilli eaters), '*sale chor-uchakke*' (bloody petty thieves), etc. Such disparaging comments given to the Bauria children deter them from going to school and they are forced to take to child labour. A young man of *tehsil* Zira (Ferozpur) retorted: 'The teachers too discriminate against us. This is a major reason for our children's educational backwardness and hence of the community.' Another old man of Man Singhwala (Muksar) focused on the caste dimension of such discrimination at the hands of teachers of both the high and low caste: 'Teachers, usually of high caste, invariably ask the Bauria children to do domestic work but those belonging to low castes (Chuhra-Chamar) beat them so that they leave the school (*schoolan ton bhajaun layi*) and do not compete with them.'

IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The community has had a mixed response to development programmes launched by the government for their welfare. No doubt

there is a definite improvement in the living standards of these people compared to the earlier times, but the situation is still far from satisfactory. They do get facilities like water, electricity, roads, etc., but that is not done especially for them, they are meant for the whole village. Schools and dispensaries are also available at hand but Bauria children are forced to drop out for lack of funds, etc. Telephones are available and one can use them if one has money.

When they compare themselves with people of the Scheduled Castes, for instance, they feel cheated. This feeling is widespread, seen in all the respondents, that whatever benefits the government wants to give them are taken away by the Chuhra–Chamars. An 85-year-old lady from Jaisinghwala (Bathinda) remonstrated: ‘Even today the Scheduled Castes (Chuhre–Chamaran) exercise complete control over the facilities granted to us by the government.’ Another 65-year-old respondent from Gursainewala (Bathinda) holds a similar opinion: ‘Whatever is granted to us by the government only one per cent reaches us. Ninety nine per cent is taken away by others.’ One respondent from Araianwala (Faridkot) retorts: ‘We do not get employment. Not one person in a thousand get it (*hazar pichhe ik nun vi nahin*). Therefore, the government must ensure more employment to our educated children. There are hardly any officers from amongst us. These can be counted.’

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Bazigar Banjara

Birinder Pal Singh

The term Banjara has numerous variations such as:

Brinjara, Lambadi, Lamane, Wanjara, Gohar Herkeri (Carnatic) who are primarily grain and salt carriers, cattle-breeders and cattle dealers, found all over the Dominions.... They have no settled homes, but lead a wandering life in bands.... Their camp, comprising a large number of followers with their pack bullocks, is known as *tanda*. (Channa 2004: 352)

Banjaras are subscribing to all the dominant religions of the land, namely, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. But their origin owes to the Hindu Rajputs as the two religions are relatively young. It is also very difficult to ascertain their origin from their mythology. Some trace it to Lord Shiva while others take it to Lord Krishna. Mota and Mola were two brothers who tended Lord Krishna's cows. From Mota descended the ancestors of the modern Marwaris, Mathuras and Labanas. Mola had no progeny. Once he visited a prince's court with his beautiful wife Radha and displayed acrobatic feats in which he was adept. The jubilant prince gave him three infant boys of different castes to be adopted as sons. Their progeny is collectively known as Charan Banjaras who have five prominent exogamous sections called Rathod, Panwar, Chavan, Badiya or Vadiya, and Tori.

According to another version they are also known as Gaur or Guar Banjara since they are the offsprings of Shiva and Parvati, whose other name is Gauran. They believe they are the oldest people on earth. Gauran gave birth to five handsome sons. As they grew up, Shiva assigned them the job of preparing food. Thus they would go out and get ingredients for the meals. One day they were relaxing on the banks of the sacred lake Mansarovar. They saw five beautiful fairies taking a bath without clothes on. They requested

them not to do so but the fairies did not heed them. Finally, they captured all of them and took to Shiva. Bholenath believed the innocence of the fairies and forgave them.

After a few days, this incident was repeated. The sons again warned the fairies and were once again ignored. The fairies were once again taken to their father. The enraged Shiva tied the knots of their loose hair and married them to his five sons. He gave each couple a bull to start their own independent household. They made five *sirkis* or houses made of reed. In due course of time each *sirki* grew into a *tanda*. They would load rations on the back of their bulls and go out to trade. That is why they are called Banjara. Their business grew and they acquired many bulls and carts. Their trading also became more intensive and aggressive. They continued their business for centuries and then by some stroke of chance settled in Rajasthan. They mortgaged many states in Rajputana and finally became the rulers there.

This version is supplemented in *Banjara Bhaskar* by Swami Gokuldas (p. 12), who writes that this community expanded from the five *ganas* of Shiva who established five *tandas* separately. Gaur Kokreji established *tanda* under the banyan tree; Gaur Ashaji settled under the Neem tree; Gaur Nagarchi under Goolar; Gaur Bhrantanji under Pipal and Gaur Bhramanji near Tulsi. Their descendants were later joined by Rathod, Chauhan, Panwar, Badiya, and Tanwar Rajputs.

Moti Raj Rathod mentions that Banjaras are natives of Afghanistan. East of Kabul there used to be a Gaur river, a valley, a city, and a state by the same name (Rathod 2003: 19). He also mentions that these people were the first ones to offer food to Mahatma Buddha after enlightenment when he encountered a *tanda* of 500 bullocks coming from Utkal region to Vindhya Pradesh. (Ibid.: 20)

According to Robert Varady:

In ascertaining the source of the people collectively known as Banjaras, etymological hypotheses provide a convenient starting point. The ones offered to date, however, have not been completely satisfactory. Such noted scholar-administrators as Elliot, Wilson, Carnegy, Balfour, Platts, Crooke, Yule and Grierson debated the merits of at least five linguistic derivations. Even if the probable definition of *baniyya-kara* (merchants) is accepted, it is too vague to be of practical use. (Varady 1979: 1)

Some other proposed definitions are: *vana + jara* or *ban-jarna* which means jungle wanderers; *vanik* or *banik* is merchant; the ancient *vyas* traders; the Persian *biranjar* is a rice carrier; and *vanija* or *banijya-kara* is merchant.

The Punjabi–English dictionary mentions that the Banjara are traders or peddlers who sell bangles. This community had monopolised the transportation business during the Middle Ages, and is still engaged in small trade and peddling, especially selling bangles and trinkets. Colonel Todd considered the Charans and Banjaras as the same, just as Ibbetson does for the Banjaras and Labanas of Punjab. Ibbetson writes:

This (Banjara) and the Labana caste are generically said to be identical, being called Banjara in the eastern districts and Labana in the Punjab proper. But Banjara, derived from *banij*, “a trader”, or perhaps from *banji* “a pedlar’s pack”, is used in the West of the Punjab as a generic term for “pedlar”. *Wanjara* (q.v.) is doubtless only another form of the name. (Ibbetson and Rose 1970: Vol. II, 62)

They write further:

The term Labana appears to be derived from *lun* (salt) and *bana* (trade), and the Lubana, Lobana, Labana or Libana was doubtless the great salt-carrying and salt-trading caste, as the Banjara was the general carrier, in former times. Indeed the Labana is occasionally called a Banjara. (Ibid.)

Mahan Kosh of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha too subscribes to the Labana identity of being a salt trader, whose leader called *naik* would receive a rupee each from a house where a marriage or other celebration was held.

These beliefs and assumptions about the origin of this community leave everything uncertain about it. But it makes certain at least one thing, that these are people of great antiquity. Varady also concludes:

Any attempt at defining Banjaras, then, must be at least partly inadequate. Can so many groups with divergent characteristics be referred to under a single heading? What, if anything, sets them apart from other nomads? With nomadism as a point of departure, there are three key features which can serve as identifying criteria. First, Banjaras generally speak a language akin to Marwari, and there is agreement concerning their Rajasthan ancestry. Secondly, virtually all chroniclers of these peoples have noted their connections

with oxen. And, finally, a common factor extending well into the nineteenth century was their institutional role as teamsters and transporters. (Varady 1979: 2)

Banjaras as traders were great suppliers to the moving armies irrespective of their religious or regional affiliation. As they had to defend themselves against dacoits, they were also good in martial arts. Their caravan called *tanda* would almost look like a moving army. Colonel Todd writes:

The *tanda* or caravan, consisting of four thousand bullocks, has been kept up amidst all the evils which have beset this land through Mughal and Maratha tyranny... and they were too strong to be pillaged by any petty marauder, as anyone who has seen a Banjara encampment will be convinced. They encamp in a square, and their grain-bags piled over each other breast-high, with interstices left for their matchlocks, make no contemptible fortification. (Quoted in Channa 2004: Vol. 2, 360)

In Punjab, the Bazigar Banjara is a community of brave though shy, well built and strong people. Their name owes to their specialisation in performing *bazi* (*bazi pauna*), that is, giving a demonstration of acrobatics. *Bazi* in Persian means 'play'. It is also indicative of their martial character and Rajput lineage. They had been good horsemen and fighters. According to Ibbetson, Bazigars are Muhammadan and Nats are Hindu. This is basically an occupational category. The Bazigar Banjaras are widely distributed throughout Punjab though their dominance is in the *doaba* region, followed by Majha and Malwa regions of the state.

But why are Banjaras called Bazigar Banjaras in Punjab? It is quite likely that there is a preponderance of the descendents of Mola, who was an ace acrobat. And those among the Banjaras who settled here specialised in acrobatics to make a living, especially when the Banjaras were coerced into leaving their traditional occupation of trading on bullock-packs with the onset of railways by the British in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The majority Bazigar Banjaras of Punjab trace their origin to the Rajput kings/warriors called Jaimal and Phatta. These two brothers were very brave and chivalrous. They were important courtiers in Akbar's court. One day a courtier of Akbar told him about the beauty of Jaimal's daughter, Sandali and suggested that he make her

live in the palace. Subsequently, Jaimal was summoned to the court and asked to hand over his daughter to the Emperor. Jaimal refused point blank. The two brothers were put in prison. Phatta thought of a plan to get out of the prison. He pleaded to Akbar to release them from prison and that they would then arrange for the marriage with all pomp and show. The Emperor agreed.

The two brothers came to Chittorgarh. They sent an invitation to Akbar for the marriage. As the Emperor was approaching with a plan to get married, the two brothers were planning to meet him head on. They would prefer to die than give the daughter of the land in marriage to a Muslim ruler. Thus a war ensued. The army of the Rajput rulers could not stand the might of the Akbar's army. Both Jaimal and Phatta died in the battle and Jaimal's daughter jumped from the fort. A Rajput Rajkumari (princess) would prefer to lay her life than to be captured by the enemy. Though both Jaimal and Phatta were killed and Akbar had captured Chittorgarh, he was furious with the 'deceit' of his courtiers. He hunted out all the people of his clan who lived there. The descendants of the rulers of Chittorgarh and its public were moving in forests, leading the life of dethroned people. A few respondents, however, denied their ancestry of Jaimal and Phatta: 'We had nothing to do with them except that we were their *praja* (public). No doubt we were the respected residents of Chittorgarh.'

Their own characterisation of Guar has another version that suggests that Guar is *gawar*, that is, unsophisticated stupid. It was a curse given by a *sadhu* (mendicant). The legend says that once a *sadhu* came to their *tanda* and asked for food. They treated him well. He was very happy with their hospitality, so stayed back for many years. Some young men of the community became his disciples. During the day only children and old people usually stayed at the *tanda* and everybody else would be out working. The *sadhu*'s disciples would also remain there. One day they raped a young girl. The *sadhu* was enraged over this act and cursed them as *gawar*. Since then they are called by this name.

In Punjab, Bazigars are respected more than Sirkiband and Banbutt as these have low status. These communities gradually improved their status by working on the land and slowly became the landowners, but the Bazigars did not discontinue their nomadic life. According to them, many noted Jutt Sikh clans like Brars are related to Sirkiband, and many Sidhus and Gills are Banbutt. But they do not accept this relation today and consider themselves as the natives of Punjab whereas as a matter of fact these are actually Bazigars.

Some of the respondents argue that all these communities are fundamentally Bazigars but that their names are different in other states of the country. For instance, in Rajasthan they are called Guar Rajput, in Punjab as Bazigar, in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP) as Banjara, in Bengal and Maharashtra as Gual Banjara, in Assam and Karnataka as Barjatian. But as a matter of fact, all these people are one, that is, Banjaras.

The Parsi language was originally spoken by the Bazigar Banjara. They call their language Guar *boli* which is universally spoken and understood by all Banjaras though they now speak the language of the state where they reside. Only a minuscule proportion of the educated amongst them can read and write English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, and Braj.

FOOD HABITS

Bazigar Banjaras have been primarily non-vegetarian since they adopted a nomadic lifestyle. Even now 75 per cent are non-vegetarian. They were not so earlier. In their nomadic life, men used to hunt. On their return in the evening the residents of a *tanda* would clean the meat, and used to distribute it equally among all houses (*sirkis*) in a *tanda* depending on the number of members in each house. Each household would do its own cooking. Sometimes, if they could catch big game (*vadda shikar*), they would cook together. At that time they had not learnt the art of *bazi*.

Their women on the other hand would go to those households in the city or the villages where there had been some occasion of happiness like a marriage or the birth of a son. They would congratulate them and dance (*giddha*) there to seek some flour (wheat or maize) or grain etc. An old man quipped: 'Traditionally people were very considerate to us or other alms-seekers. It was considered ill omen to return such a seeker empty handed from one's door.' The women of this community are still carrying out their traditional occupation of congratulating others and seeking something in return which is now usually money in cash.

They used to hunt and eat tiger during the era of their forest dwelling because its meat is very nourishing. The wild cat (*jungali billa*), like tiger is also believed to be nourishing and energising. One who eats it does not need quilt even in the winters. Jackal, tortoise, *goh* (a large-sized lizard), hedgehog (*kanderna*), porcupine (*seh*), patridge, rabbit, deer, wild boar, and peacock were also hunted by

the Bazigar Banjaras for food. They would eat lamb and chicken as these were easily available to them since each household kept such animals. They are also fond of mutton but do not eat beef. With changes in the policies of the government in relation to the forest and wild game, the Bazigar Banjaras have now taken to eating mutton and chicken only. These are also served to guests on special occasions. Earlier when sometimes they killed big game and could not consume all of it in one go, it was dried and stored for future consumption.

They eat all types of cereals and green vegetables available in the market. They make *chapattis* of wheat flour. The medium of cooking is *desi ghee* and animal fat. Mustard oil is also very popular among them for its bitterness (*kararapan*). *Alsi* and *til* oils are used for cooking as well. When they were leading the nomadic life they would eat leaves of trees and plants, roots of certain plants and the bark of Bohar (*Ficus bengalensis*). During times of food scarcity they would make flour from the tree bark infected with wood-worm or *ghun* (*darakhtan nu lagge ghun da atta*).

As far as drinks are concerned, they like country liquor. In their own words: '*Nashe ghat karde han sharab pinde ne.*' They also smoke cigarette, *bidi* and *huqa*. Some, though few, chew *paan* and *zarda*.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

There are no such divisions within the community as is characteristic of the caste system. However, the Bazigar Banjaras maintain a distance from the Scheduled Castes as they believe themselves to be of Kshatriya origin. They do not ever marry into that caste but do trade with them. According to some respondents, despite their Rajput origin, their low economic status makes them feel inferior to the Jutts and hence do not sit with them on their cots.

There is no social hierarchy within the tribe. There is no *bhavna* (feeling) of high or low among them. A sense of equality prevails amongst them. Social divisions concern them only in the case of marriage, which involves *gotra* exogamy. There are four main *gotras*: Parmar, Chauhan, Rathod, and Badiya. Others include Sanawat, Ghirawat, Matawat, Namsot, Baljot, Hamawat, Rupawat, Bijrawat, Dharmsot, Bijrot, and Bhatti. Their sub-*gotras* are Toor, Vijanarsi, Mushal, Bhujal, Rupana, Bhukia, and Solanki.

Originally the Parmar ancestor had 12 sons who established 12 *tandas*, Chauhan had six sons who established six *tandas* whose number grew to 35 over the years. Prithviraj Chauhan belonged to this *gotra*, the ruling one. The Rathod ancestor had seven sons who established seven *tandas*, now expanded to over a hundred. The Badiya ancestor had 12 sons who established 12 *tandas* whose number now stands at over 140. Besides these there are also Kamdhan and Bandhod who had seven sons and one son respectively, each establishing the same number of *tandas*. These *gotras* and sub-*gotras* of the Bazigar Banjaras are now scattered all over the country. They also believe that the cities of Lucknow, Gwalior, Dwarka, Ayodhya, and Mathura were established by the ancestors of this community.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

The most important rule concerning marriage is tribal endogamy and *gotra* exogamy. No one is allowed to marry within the *gotra* or the *tanda*. There is no hard rule but depending upon the suitability of the match and convenience, one may leave one, two or three *gotras*. The notion of love marriage is absent. If someone does it then s/he is expelled from the *tanda*/community. Earlier child marriage was the norm. *Muklawwa* ceremony was observed 12–13 years after marriage when both the boy and the girl would have attained puberty. Now things have changed. The minimum age at marriage now is around 15–18 years. Shortly, after the marriage the couple sets up their own house (*sirki*).

The most important criterion for the selection of a match is its suitability on the basis of parity between families and not better economic status. Parents select the mate and the mediator plays an important role as all marriages have to be arranged. Love marriages are not approved by the community.

Earlier most of the marriages were done with bride price (*mull da viah*) but now this practice is on the decline. *Punn da viah* (marriage in which no dowry or price is given) is becoming more popular instead. Dowry is given according to one's capacity and is never demanded. Divorced men and women can remarry. Divorce is not very common but whenever relations between a couple become extremely strained, the panchayat allows it. However, a divorced woman (*chhutad aurat*) has a low status (*bahut ghatia*)

in the community. On the other hand, however, a male *duhajoo*, one who is marrying for the second time, may get an unmarried girl (*kuari*). An older person may get married to a younger girl only if he has much money. *Chadar pauna*, the practice by which a widow is made to marry her brother-in-law in the same family in an extremely austere ceremony, is also common.

The marriage ceremony is otherwise always simple. Earlier *phere* (Hindu custom of circling the sacred fire) were performed but now as most of them have taken to Sikh religion, Anand karaj (circumambulating around the sacred scripture of Sikhs, *Guru Granth Sahib*) is more common. Sometimes the bride is brought home just after the ceremony of *chunni charauna* in which the groom's parents and other relations go to her place to approve of the match and offer her *chunni*, a light but long head cloth for women which is about 2 metres long.

FAMILY

'*Ekehre parivaran da yug hai.*' Literally, 'this is the age of nuclear families', was a statement made by an elderly respondent. The head of the family is usually a male. The status of women is proclaimed to be equal to men as there are no restrictions on their activities: '*Aurat da darja mard de brabar hi giniya janda hai. Usnu koi bandash nahin hundi.*' Elders are feared and respected in the family and society irrespective of gender: '*Siyani umar de bande da satkar kita janda hai, bhavein aurat hove jan mard.*' According to all the respondents there is feeling of love and respect in the family depending upon the nature of the relation. Jokes (*makhaul*) and sometimes 'loose talk' are also permissible between certain relations such as those of *jija-sali* (sister's husband and wife's sisters) and *deor-bhabhi* (husband's younger brother and brother's wife). A respondent remarked about the cordial and harmonious relations in the *tanda*: '*Sadde lok aap vi khush rehnde ne te samaj nu vi khush rakhde ne*' meaning thereby that our people remain happy with themselves and also keep others happy. There is also a spirit of belonging and togetherness between them. An old man replied: '*Apsi sanjh nal hi mangde-khande han.*'

There is no restriction on women to work; rather they move out along with men to make a living but there is a gender division of labour among them. Men undertake the hard tasks (*aukhe*)

and women the easier (*saukhe*) ones. Besides selling needles and brooms as part of their daily routine, women also go to the houses in the city or neighbouring villages where some celebrations (marriage or birth of a son, etc.) are on to congratulate the family (*vadhai dena*). They sing and dance there to obtain *bakhshish* (reward/tip) which was earlier grain but is now usually in the form of cash. Men beat drums (*dhol*) on festive occasions to obtain *bakhshish*. These days adult men and young boys usually engage in the collection of junk (*kabad*) and undertake other menial jobs that do not require any particular skill. The changed economy has forced them to leave their traditional occupations (*pita-purkhi dhande*).

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Birth: The birth of a male child, but not that of a female child, is celebrated (*khushian manayian jandian ne*). The midwife beats *chhanna* (a bronze bowl with edges inclined inwards) to announce to the family and the community that a male child is born. On the gate to the *sirki* or house, leaves of trees like Neem (*Margosa*) or Sharinh (*Cassia speciosa*) are hung to keep off evil spirits. Though the birth of a girl is associated with sadness, there is no practice of female foeticide (*kukh 'ch maran di reet nahin hai*) or infanticide.

The mother is brought out (*vadhayia janda hai*) on the third day when Goolar's prasad is distributed in the *tanda*. The male child is made to wear a *taragi* (a cord worn around the loin) (*taragi payi jandi hai*) seven days after his birth. A wheat seed is tied to it (*kanak da dana baniya janda hai*). On the 21st day, the child is integrated into the *gotra* (*got wich milayia janda hai*) and the mother is allowed to perform household chores again. The tonsure ceremony (*jhand*) is performed at the Naina Devi temple in Ropar district (*Mata de darbar'ch*). When a wish is fulfilled a lamb (*bakra*) is sacrificed at the Kali Devi. *Namkaran* (naming) does not involve any ceremony. An elderly person in the family is requested to suggest a name.

Marriage: The first step of a marriage is *mangani* or engagement. The mediator who has arranged the match now fixes a date with the girl's family and takes the boy's father and around five to 15 relations, including the *mama* (mother's brother) and *phupar* (father's sister's husband) to the girl's residence. After initial deliberations the boy's father, with a robe (*palla*) around his neck, seeks

the hand of the girl from her father. He initially refuses, walking away from the gathering saying, 'I will not give my daughter, I will not give my daughter.' The wise and elderly men of the *tanda* follow him along with the mediator and try to convince him otherwise. Finally he agrees and returns to the panchayat. Everybody is happy (*sare hasa-thhathha karde ne*) and the bride price is settled. The beauty of the girl and the economic status of the family are taken note of at this moment. The amount may be anything between Rs 5 and to Rs 50,000. If this amount is acceptable then the girl's father gives his consent for the *shagan* (betrothal) ceremony. During this, the boy's father takes a rupee, *thhuthhi* (cup-like half a coconut kernel), some *chuhare*, almonds, and *makhane* (sweet drops) and puts these in the lap (*chohli*) of the girl. Then the girl's father offers a rupee to the boy and makes him eat a *chuhara*. Finally, the girl is also given cloth for a dress, *hinna* or *mehndi* (*shagna di*). As the engagement is finalised the women of the girl's house (*sirki*) start dancing in happiness.

Sweets — *ladoo*, *patase* and *makhane* — brought by the boy's family are served there. Liquor and mutton or chicken are also served to the guests. The whole expense of this ceremony is borne by the boy's family. The expenditure to be incurred during the marriage is estimated at this time. It is to be given by the boy's family to the girl's. The date for marriage is fixed. Before the day is out, the guests return to their *tanda*/village where *laddos* are distributed and engagement is celebrated with dance (*giddha*) and party. Liquor is served and some make mutton for the party. Other residents of the *tanda* come to congratulate the family.

Three days before the date of marriage, *mayian* are imposed on both the boy and the girl to be married, thus restricting their movement outside the *sirki*. A *gana* (a bracelet of multi-coloured yarn) is also tied to the right wrist by the sister or/and father's sister (*bhua*). The day before the marriage, *nanke* (mother's family) arrive with pomp and show. When they are face to face with *dadke* (father's family) they cast aspersions on each other, singing *sithanian*, couplets which have no meaning as such and are used principally to belittle and ridicule the other person or party. The choice of words is determined only by the need to rhyme, not meaning. There need not be any connection between, for instance *laddoo* (sweet balls) and *dadoo* (frog) or *mor* (peacock) and *chor* (thief). The *dadke* comment:

*Ihna khade si ladoo, jamme si dadoo,
chhapran te gayian, ni Veeero terian nankian.*

[They ate sweets and gave birth to sons like frogs,
O' Veeero (bride's name), your maternal family has gone to the
ponds.]

A counter from the *nanke*:

*Ihna khade si mor, jamme si chor,
hun choran de gayian, ni Veeero terian dadkian.*

[They ate peacocks and gave birth to sons as thieves,
O' Veeero, your paternal family has eloped with the thieves.]

On the eve of the marriage all residents of the *tanda* are invited to dinner.

Vatna, a mixture of gram flour (*besan*), turmeric and mustard (*sarson*) oil are applied to the body of the would-be bride/bridegroom. It is followed by the tying of the *gana* by the mother, father's sister (*bhua*) or sometimes a *jheor* (a member of the water-carrier caste) if he is a *laagi* (person of a menial caste). The girl is made to put *mehndi* brought by her maternal relations on her hands and feet. More *mehndi* sent by her in-laws is also painted on her followed by that given by her own sister or *bhua*. *Nuhai* (bathing) is carried on after this, in a *pital prant*, a flat container used for kneading dough, made of brass or of steel. The *mama* of the boy/girl picks him/her from the *prant* and takes him/her to the *sirki*. He breaks seven *chapnian*, flat earthen disks with a silver coin or a rupee beneath them in a single stroke of his right foot. If he fails to break the disks then he is supposed to pay *laag* (payment of service in *jajmani* system). And if he fails to carry his nephew/niece to the *sirki* then he is made to pay double *laag*.

After that, when the boy is fully dressed in his marriage clothes, a *sehra* (a decorated wreath) is tied to his turban by his sister. The marriage procession (*barat*) is ready to move to the girl's *tanda*. Earlier bullock carts or camels were used but now they go in cars. *Milni* (meeting of bride's and groom's families) takes place at the entrance of the girl's *tanda*. The fathers of the bride and the groom exchange finger rings or *khes* or *bhure* (blankets) before embracing each other (*Mel diyo kartar, vela milni da*). The poor families do it with flower garlands only, some do it with a rupee or a towel: it all depends upon one's economic position. After the fathers, other relations — paternal and maternal uncles and brothers too — from both sides perform *milni* with each other. Then the *barat* is treated

with tea or cold drinks and some *mitha-namkeen* (sweet and salt). Earlier they were given *shakar da sharbat* and *sirni-bhujia*.

A well-decorated *mandap* (place where marriage is solemnised) is prepared for the *phere*. In the centre of the *mandap*, a small pit is dug for the sandalwood. A *pandit* recites *mantras* as the bride and the groom take seven rounds. The father of the bride makes the groom hold her *palla* as he leads in each *phere*. The sisters-in-law throw flowers on the couple. After the ceremony the couple is taken to a *sirki* where they crack jokes regarding the groom.

Khatt (dowry items) prepared by the bride's family, her *nanke* and other relations is now shown to all the *baratis* and other guests. All this is packed to be carried to the groom's *sirki* and the expense incurred is paid by the groom's father. Then *barat* is taken to lunch at which liquor and mutton, chicken or lamb are served. Often the bride's father asks the groom's father to give them five to seven lambs. The liquor is also brought by him. The Bazigar Banjara are without a doubt voracious eaters.

Doli: To enable the *barat* to reach their *tanda* before nightfall, the bride and the groom are given a send-off by the bride's family. Her father puts some rice, wheat, *gur*, *thuthhi*, and a rupee in the lap of the groom before departure. This is a sad moment as her parents, siblings, friends, and other relations sob and cry. As the *doli* (palanquin) reaches the *tanda* of the groom there is great excitement. The mother is ready with a *garbi* (a small, pitcher-like metallic vessel) containing water to which is tied a *khammani* and green grass (*dhoob/khabal*) or leaves of Pipal. As the couple approaches the *sirki* the groom's mother stops them at the gate and circulates water (*pani varna*) over the heads of the couple. She does it five times and after each round takes a sip of the water.

Then there is the ceremony of *gana khedna* organised by the groom's brothers' wives (*bhabhis*). The *gana* is thrown into the water in a *prant* and the couple is asked to pick it up. It is done seven times. The one who succeeds in picking it up the greater number of times is the winner. The loser has to pay *laag*. *Ghund chukai*, unveiling the bride is also done in which the groom asks the bride to show her face. She refuses point blank. Then he offers some money, starting from one rupee then, five, 11, 21, 51 and so on, till she agrees.

The next morning the couple is asked to take a bath. They are taken to a flat space (*padhra than*) outside the *sirki* where they are asked to pay obeisance to their ancestors by burning a cow

ding cake with desi ghee poured on it. After that there is the ceremony of playing *chhatian* that is carried out by the couple in which first the groom hits the bride seven times with a stick. The same action is repeated by the bride. On their return to the *sirki* the bride makes sweet chapattis (*mithian rotian*) on a new hearth (*chulah*) and serves these to all the family members. She is not allowed to cook on the old *chulah* till this ceremony is complete. The *nanke* then return to their *tanda* with clothes and sweets (*bhaji*).

On the second night of the marriage the couple is taken to the newly made room or *sirki* where the bed brought by her is laid out. The groom's brothers' wives (*bhabian*) also bring with them a *chhanna* of milk which is to be drunk by both of them. Both the bride and the groom feel shy but they are made to drink it. Then they are left there and the door is closed.

The marriage celebrations continue for one week. There is *raunag* (hustle-bustle and happiness) in the *tanda*. People keep coming and going, *tichran-mazaq chalde ne aur pakwan bande ne* (the guests exchange jokes and pleasantries, and good food is prepared). After that people get back to their routine. Everyone moves out except the old and the children. The newly-weds are not allowed to go out to work for a month and a quarter.

Bodi katna (cutting a lock of hair) is also an important ceremony during marriage. It is not done in every marriage but only at the time of the first one in the family, the marriage of the eldest (*jetha*) child. It is meant to ensure that marriages of other children will follow soon. This ceremony is done on the same day as the making of sweets begins — *kadahi chadayi jandi hai* — on the third day before the marriage. For this purpose sweet *mathian* (small crisp fried bread) are made of wheat flour and *gur*. All brothers and sisters are summoned for the occasion. They are made to come to the maternal uncle (*mama*). Seven *mathian* are put on each person's head. The *mama* takes a lock of hair from each one's head and puts them on a white *chadar* (sheet) spread on the ground. The seven *mathian* carried by the person are also thrown there. When all the brothers and sisters have had their turn, they are made to sit on the same sheet. Another *chadar* is put over their heads. All the children in the family throw five *mathian* each on it. Afterwards the *mama* covers all his nephews and nieces whose hair has been cut with a *chadar*. They try to wriggle out of it and run for *mathian*.

This ceremony is performed especially when there are a large number of unmarried children in the family and their marriages have been delayed unusually. This custom of *bodi katna* is common in certain Rajput tribes even today.

Death: The first thing that is done is laying out the dead body on the ground as it is not kept on the cot. It is given a bath with soap and curd. *Surma*, collyrium powder, is put in the eyes and *mehndi* too is applied. A *sehra* is also put on the head of the dead man if he was a bachelor. If someone was childless (*aut*) then he is transfixed (*kiliya janda hai*) by the *chela* (one who knows black magic, *Chela dhage-taveet vi karda hai*). Then the dead body is dressed in wear newly-stitched white clothes. The shirt, however, is not buttoned up. A turban is tied before putting the body on a pyre made of bamboo sticks. A reed (*kana*) is also placed therewith. Coffin cloth is always white, but red cloth is placed over it. Four persons who are close relations, and later friends too, carry the body in a procession to the cremation ground. There it is put on the funeral pyre. *Desi ghee* is put into the mouth. Finally, *samagari* (material for the last rites) is sprinkled over the body and the eldest son lights the fire. In the cremation ground women do not go near the body, they wail and cry (*keerne paundiyan ne*) and return home.

On the third day the remains (*asthian*) of the dead body are collected by the sons and paternal kin. They take four small reeds (*kanian*) and erect these on the ground around the place of cremation (*siva*) and tie them with an unused cotton thread. A mixture of unboiled milk and water (*kachi lassi*) is sprinkled over there. If the dead person had 32 teeth then these are collected otherwise an equal number of small bones are collected and kept in a small earthen vessel (*kujji*) covered with white cloth. This is carried by the eldest son or the brother of the deceased. A small piece of red, blue or yellow piece of cloth is tagged on it and hung on a tree in the cremation ground. When they plan to move out for the immersion of remains they take the name of the dead person and ask him to come along: ‘...*Aa chaliye Hardwar*’ (Let us go to Hardwar). They repeat it as they pick up the remains in the *kujji* from the cremation ground. On way to Haridwar, whenever they eat food or drink tea or water, they call the name of the dead: ‘...*Aa roti kha le, ...Aa chah pee le*’, etc.

On reaching there they contact their *panda*, the priest. He puts the remains in a *thali* along with fruit, coconut, almonds, *phulian* or

khillan (roasted rice), *patase*, wheat flour, water etc. and walks up to the banks of the Ganga with bare feet. While reciting some *shlokas* (verses) from the Hindu scriptures he immerses the whole *thali* into the water. Then the *panda* registers the death of the person in his records. Subsequently, he prepares *karah prasad* and asks the relations of the dead to give *daan-dakshina* (alms and gifts). He picks his own share and gives the remaining *daan* to the temples of Shiva or Krishna. The relations of the deceased also accompany him. There the *panda* recites the *shlokas* from the *Garud Purana* and gives *prasad of phulian-patase* to the members. Finally, they return home. Sometimes people go to Haridwar after the twelfth day also.

The Sikh Bazigar Banjaras immerse the remains of the dead only at Kiratpur Sahib. *Path* (Guru Granth) is done on the twelfth day so that the soul of the dead may rest in peace. After the *bhog* ceremony there is *rasam pagdi* (tying the turban) in which the panchayat's *chaudhary* (headman) or the *nanke* tie the turban on the eldest son. This is done under the influence of the present Punjabi society. Earlier they would sit before the *sirki* and ask the eldest son to offer water to the ancestors. The *chaudhary* of the panchayat would tie the turban on his head. Children are not cremated but buried with *guddian-patole* (play things) and clothes (*lide-kapde*). In some villages their cremation ground is separate from that of other villagers.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The occupations of the community can be looked at under two headings: traditional and present. As far as the former is concerned, they specialised in performing or demonstrating *bazi*, hence the name of the community. They are experts in *bazis* of many sorts — *uchi* (high), *lammi* (long), *sidhi-puthhi*, *katria chhal*, *phattiwali chhal*, also called *maut da khuh* (death-well), *suli di chhal*, etc. — which are a treat to the spectators. The last two *bazis* are extremely difficult and can endanger the life of the performer. In earlier times they would camp outside a village and make an announcement to the beat of a drum (*dhol*) that at a certain place in the village *bazis* will be performed on a particular day. They would stay there for two or three days depending upon the demand of the villagers. They would collect whatever was given to them by the villagers, often invariably in the form of some grain, wheat flour or gur and then the band would move on to the next village.

They also reared sheep, goats, cows, oxen, and camels, especially the females. Historically, they were traders as their eternal father Shiva commanded them to be. The Guar Banjaras keep a cart and two oxen. One pulls the cart and the other follows behind. They had been trading since ancient times (*adi kaal ton*) and also practiced the barter system. Lakhi Shah Banjara and Makhan Shah Labana, whose names appear in Sikh religious history, were the most prominent traders of the community during their times. During the Middle Ages they had become so rich that they mortgaged many kingdoms in the country and Rajputana was their stronghold. They became the rulers. Maharana Partap and Prithviraj Chauhan were from this community.

Botian, female camels and the Bazigar Banjaras are virtually inseparable. This community was well-known as *botianwale* Bazigar. This is also indicative of their Rajput origin from Rajasthan where camels are a necessity. Thus, traditionally, each *tanda* used to have 15–20 *botian*. These would also give them milk, which is considered very nourishing as it is believed to have seven layers of cream (*sat malayian*). Moreover these were also traded for money. They would also make *baan*, a coarse thread from the camel's hair which is used to weave a cot. A finer version of *baan* was also made for making jackets for winters (*sialu jaktan*) that were very warm. *Godri* (a coarse quilt) was also made from the same stuff and would not wear out for many years. These were also taken to fairs to sell, fetching them good money.

Goats are very dear to the community. It is virtually a norm even now that each household must have a goat, invariably of high quality. Some of these yield even five to six kilograms of milk. Some households have large herds of sheep and goats. They keep their goats like a newly-wed bride (*navin viahi bahu vang*). They put a bracelet of *ghunghrus* and *bore* (coloured stones) around the neck and *mankian walian chhanjran* on their feet. These are also taken to the fairs in Punjab to sell.

One of the traditional occupations was cutting the *sanna* grass or hemp, *Crotolaria junica* from the forest for making a *sirki*. They would also cut *kahi* grass, *Saccharum spontaneum* from the forest and their women used to make brooms for domestic use. The women would carry brooms on their heads and sell these in the villages and cities. They would get some grain, wheat flour or *gur*, etc. in return that helped them run their households. The men would go

hunting. In the words of an old respondent: '*Is kabile da loon-tel toran vich bazigar aurtan da bahut vadda yogdaan si*', that is, the women of this tribe had great role in running their households. It is true even now. According to another respondent: '*Sara din pindan diyan galian napdian, Bazigarna sham tak apne tokre khali karke, dane-phake naal bhar ke hi murdian ne. Mardan nalon vi kayi vaar vadh kma lendian ne.*' Literally, the Bazigar women return home with basketful of grain in the evening after selling their goods from village to village. Many a time they earn more than their husbands.

Men would go hunting, fuel-wood collecting and take the cattle grazing in the forest. They also collect honey from there. They are also known for '*tokra* meat' as they would carry mutton in a *tokra* (basket) on their heads and move from village to village too sell it. One *ser* (equivalent to a kilogram) of meat was exchanged for five *ser* of wheat or maize grain. They gradually became popular and people only used to buy meat for social functions like marriage or other celebrations from them. The unsold meat was cooked in the evening.

The mats (*saf*) and *chik* (screen) of reed were also made by them and exchanged for food items. Some rich people would invite them (men) to make *sirki* and would often give them a sheep, goat or cow if they had done a good job. The majority of the older people in the community are still carrying out their traditional occupation of cutting hemp.

With the modernisation of tradition, their occupations have undergone change, though some of the old ones have been retained. The women used to sell brooms, small needles (*suian*) and large ones (*gadhuian*) for long stitches on quilts, and bangles, etc. They are still doing this to an extent. Women still visit the houses where a marriage is taking place or a son is born to dance as a part of the celebrations (*vadhayian dendiyan ne*). This happened when they left the nomadic existence and got settled in villages. Then they had *jajmans* from whom they used to get *laag* on festive occasions. This practice of women is still continuing and has become one of their major activities now.

The middle-aged women (40 to 50 years) go out of the *tanda* for begging (*mang khana*). According to a respondent: '*Mang khana saade khoon'ch hai*', begging is in our blood. Those who are a little educated work at home stitching clothes, knitting pullovers, making footballs, and cotton mattresses (*dariyan*). Some women have also

kept domestic cattle like cows and buffaloes to sell milk and milk products. Some illiterate ones work in houses as part-time domestic help. Those who move out, keeping goods on their heads for sale, make melodious calls to draw peoples' attention. They have clear, prominent voices. They keep on repeating: '*Koi suian, gadhuian layo bhaine; koi damkade, bhamirian le layo; koi bhamirian bachiyan layi; koi vangan charah lo; koi surkhi lo; le lo bhaine*' (O' sisters you may take needles — small or large. You may take toys for the kids. You may have bangles or lipsticks. Take it o' sisters).

The traditional occupation of men has undergone drastic change. Modern technology and culture have outdated their performances as *bazigars*. Today there are only a few (seven to eight) young Bazigars who can perform authentic *bazi*. *Dhol* is the only thing that they are still practising in the present times. Most of them have taken to alternative jobs like rag-picking and junk vendors (*kabadiye*), moving on their bicycles from village to village or within the city. Some do boot polishing. Some also sell vegetables on bicycles. They also work as wage labour in the vegetable or grain market (*mandi*). There are very few who are educated and employed.

They are also called *mang khani jaat* (a caste living on begging) in Punjab. Their main economic resource is *jajmani*.

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Each *tanda* has its own panchayat. Usually there is only one *gotra* in a *tanda*, whose head is called *chaudhary*, a senior wise man (*siana ate vaddi umar da*). A woman can also be the chief as the status of men and women is equal. Each *tanda* panchayat has one member from outside the *gotra*. He is called *orsakhia*. He is honoured and respected and is specially invited to each and every function (*har karaj vich pehal de adhar te sadiya janda hai*). All issues are settled in the *tanda* panchayat, even those related to murder.

The complainant/plaintiff and the defendant deposit Rs 1.25 each at the time of filing a complaint in the earlier times. This money was raised to Rs 5, 10, 21, 51, 101 over the years and now stands at Rs 125. This deposit is called *gathha*. As both the parties deposit it, the fine is deducted from the amount (*gathha*) of the party that loses the case. The other party's amount is returned. If the case is of murder then the parties are asked to deposit a sum of Rs 1000 to Rs 5000 each. Earlier, all accounts (of *gathha*) and the proceedings of the *tanda* panchayat were made orally but now these are recorded.

There is a proper register with the panchayat in which the details of the cases are registered. Both the parties have to deposit *gathha*. If the complainant deposits money and the defendant does not turn up, the *tanda* panchayat has the right to summon him. If this warning is not heeded, then the *tanda* panchayat calls a meeting, fines the defaulter and compels it to deposit the requisite amount. If, somehow, this warning too is not listened to then the *tanda* panchayat takes ex-party decision. This is the procedure laid out by the community which is rarely violated.

After *gathha* is deposited the *tanda* panchayat summons a meeting, called *dhoh*. The judgement by the jury is given without any bias. The guilty is fined. If the case involves a person from another *tanda*, then the panchayat of the other *tanda* is also involved. If the issue is not settled here, then the case is moved to a higher level panchayat. All parties are invited (*sab dhiran nu bula ke dhoh laundi hai*). Hearings are fixed which sometimes are dragged on for one year. Witnesses are also invited if the *tanda* panchayat deems fit. An advocate (*vakil*) too can be hired by the parties to argue the case. These advocates are not professional lawyers of the civil courts but wise and articulate men of the community itself. The decision of the *tanda* panchayat is binding and people have great respect for it. Even now its status is equivalent to God — (*Rabb smajhde ne*). It is very rare that a Bazigar Banjara case goes to the civil court.

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

They believe in the gods and goddesses of Hindu religion but Naina Devi and Kali Kalkatewali are their main deities. In Punjab, there are two places which are of utmost significance to the Bazigar Banjaras. One is the temple of Baba Hathi Ram at Gunachaur in the Nawanshahr district and another one is Sanjhi Devi/Sanjha Pir at Lahori Gate, Nabha. It is due to their preponderance in the Doaba tract that they have their most important shrine of the Baba in district Nawanshahr.

The legend goes that Raja Guni Chand of Gunachaur had numerous elephants and one Bazigar called Asa Ram was employed to take care of them. He was a charismatic person who had miraculous powers. When water was scarce at the palace, he would carry the elephants to the river (Satluj) to bathe, hence his name Hathi Ram. As is the wont of some people, they challenged the divine prowess of the Baba. He was a foremost accomplished

performer of *bazi*. He could also fly tying *chhaj*, a winnowing tray made from the reeds meant to separate the grain from chaff. Some miscreants challenged his prowess to do so. They said: 'If Baba has real powers then he must fly without *chhaj*.' The Baba took the ordeal on himself and jumped from the wall of the fort and landed about half a kilometre from there at a place where there was a small well. Having accomplished the feat, he chose not to live as he was not happy with the people who doubted his prowess. He left for the heavens (*chola chhad gaye*) thereafter. At this place now stands a temple which is currently undergoing renovation. This is the most sacred shrine for the Bazigar Banjar community who come from far and wide to pay obeisance to the Baba for three days of the month of *Haar*, the third week of June every year. A grand fair (*mela*) is held here during these days. Besides other activities — religious and cultural — *bazis* are especially performed on the third day.

Sanjhi Devi/Sanjha Pir is another place which is more popular with the Bazigar Banjaras, especially those who came from Pakistan. They are called Galole, who are differentiated from the locals called *desi*. As they migrated from there where Lalanwala Pir was very important, there is a *samadh* of the same Pir. It is of a relatively small size and is wrapped in green cloth. This Pir is especially very popular even among the Hindus of the western Punjab. Pandits too believe in it. Next to this *samadh* is the statue of Kali Mata wearing the red *chunni*. A statue of Shiva Shankar is also standing there. Every Thursday, a *chirag*, a lamp, is lit in the name of the Pir. Every Tuesday and Sunday, a *jot* (light in an earthen lamp) is lit for Kali Mata. Lord Shiva is worshipped on Monday. This place of common worship is primarily visited by the Bazigar Banjaras.

The local or *desi* Bazigar Banjaras subscribe more to the Sikh religion. This they owe to the sixth Guru Hargobind who initiated them into this religion. They came to Amritsar in large numbers at his instance. History narrates that the Guru used to organise *akharas* for the selection and training of Sikh soldiers to raise an army. The Bazigar Banjaras also went there and demonstrated their skillful *bazis*. The Guru was very impressed with their performance and asked them to do *kirat* (labour) and earn their living by demonstrating their skills (*bazian paun nu apna rozgar banaun di slash ditti*). He also advised the Sikh *sangat* to organise their shows (*bazian de mele*) in their respective villages. So the tribe splintered itself into smaller groups (*kabila chhote-chhote tukdian vich*

vand ho gaya), marked their regions (*apne ilaqe vand laye*) and scattered all over Punjab.

Since then the Bazigar Banjaras have come into the fold of the Sikh religion and remained with it till date. There were many historical characters in this community who stood by their faith and sacrificed their lives for the sake of it. When Guru Tegh Bahadur went to Delhi to become a martyr, Bhai Dayala belonging to Binjrawat *gotra* was boiled to death in an oil cauldron. Another notable person Bhai Mani Singh was sacrificed joint by joint (*band-band katvaiya*). When the Guru was martyred then Lakhi Shah Banjara caught hold of his beheaded body, concealed it in his cart and brought it home. As the Mughal sepoys were chasing him, he set his house on fire, thus performing the cremation ceremony (*dah sanskar*) of the Guru's dead body. Bhai Gurbakhash Singh also fought against Ahmad Shah Abdali to stop him from defiling Harmandar Sahib. Bhai Ajaib Singh also got killed fighting the Mughal army. Another much talked about warrior Bhai Bachittar Singh, who single handedly fought against the drunken elephant was also one among them. It is due to this connection of the community with the Sikh religion that now almost 80 per cent Bazigar Banjaras in Punjab follow this religion. Moreover, the founder of the Phulkian State (Patiala) Baba Ala Singh was also a Sirkiband Bazigar Banjara.

Kaduri dena is an important ritual that they perform to pay obeisance to those girls who laid their lives for the sake of their honour. The legend has that Akbar captured seven beautiful girls after killing Jaimal and Phatta at Chittorgarh. He wanted to marry them forcibly, if they did not agree. The girls requested Akbar not to dishonour them. They would themselves marry him if he agreed to their proposal. They asked him to arrange 20 *maunds* (2.5 *maunds* = one quintal) of sandalwood and *desi ghee* for them, as they would take seven rounds around the sacred fire and then offer themselves to him for *niqah* or marriage. Akbar ordered for the required things. As the heap of wood caught fire, the girls sprinkled ghee over themselves. They took seven rounds, and one after another, jumped into the fire. This is how they saved themselves and their community from being dishonoured at the hands of a Mughal emperor. These 'true daughters' (*sachian sahibzadian*) are fondly remembered by the community, and they are offered *kaduri*.

Kaduri is made from *chapattis* of wheat flour and *gur* mashed in *desi ghee*. The woman who prepares *kaduri* collects the ration from

all the households of the *tanda* on the eve of the day when it is to be offered. She takes a bath and does not sleep with her husband. She gets up early the next morning, takes a bath and does not wear clothes, instead wrapping herself in a *phulkari* to prepare *kaduri*. The *chulah* (hearth) and *chaunka* (the cooking place) are also given a fresh coating of cow dung for cooking. All this is done before the day breaks. By the time it is ready, the women, girls and children of the *tanda* have already gathered at the house where this is being prepared. Then *havan* is performed on *kaduri* (*kaduri te havan kita janda hai*), that is, *desi ghee* is poured over a burning cake of cow dung and the incense thus produced is given to *kaduri*. This is called *dhoop pauna*. This ritual can be performed only by the married women. After this, *kaduri* is distributed first to the unmarried girls and then to all women and children of the *tanda*. The men are also given *kaduri* at the end.

Vashna deni is another ceremony of importance associated with the above ritual. From the fire place on which *kaduri* is prepared, a hot coal is picked up by the lady who has prepared it. Then it is put in a bowl of water. This purified water is sprinkled in all the houses of the *tanda* for their purification. The burning coal is then put in a bowl of *desi ghee* where there is a small stick at the head of which is tied a piece of fresh or unused (*unlag*) *khadar* (coarse cotton) cloth. As the coal touches *ghee*, it produces a sweet fragrance all around. It is believed that this incense and its fragrance reaches the 'true' (pure, undefiled) daughters in the heavens.

Before the day breaks, the unmarried girls of the *tanda*, preferably seven in number are made to stand in a queue. The lady with the *ghee* bowl and the coal goes to each one of them who bow before it in obeisance (*matha tekdian ne*) and inhale the incense. This bestows on them a boon for a happy married life. Therefore this day is awaited with much eagerness by the whole community. If this ritual is not performed on the specific day then it can invite the wrath of the 'true daughters'. The girls and the boys of the *tanda* do not get married.

As far as festivals are concerned, Lohri and Holi have special significance. On the day of Lohri the whole *tanda* sits at one place to celebrate it. A huge pile of fuel wood is laid and shown fire. Starting from the oldest man or woman to the youngest, everyone pours a few pinches of *til* seeds on the fire and wishes for the welfare of the tribe. Girls put *til* and rice in the fire and wish for the well being of their brothers. All living relations are remembered while doing so as well.

Besides organising a common fire place, each household also does the same at a smaller scale. Fire is considered by the tribe as a symbol of peace and prosperity (*sukh-shanti*). People from all households visit one another and exchange greetings. They take with them ground nuts, *reodi*, *gachak*, *til*, roasted grain of maize and gur, etc. The Bazigar Banjaras are very fond of sweets like *laddoos*, *jalebi* and *besan*. Hence, on this day the elders go to the town to fetch sweets for children.

Lohri has special significance for a *sirki* or a house where there has been a marriage or the birth of a son. The first Lohri is celebrated with much enthusiasm, with a grand feast being organised for the whole *tanda*. One or more *bakra* are sacrificed depending upon the strength of the community, and liquor is also served for merry making. *Dhol*, a speciality of the community is kept beating the whole night. Men and women, boys and girls keep dancing to its tune virtually the whole night. Such a family must also distribute Lohri, that is *reodi*, *gachak*, *til*, etc. to each household. The whole community makes the *prasad* (*karah*) of Lohri Mata and distribute in the whole *tanda*.

On the first day of Maghi all the women of the *tanda* get up in the morning and pay respects to all the elders by washing their feet. This custom is called '*bazurag manauna*'. The elders give some money (*rupiya-dheli daan*) in return to them for their gesture.

INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES

Inter-community linkages as reflected through interaction and participation with other castes and tribes shows that they maintain cordial relations with them but they definitely maintain a social distance from the untouchables. One respondent quipped that they keep peace with themselves and also with other communities. Their traditional occupation of *bazi pauna* and visiting the households on occasions of marriage and birth endears them to other communities.

IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

There is no doubt that compared to earlier times there has been much improvement in the living conditions of these people. The opening of schools, dispensaries and hospitals and the development of means of transport and communication have definitely made

their lives relatively easy and comfortable. Earlier they used earthen lamps (*diyas*); now every *sirki* in *tanda* is electrified. Earlier they used to take drinking water from the ponds or go to a distant well to fetch water, now taps are available in the *tanda* itself. One lady remarked about the telephone facility: '*Telephone da bada faida ho gaya. Door baithhe rishtedaran naal dukh-sukh sanjha ho janda hai*', (telephones have benefited them, now one can easily share joys and sorrows with distant relatives).

But compared to other communities they feel cheated. Some even remarked: '*Is kabile nun kise kisam di sahulat nahin*', (the tribe has no facilities at all), the government dispensaries do not have medicines, which are so very expensive that they cannot afford these: '*Sehat shualtan sirf tagrian layi ne*'. Schools are there but fees are so high that they cannot pay. Moreover, teachers too are biased against them: '*Mastar gariban de bachian nun kutt-maar ke bhja dinde ne*'. Some others noted that no doubt their children are going to schools but that there are no jobs for them anywhere: '*Sarkari naukrian sirf atte'ch loon brabar ne*'. Government jobs are very few and those too are taken up by Chamars and Balmiks, and as there is no reservation for them. There are hardly a few gazetted officers from this community. The majority is living in utter poverty and are engaged in petty errands like rag-picking, boot polishing or selling vegetables or other items on their bicycles.

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Bangala

Harinder Kaur

Bangala is a nomadic tribe, mostly snake charmers, whose main occupation is playing *been*, or gourd pipe, i.e, begging and selling herbal medicines. K. Suresh Singh, in his *People of India*, refers to them as Bangali, Sapera, Sapela, Spado or Jogi (2003: 66). He also quotes Ibbetson:

In the Punjab... none of these people have been returned in our census tables as Bangali by caste, ... that in the Delhi division Bangalis have been included with Sansi... The Bangalis have very probably been included with Jogis in the return. These are a vagrant tribe of immigrants from Bengal. They keep dogs and donkeys and exhibit snakes, and have a dialect of their own... The name is also applied generally to Muslim jugglers. (Ibid.: 66)

Ibbetson, giving more details, mentions Bangali as:

a (1) native of Bengal (2) a vagrant tribe, probably a kin to the Sansis (with whom they certainly intermarry) and found chiefly in Kangra whether they were probably driven from Hoshiarpur by the passing of the Criminal Tribes Act.

The Bangalis are a small group, but are in constant communication with the Saperas and other criminal tribes of the plains. They live by begging, exhibiting snakes, hunting and pilfering, but are probably not addicted to serious crime. Their camps are said to contain never less than 7 or more than 15 male adults. They make reed huts and strike camp on the shortest notice, traveling with donkeys as pack animals. Dogs are kept for hunting and the Bangali will eat any wild animal, even a hyena, but he eshews beef or pork according to the prejudices of the people among whom he finds himself. There is said to be a special Bangali argot, known only to the tribe. Their women are prostitutes as well as dancers and singers. Besides propitiating local deities the Bangalis are said to specially affect Sakhi Sarvar as Lakhdatta and occasionally visit shrine at Dharamkot near Nasirabad. (3) The term Bangali is applied to Kanjars in some districts and in

other to any Sapeda or snake charmers in the plains. There is no evidence that (2) or (3) have any connection with Bengal. In Punjab Bangali means a braggart, as in bhukhkhha Bangali, a boastful person. (Ibbetson and Rose 1970: 56–57)

According to the *Census of Punjab* (1981), the total population of Bangalas is 1,600, that is, 846 males and 754 females. These figures rose to 7,765, 4,087 and 3,678 respectively in 2001. In this year, 2,722 persons were living in rural and 5,043 in urban areas of the state. But if we go by the community estimates of their population it is not less than 10,000–15,000. Their maximum concentration is in the district of Ropar where they number 3,304. In Gurdaspur (47) and Amritsar (38) districts their population is the lowest. In all other districts they are evenly distributed. Their habitation is always distant from the local population, mainly in deserted places or along the railway tracks. Some of them do have *pucca* houses but most of them live in *kullis* or *jhuggis* (huts).

Bamboo sticks are cut vertically and moulded into half-circles and fixed in the ground. The roof is made with pieces of split bamboo put together and covered with *godri* (a quilted covering made from cut pieces of cloth and used as bed-sheets, blankets, carpets or cover for *kulli*), or coarse cotton cloth or sacks, whatever is easily available. To make it waterproof it is further covered with polythene or a tarpaulin. These *kullis* are round, plastered with clay and a hearth inside. Behind each there is a bathing place. Earlier, Bangalas used to sleep on the floor but now most of them use folding cots.

This tribe know nothing about their history but the one thing they are sure about is their Rajput ancestry. They narrate that Gandhila Chohan, who was murdered by Muslim invaders from Iran and Delhi, once ruled Delhi which subsequently came under the rule of Muslims. These Muslims then defeated Maharana Pratap, and this was the beginning of the miseries of the Chohan Rajputs. In order to survive they migrated from their native place and took shelter in the jungles. A few of them came to the forests in Punjab, and the Bangalas were one amongst them. These people, owing allegiance to Maharana Pratap while moving from their native place took a vow neither to live in *pucca* houses nor to sleep on a cot till they regained their lost kingdom. This is how destiny decreed that these *rajas-maharajas* and their *praja* (public) wear a *yogi's* dress and play

the *been* and beg. Thus they became nomadic, roaming in search of livelihood. These people consider themselves Kshatriya Rajputs and their ancestors belonged to Bikaner, Ganganagar and Jaisalmer districts in Rajasthan. Now they consider Sirsa in Haryana to be their original abode or native place.

These people are scattered almost all over Punjab. Since they were nomadic, it was difficult to keep account of their exact population. However, their *jhuggis* can be found in most cities or villages of Punjab. At a few places like Dugri and Machhiwada in Ludhiana district and Rampura Phul in Bathinda district they have permanent settlements comprising nearly 60 to 70 houses each. During investigation it was found that they are fairly distributed in the districts of Sangrur, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Muktsar, and Hoshiarpur. They also inhabit towns like Nabha, Malerkotla, Dhanaula, Jagraon, Talwandi, Bhikhi, Cheema, Kartarpur, and their neighbourhoods.

They once led hard lives because they were socially marginalised and did not interact with the locals. They were considered thieves and criminals and were thus not allowed to stay in villages. Even now life is not too easy for them. They have to survive on begging or manual labour. Much before India's partition in 1947, the criminal act was enforced on them and they were not allowed to move from one place to another. The police used to arrest them on one pretext or another, but that is not the case today; nowadays the behaviour of the local people has also changed.

Bangalas do not have full-fledged villages of their own. They have only *bastis* in different cities, towns and villages with a population ranging from 50–500 persons. These people have their own dialect and speak their own distinct language called Pushto, which has no script. Now they speak Punjabi as well due to their long stay in the region. They talk to the local people in Punjabi but in Pushto with their own people.

The men of this community wear Rajasthani-style turbans, long shirts (*kurta*) with a jacket and *dhoti*. They also wear *mundran* (earrings) and *mala* (beads) around their necks. When they move out on the *pheri* (rounds), they usually choose *jogia* (saffron) colour for their dress. But when they are at home they wear their normal dress, perhaps a *kurta-pajama* or pant-*kameez* as worn by the new generation. The women wear *salwar-kameez* with a *dupatta*.

FOOD HABITS

Bangalas are both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. *Kachhu* (tortoise), *goh* (large lizard), *saha* (hare), *billa* (cat), *neola* (mongoose), *giddar* (jackal), *kukad* (chicken), etc. are relished. Though they do not talk about it, in reality they can go without *roti* (bread) but not without meat. They do not eat the meat of cow and a few of them like Sultania also do not eat the meat of pig (*sur*). They also do not marry their daughters to people who eat pork. Very few Bangalas are vegetarian, but if a vegetarian eats meat, s/he has to go to Haridwar for purification and serve *thali* in honour of their Nath. Wheat is their staple food. They eat pulses like *moth*, *masar*, lentil, gram and all types of vegetables available in the market; however, consumption of vegetables is less than that of pulses. Mustard oil and vegetable *ghee* is commonly used as the cooking medium. On special occasions *karah* (pudding prepared with wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter), *kheer* (rice boiled in sweetened milk) and *mithe chaul* (sweet rice) are cooked, and for non-vegetarians especially, meat of *billa* (wild cat) is a delicacy.

Bangalas settle mainly on the banks of ponds and canals or on the fringes of forests because of the availability of animals for hunting. Earlier hunting used to be a group activity and the prey was equally distributed among all. These days, however, it is a personal or rather, a family affair. Though the government has imposed a ban on hunting it is still done illegally. They hunt surreptitiously and conceal a *bagali* (small bag) under the arm in a clever way so that no one can notice. They are reluctant to buy meat from the market as they are keen hunters and relish only what they themselves hunt.

Bangalas lead their lives under the open sky. Therefore, they need food which will keep them warm and protect them from the cold winter. Basically they are hunters and hunt whatever is available. That is why they keep hounds, which are helpful in hunting. Only men go hunting. Earlier, when there was dense forest everywhere, jackals were easily available. Their meat is very rich in food value and Bangalas prefer to eat it in winter. One jackal can yield 10–20 kilograms of meat. Hunting a jackal used to be a group activity and the meat was equally distributed among the partners, though cooked in each *kulli* separately.

Bangalas also have a weakness for wild cat. They take their dogs along to the fields and search keenly for it. Each cat yields 3–6

kilograms of meat. They are so fond of this meat that they do not hesitate to kill domestic cats either. Since it is a delicacy for them, they also cook it on special occasions. The meat of tortoise is very delicious and good for health, and apparently cures various ailments as a result of which doctors and *vaid*s also recommend its meat. It is not an easy job to catch a tortoise and only the Bangalas can do it efficiently. *Neola* (mongoose) is easily available and easy to hunt. They kill three to four mongoose at a time so that it makes for one good meal. It is a very powerful animal and its meat is believed to strengthen the body. Snakes are afraid of mongoose but Bangalas take pleasure in killing them. Like the tortoise, the *goh* (large lizard) also fascinates them. Since it lives in holes, *gaddali* (an implement) is used to catch and kill it. They also take the help of their hunting dogs. The *goh*'s meat is delicious and healthy. *Jangli sur* (wild boar) is another attraction for them. It too is difficult to kill. No single person can perform this act; it is killed in an organised manner with a group of people. It is rich in fat. After killing it, they melt the fat and use it as a substitute for oil or *ghee* for cooking. After eating this meat, one can sleep in the open without clothes during winters and never catch cold. But they are not very fond of the meat of *kamadi kukad* (chicken). They eat it only if there is no *kachhu* or *billa* available.

Fishing is another fascination for this community. They are extremely fond of fish which is why they prefer to live on the banks of rivers and canals. Fish oil is also extracted and is used in various medicines that they make.

This tribe partakes heavily of drugs and drink. Even women smoke and drink liquor. At one time this community used to distil liquor (*desi-daru*) in their *kullis*. Since these were then settled away from the local habitation amidst dense bushes or forest, it was not easy for the police to locate the *bhathis* (household distillery). Since it is now not possible to make their own liquor, they buy it from *thekas* (liquor shops). Drinking is not a daily routine but whenever they find an opportunity they enjoy it. Almost all Bangalas smoke. They smoke cigarettes, *bidi* and few of them even *huqa*. Cigarettes with *sulfa* (mixture of tobacco and Cannabis) is their favourite intoxicant. Men coat their palms with mustard oil, rub leaves of the *sukha* (*Cannabis indica*) plant on them and then collect the material in cigarettes to smoke. It is very strong; three inhalations are enough to bring down an individual and not everyone can stand it, though

the Bangalas are used to it. *Zarda* (powdered tobacco) is another intoxicant used by both men and women; most of them always have it tucked in their mouth.

Zarde-wala-pan is also very popular among them. *Afeem* (opium) is easily available in the Malwa region and that too is smoked. It gives their body strength and they remain active. As they often go to Rajasthan, they bring back *dodas* (poppy husk). *Naswar* (snuff) is also used by the youth who are aware of the implications of drugs. Heroin and smack are too expensive and out of their reach, but valium and mandrax tablets are quite popular among them. One curious but important thing about this community is that they never get addicted to any kind of intoxicant. They take drugs for pleasure and not out of habit. They also try *bhanga* on special occasions like Shivaratri or Holi.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

The main division among them is *Ik Jholiwale Nath* and *Do Jholiwale Nath*, that is, Naths with 'one' and 'two' bags. This division is based on their respective religious gurus. The followers of Kaanipa, Augar Nath, Machhandar Nath are called *Ik Jholiwale Nath jogi*, and the followers of Guru Gorakh Nath, Jallandhar Nath, Balak Nath and Bhola Nath call themselves *Do Jholiwale Nath jogi*. There are more than 20 *gotras* among them, such as Bambi, Bidhey, Molli, Chaklas, and Parmar. Thus *Ik jholiwale Nath* marry among themselves but across different *gotras*. They also go to each and every house, even to low caste homes, in order to beg, but not so the *Do Jholiwale Nath jogi*.

Another differentiation among the community is based on food habits. A few of them are vegetarian and prefer to marry vegetarians only. As most are non-vegetarian but do not eat pork, e.g., Sultanias, they marry amongst those who do not eat pork. The Bangalas consider the Gandhilas to be part of their community and their settlements are quite close to theirs, though they do not interact with them.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

The Bangala tribe is endogamous but *gotra* exogamous, i.e., there is tribal endogamy and *gotra* exogamy one marries within the tribe

but outside the four *gotras* of the mother, father, *nani* (maternal grandmother) and *dadi* (paternal grandmother). But according to Singh, they also marry in the Gandhila and Deha communities, a fact, however, denied by the respondents of this study (Singh 2003:67). There are no hard and fast rules regarding age at marriage. Child marriage is prevalent in the community. The 'engagement' is usually at birth or in the second or third year of the child's life but sometimes even when the child is not yet born. Bangalas marry at a very young age but *muklawwa* takes place between the ages of 12 to 14. They are aware that child marriage is a crime but they still violate the law because it is a traditional practice. The reason for early marriage is to prevent teenage crimes like rape, elopement, etc.

The criteria for mate selection is the suitability of the family on the basis of equal status and if the boy is able to run the household. Parents usually arrange the match but sometimes a *vichola* (mediator) also plays a role. Love marriages are not permitted. With the consent of both the families ('parties'), children are brought together and an elderly person of the community places his hands on their heads and declares them engaged. Marriage is solemnised with *phere* around the fire. The practice of bride price is still prevalent and the residence is patrilocal, but they are a monogamous tribe.

Dowry is given according to the capacity of the family and not demand. A dowry usually consists of *sappan da jora* (a pair of snakes), *giddar singhi* (jackal's husk), *billi di jer* (cat's placenta), *sapp da manka* (a button-like item made out of snake's poison), *patari* (a box in which snakes are kept), *bagli* or *jholi* (a shoulder bag), *jadian butian* (herbs), *been* (gourd pipe), a *godri* (a quilted covering made out of cut pieces of cloth), clothes, utensils, bamboo sticks to make *kulli*, and a folding cot.

Each of these items has its own significance in one's life. Snakes and Bangalas have had a long association. This is the source of their livelihood. A pair of the most poisonous snakes is given as dowry since this is a symbol of status. To catch such snakes for a daughter's marriage the family goes to the Himalayas or Himachal Pradesh since they are no longer found in Punjab. *Phaniars* (cobras) in this region are also difficult to find as these snakes mostly live on barren land. Bangalas have the ability to hunt snakes just by smelling the earth. If they come across its 'footprints' (*ped*) they go to any extent (*pataal*) to catch it. While catching it they make the snake swear by Bhole Nath (Lord Shiva) not to bite them and

they swear to release him in time. The in-laws of the daughter are made aware of the pledge. Whenever they get a more poisonous snake they release the earlier one. This community has extensive knowledge about varieties of snakes. They can immediately recognise them as a *phaniar* or *kana*, *kaudian-wala*, *takhi nag*, *uddna sapp*, *padam nag*, *saral*, *ichhadhari sapp*, etc. They never catch *ichhadhari sapp* even if it comes to them. They consider themselves very lucky and bow before it (*matha-tekna*).

Every Bangala is capable of catching snakes. It is a traditional skill and even small children are not afraid of them. They are expert at catching the most poisonous snakes very easily without harming themselves. In case of a snake bite, they make use of *sapp da manka* that sucks the poison when placed on the bite. It is a button-like object which is prepared from the poison of very poisonous snakes and is used to cure snake bites and is hence a compulsory item in dowry. Bangalas also possess a stone which is used to neutralise snake fangs (*sapp de dand khatay karan layi*). It is available only in the Himalayas and is very difficult to find, but whosoever possesses it is considered lucky.

Giddar singhi (jackal's husk) is another important item of dowry. It is obtained by killing a jackal and performing certain rituals. Every day *dhoop-batti* (incense) is placed in front of it. Each Bangala possesses it, generally one in their *godri* and another one in their *bagali* or *jholi*. It is their source of livelihood. They believe that if anybody keeps *giddar singhi* along with *sindoor* (vermilion) and *elaichi dana* (small cardamom) for a month and a quarter, and recites specific *mantras* every day, one can get every wish fulfilled, be it the desire for money, love or dominance over someone.

Billi di jer is also a part of the dowry. It is considered very auspicious and is believed that all the evil spirits (*bhoot-paret*) stay away and cannot harm the person and family who keeps it. *Billi da panja* (cat's paw) is also kept with it which is considered auspicious to maintain peace in the family. All three things — *giddar singhi*, *billi di jer* and *billi da panja* — are kept together in one container along with *sindoor* which forms a part of dowry. These items are sold to other people for money.

Godri has its own importance in their lives. It has a similar significance as *phulkari* in Punjabi families and society. It serves many purposes — it may be used as a bed sheet, a quilt, a cover for *kulli*, etc., and is made by arduous stitching. Only wise, expert and

efficient women can make it. Young girls are also trained by their mothers or grandmothers to stitch it. It is made out of waste cut-pieces of colourful clothes and is stitched in a very artistic way by making patterns. A *godri* for routine use is made of rags which their women beg for from the local people. But the one used for marriage purposes is made from the cut-pieces collected from the tailor's shop. Each *kulli* has two or three *godris*: the richness or status of a family is judged by their number. It has a special role in their lives. It works like a *pardah* (screen/veil) in the *kulli*, saves them from the sun and winter, and enhances the *shan* (grace) of their *kullis*. Thus it is very dear to them.

Various types of herbs that are used for personal treatment and also to make medicines for sale are also a part of the dowry. Divorce is not common amongst them. But whenever relations between husband and wife get strained, the *kabila* panchayat permits divorce. If the husband is an idler or a drunkard and beats his wife, and in case of a wife if she does not do household work, being infertile, having extra-marital relations or a love affair before marriage, then divorce is granted.

Sometimes small tiffs between husband and wife take a serious turn, for example, when the wife asks for non-vegetarian food and the husband does not get it, or does not bring enough to even feed the family. The verbal violence turns into physical violence and the matter goes to the tribal panchayat. At the first instance, the couple is asked to compromise and live together cordially. If this does not work then the parents of both are called and in the presence of the panchayat they too try to convince them to live together. If there is still no solution to the problem then the *kulli* panchayats of both partners sit together and each party freely puts forth its own point of view; then, both panchayats sit together and decide who is at fault.

Once more they are given a warning to mend their ways and live together amicably. At this stage most of them reach a compromise with certain conditions, but if not, then the panchayats fix a day for the formal divorce and the couple is asked to stay separately. The guilty party is asked to pay some amount as a punishment or fine on that fixed day that ranges from Rs 500 to Rs 5,000. Dowry, however, is not returned. On the fixed date three *chulis* (handfuls) of water are poured on both the husband and wife by a panchayat member or elderly person and they are then considered divorced

and both are free to remarry. The woman is not allowed to take her children with her and remain in the custody of the father. She can come to meet them whenever she wants but outside the periphery of their *kullis*.

A widow, widower or divorcee can remarry with the consent of the community panchayat but widows with children usually remarry within their in-laws' family; this is called *chadar pauna*.

There is hardly any change in the institution of marriage except in the age of *muklawwa* (second ceremonial visit of the bride to her in-laws' home after marriage). Earlier it used to be at the age of 12 to 14 years but now it has been raised to 14 to 16 years. The rituals and ceremonies of marriage are the same with little variation. Bangalas do not have much interaction with other communities which is why they are strictly tied to their traditions.

FAMILY

Bangalas live mainly in joint families. The eldest male is the head of the family and elders are feared and respected. Women keep *pardah* (veil) to show them respect. All members of the family follow the restrictions imposed by the elders. They too enjoy joking relations between *jija-sali* and *deor-bhahbi*, and there is love and affection towards children and young ones.

Women enjoy equal status. There is no restriction on their going out of the house to beg or sell toys. Most of them, however, do household work only. Bangalas do not have much contact with the outside community except while begging (*sirf mangan khan di sanjh hai*). But amongst their own community they are well-integrated and this is why they survive in *kullis* in deserted places.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Birth: The birth of a male child is cause for celebration. *Gur* (jaggery), *patase* (sweet bubbles), *phulian* (moistened and parched rice), *ladoo* (a common sweet made from droplets of gram-flour paste fried in cooking oil and soaked in sugar syrup and then rolled into balls), and other sweets are distributed. *Gur* or sweets and clothes are also given to the *dai* (midwife). A female child, however, gets no such celebration.

Gurti (the first food given to the newborn) is usually honey, brown sugar or goat's milk is fed to the baby to be a wise person in the community. After three days the male child is made to wear a *taragi* (cord worn around the loins by children). The mother and the newborn are brought out of the *kulli* (*bahar vadhauna*) after worshipping the ancestors (*doop-batti karke*). Like Hindus, Bangalas also celebrate the 'first Lohri' of their son with great zeal. All friends and relatives sit together, share groundnut, *reodian* (jaggery balls with *til* seeds), etc. Liquor and non-vegetarian food is also served. Forty or 21 days after the birth (*sava mahina*) the new mother is made to cook food (*chaunke charauna*). There is no *namkaran* (naming) ceremony as such, and they use the prefix 'Nath' with their names, e.g., Tora Nath, Cheeka Nath, Taplu Nath, Bhole Nath, Kheta Nath, etc.

Marriage: At night, when the Bangalas routinely sit together, they discuss all matters regarding the family, including the marriage of their children. Sometimes in their *basti* people belonging to different *gotras* live together, thus making it easy for them to find a suitable match for their children. They avoid marriage among the siblings of the *mama* (maternal uncle), *bua* (father's sister) and *chacha* (father's brother), but it can be solemnised with the *massi's* (mother's sister's) children. First it is discussed at the family level then with the concerned family, and if both parties agree to the match, a wise and elderly person is requested to fix the engagement ceremony. He calls both the families together and gives one rupee each to the boy and the girl and blesses them by placing his hands on their heads. He declares to the community that the two are engaged. Sweets or *gur* (jaggery) are served to the people gathered. *Daru* (country liquor) is usually served to celebrate the occasion.

Once the boy and the girl reach adolescence, arrangements are made to fix their marriage. The bride's parents send a message to the groom's family to fix a date. They formally go to the groom's *kulli* and ask for a suitable date. When it is fixed, the bride's parents offer them *viah da sadda* (invitation of marriage). If the parents of the groom live in some other village, town or city then they shift to the bride's place and make their *kullis* nearby. When the date of marriage is fixed, the bride price is also settled. If possible it is also paid on the same day to the bride's parents. Generally it is given just before the marriage so that the bride's parents can make proper arrangements for the ceremony. Normally Rs 525 are

given to the bride's parents but the amount is not fixed and may be higher depending on the status of the groom's family. It is given to the bride's parents in the presence of the tribal panchayat.

The *nanke* (maternal family) are then informed of the date of marriage. They also reach the bride's place and make *kullis* nearby. The *mama* (mother's brother) plays an important role in the marriage (*es vele mama lodinda*). A few days before the marriage or sometimes a day before, the *nanke* arrive at the bride's and groom's *kullis* with enthusiasm. Mustard oil is poured on the sides of the *kulli* to welcome them (*tel-chona*). At this moment, when the *nanke* and *dadke* are face-to-face, they cast aspersions and even abuse each other in the form of *sithanian*. For instance, the *dadke* sing:

Hun kidhar gayian ve Rode terian nankian

[O' Rode, where has your maternal family gone?]

Then the *nanke* reply:

Asin hajar khadiyan ve Rode teriyan nankian.

[We are present here, O' Rode, your maternal family.]

It is the turn of the *Dadke* again:

Ihna nankian nu kotrian di maar

Ihna nankian nu kaddo dalanon bahar

[Bash the maternal family with a *kotla*,

Drive them away from the hall.]

Three or five days before the day of marriage, *mayian* are imposed on the bride and the groom. Their movement outside the *kulli* is curtailed. *Vatna*, a mixture of gram flour (*besan*), turmeric, mustard oil and curd is applied on bodies by five or seven *suhagans* (women whose husbands are alive, that is, relatives like the mother, *chachi*, *bua*, *bhabhi*, etc.) *Gana* (a red thread called *mauli*) is also tied to the wrist by the sisters of both the bride and groom. At night the relatives of both the bride and groom are offered food at their respective places. Sometimes simple *dal-roti* is served, but mostly non-vegetarian food and liquor. On the day of marriage both the bride and groom are given a bath (*nuhai*) by their respective sisters. The *mama* picks them up from the *chaunki* (a wooden plank for sitting) on which he or she has had the bath. He also gives *shagan*. If he is not able to pick him/her up properly then he has to pay a fine in the form of *lag*.

After *nuhai*, the groom is dressed up well and *sehra* is tied on his turban by his sisters (*sehra bandi*). Then the ritual of *salami* is performed; the sister gives the first *salami*, after which the *nanke*

perform it by giving one or two rupees, and then other relatives present there do the same. To the bride, relatives give suits (clothes), utensils, money, etc. Then the sisters of the bride and groom walk them to the place where the *pheras* are to be performed. The *barat* goes from one *kulli* to another and all *kabila* people follow it. After reaching the doorstep of the bride's house, the ceremony of *milni* is performed. In this ritual nothing is given or taken; the relatives embrace each other — father with father, mother with mother, *mama* with *mama*, and so on. After reception of *barat*, *gur-da-sarbat* or tea is served to all.

The marriage is solemnised after taking seven *phere* around a *diya* or *jot* (lamp) made from flour, cotton wool and lit with mustard oil. A small *chaunki* is placed over that lamp. Then the whole thing is covered with an inverted *tokra* (basket) on which are tied four twigs of either the *toot* (mulberry), *tahli* (shisham) or *ak* (*Calotropis procera*) plants. Then the bride and groom are made to take seven *phere* around it. This ritual is performed by the brother-in-law of the groom. No pandit is called upon and no *mantras* are recited during this ceremony. After *phere* the couple can relax; the bride goes to her relatives and the groom to his.

The *baratis* and relatives are then offered food. Mostly non-vegetarian food and liquor are served but it is not a compulsion; these are served if a good bride price is paid. Meat is never brought from the market but it is hunted. *Daru* is bought from the market and served to the women also. After eating, preparations are made for the *doli*. Till now there was an atmosphere of joy and excitement but departure is always sad. The parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and friends of the bride cry. On the other hand, the parents and relatives of the groom show excitement and happiness, a sign of achievement.

As the *doli* reaches the steps of the groom's *kulli*, his mother is ready with a *garbi* in her hand containing sweet water and green grass called *doobh*. A red thread (*mauli*) is also tied around the *garbi*. The mother circles water seven times around their heads and drinks it each time. At the last round the daughter-in-law stops her mother-in-law from drinking water, but some daughters-in-law allow their mothers-in-law to drink the water as it is a symbol of their inclusion into that *gotra*.

The next day the newly wedded daughter-in-law is made to perform the ritual of *pitran-da-pani* (worshipping ancestors). She takes

seven rounds of the Beri (Jujube) tree which bears fruit and each time pours a little water on it. Afterwards she sits near the Beri tree and the ritual of *gana kholna* is performed. The bride unties *gana* from the groom's wrist and the groom does the same to the bride's *gana*. Then both *ganas* are tied to the Beri tree. *Jathera* worship is also performed subsequently. A smouldering cake of cow dung is taken and some *desi-ghee* is poured on it. It is kept on a plain surface under that Beri. Then the couple bows (*matha tekna*) before it to worship *jatheras*. The Beri tree is of great importance to the Bangalas which is why they consider it auspicious to settle marriages at a time (spring) when this tree is full of fruit.

On their return to the *kulli* they are served *mithe chaul* (sweet rice) on one *thali* and are made to eat together. Thus begins their *grehasth* (family) life. After this ceremony the *nanka-mel* and parents of the bride dismantle their *kullis* and leave for another place.

Marriage is of great importance in this community. In the words of a female respondent: 'They start worrying about the marriage of their children when they are in the womb'. They are not pessimistic but full of life even if they have to struggle to earn a living. They are aware that their children have to earn a livelihood by begging, snake-charming and selling medicines, which is why these are a part of the dowry.

Death: Immediately after a death, the body is laid on the ground and not on the cot. The last bath is given, and the body is dressed in new saffron-coloured clothes. If the person is unmarried then *sehra* is tied on his turban and *mehndi* is also applied. The *kaphan* (shroud) is brought by the parental family in the case of the wife or daughter-in-law. Both the rituals of cremation and burial are prevalent among Bangalas. If a child dies it is always buried. If an unmarried young person dies then the ritual of *keelna* is performed. It is not done in the case of an unmarried girl. A *kabila sadhu* (shaman) recites a few *mantras* and fixes iron nails only in the eyes of the dead person so that the spirit is restricted to only that region where s/he died. This prevents it from roaming and possibly harming others.

Earlier the rituals of burial or cremation were performed near their *kullis* as the local residents did not allow them to go to the village cremation ground. But today, with the permission of the *sarpanch* of the village, they can go there on the condition that they

stay till the last remains can be collected. It is still not completely acceptable to the locals. For the cremation they either beg for fire-wood or take it from the forest. The ceremony of *dhamark* (breaking the pitcher full of water) is performed, and the eldest son lights the pyre.

No food is cooked in the house where the death has occurred. Neighbours or the panchayat make arrangements for meals and tea for the family and relatives of the deceased. On the third day after cremation, the remains (*asthian*) of the dead are collected and kept in a small bag of cloth (*potli*). The ash is formed into the shape of a human body and raw (*kacha*) cotton thread is tied around the *siva* (cremation place) seven times. This ash is collected after five or seven days and immersed in flowing water. If the family of the deceased can afford to go to Haridwar then the remains (*asthian*) are immersed in the Ganga, but most often the ashes are immersed in a nearby river. If there is no source of running water close by, then they bury the remains near their *kulli* and put a stone or plant or sticks on it. Whenever they find it convenient they dig these up and go to Haridwar or some other canal for immersion. A pandit is not asked to perform any kind of ritual, neither is the death registered. The ritual of *gati* (salvation) is also not performed; they believe that nobody is capable of performing this ritual for them. As the Bangalas live close to the Ganga, they immerse the half-burnt body of the dead there itself.

There is no specific time for *bhog* among Bangalas. Some of them perform this ritual after three days, a few on the tenth or the twelfth day. It is again a simple ceremony. On this day Shiv Bhole is worshipped and everybody prays that the soul of the deceased should rest in peace. *Karah* or *patase* are served as *prasad*. If one cannot afford it then a handful of *phulian* (moistened and parched rice) is served. The eldest son of the deceased performs the ritual of *akhri pani* (last water). After this he is declared the head (*mukhi*) of the family in the presence of the panchayat. At this time each *kabila* member gives some kind of assistance to the widow of the dead in the form of money, *atta-dal*, clothes, etc. The parents and relatives of the widow give her money and necessary terms. Simple *dal-roti* is served after the *bhog* ceremony. Like other communities, relatives and friends come for *makaan*. The ritual of *vadda karna* (celebrating the death of the old) is not performed. A lamp is lit on Diwali in honour of the dead.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Most of them make their living by begging from morning till evening. They collect money, wheat, *atta* and *roti*. Small children and women start begging early in the morning with bins in their hand to get *lassi* (butter milk), tea or *behi roti* (stale bread) for their breakfast. After breakfast, the men wear their formal attire of *chola* and *dhoti* of saffron colour, carry *jholis* on their shoulders, a *patari* with snakes and a *been* in their hands. They leave their homes and start begging by displaying the snakes which dance to the tune of the *been*. They ask for money for milk for the snakes and people give them one or two rupees. Sometimes they collect *atta* or wheat as well.

Another source of income is selling herbal medicines. They consider themselves *hakeems* and make *desi* medicines for various ailments like dental caries, *resha* (phlegm), snake, dog and mongoose bites, arthritis, fever, tuberculosis, piles, high blood sugar, indigestion, and various skin and eye problems. An oil is prepared from fish and *sandah* (desert lizard) by roasting them alive in the fire. It is useful for skin diseases, arthritis and joint pains. Clove oil is also medicated by adding a few herbs to it for the treatment of various problems related to teeth. A special kind of *surma* (eye powder) is also prepared from snake poison which is beneficial for various eye ailments and normal vision. No Bangala is ever seen wearing spectacles.

Various other types of oils prepared from the flesh of tortoise and fish cure many other diseases. An oil is also prepared to keep hair black. Any person below the age of 70 years can use this oil along with a medicine (also prepared by them) to retain black hair. Almost no Bangala up to the age of 80 has grey hair.

Another famous medicine made and sold by them is for longevity. It is expensive and is sold at a very high price which varies from Rs 5–10,000 per 10 grams. It is made of various rare herbs found in the Himalayas, from where they also collect *kesar* (saffron), *kasturi* (dear musk) and *ambar* (resin). Bangalas are also expert in curing skin ailments like *chambal*, *phulvehri*, leucoderma and psoriasis. They also claim to restore masculinity (*mardana taqat*) with medicines.

Bangalas deal with customers very politely but cleverly. They demand a price for the medicine keeping in mind the status of a person. Their customers are mostly younger people.

Bangalas also sell *billi di jer*, *billi da panja* and *giddar singhi* along with *sindoor*. They convince people of the usefulness of these items in fulfilling all their desires and sell them at very high prices. Snake poison is also sold at a high price ranging from Rs 1 to Rs 10,000. It is used in various types of Ayurvedic medicines by *vaids* and *unani hakeems*. They do it secretly because it is illegal. Sometimes a tortoise or its meat is also sold for its medicinal value. Another source of income is the skin of various animals like *neola* (mongoose), *saha* (hare) and *billa* (wild cat). This is another offence, but they cannot help it.

Many Bangalas have now adopted the occupation of selling bed sheets known as *pheriwalas*. They go to villages and localities of poor people on bicycles.

A few men and mostly children and women engage in rag-picking. They collect plastic bags, paper, *gatta*, iron and other plastic items and sell them to *kabadias* to earn money. There is no doubt that a few of them are still involved in stealing and theft to make ends meet.

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Each cluster of *jhuggis* has its own panchayat. Five wise and elderly men constitute it and one of them is elected *sarpanch*. These members are chosen unanimously and membership is life-long. If somebody does not perform his duties well then the other four members together can take the decision to replace him. The appellant has to obey their decision as if it were God's will.

Bangala social organisation has its own traditions. For the settlement of internal disputes they do not go to police stations or civil courts. Even if someone does go, s/he still has to obey the decision of the *kabila* panchayat. All issues and disputes regarding theft, divorce, rape, murder, elopement, adultery, etc., are deliberated by the panchayat. The culprit is fined depending on the nature of the offence.

Whenever there is an issue to discuss, the panchayat assembles either early in the morning or late in the evening when everybody is free. They call both the parties and listen to them carefully and whosoever is found guilty is punished. If s/he pleads guilty then a fine is fixed, which varies from Rs 500 to Rs 5,000. If the offence is minor then the fine may be a bottle of liquor for the *kabila* members. If the guilty person refuses to admit to his/her fault then

the case goes to the *vaddi* (higher) panchayat, a state-level panchayat consisting of 51 members. All these wise and elderly people are elected unanimously. The accused is summoned. Witnesses from both sides also appear and give their statements. If the witnesses are more in favour of the accused then s/he is not punished, but if the witnesses are against, then s/he is fined. These panchayat members go into the details of each and every aspect, listen to both parties carefully and pass their judgement, which is final and must be obeyed. If the accused still refuses to comply then s/he is declared an outcast. It is in the purview of the panchayat alone to fine and punish the culprit, taking into consideration the status of the guilty. Fines vary from Rs 1,000 to Rs 10,000 or five bottles of liquor or 5 kilograms of meat for all the *kabila* members of that locality.

Bangalas have immense faith in their panchayat. Its judgement has the standing of the Supreme Court which every one has to follow. They consider their panchayat to be better than the civil courts and police stations, as there is no question of any bribe and the case is decided justly immediately. It is not kept pending for years. That is why they refrain from going to civil courts.

Various other punishments meted out by *kabila* panchayat are slapping the accused in front of the panchayat and *kabila* members, beating with shoes (*juttian-marna*), *dande* or *kode marna*, etc. In case of a rape, the accused is fined and his face blackened. The punishment for the rape of a virgin girl is severe. The culprit is thrown out of the community.

In the case of murder, the panchayat fixes a fine ranging from Rs 5,00 to Rs 10,000 and also gives monetary assistance to the widow (groceries, clothes, money) for the upkeep of her children till they reach adulthood. Sometimes the widow and her children are made to live with the accused. If he does not agree then he is declared an outcast, but most agree to this arrangement. The murder is reported to the police station but no clue is given about the murderer. Out of fear of the police the culprit agrees to the panchayat's judgement. There are only a few cases of murder, which usually occur when a man tries to marry another's fiancée, or tries to rape someone's daughter, sister, etc. Such murders were common in the community during the British regime but not anymore.

The abduction of women is also a crime for which a person may be fined up to a maximum of Rs 5,000 or merely a bottle of liquor, which is the minimum fine. The accused is also compelled to free the woman he has abducted or he has to marry her by giving

a bride price, if she agrees to this. The money obtained through fines is used either to serve liquor and meat in the community or is equally distributed among *kabila* members.

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

Bangalas are basically Hindu Rajputs. They do not have their own separate *mandirs* (temples) though they are followers of Hanuman, Brahma, Vishnu (Krishna, Ram), Mahesh and various forms of Kali Mata like Chintpurni, Jawala ji, Kangrewali Mata, Veshno Devi and Naina Devi. Nine Nath, which include Baba Balak Nath, Gorakh Nath, Machhander Nath, Jalandhar Nath, Bhola Nath, Goya Nath, are also worshipped.

Bangalas are great worshippers of Gugga Pir. The biggest *mari* of Gugga Pir is in Rajasthan where every year Bangalas from all over India come to participate in a fair that is held for one month (the month of *sawan*) and ends on *Gugga Naumi*. They consider this Pir their Guru with whose blessings they keep snakes, beg and earn a living. They also go to Sirsa in Haryana to worship. They also beg in the name of Gugga Pir. Bangalas offer *sevian* and milk as *prasad* to the Pir.

The most popular deity among them is Lord Shiva. Each *kulli* has his poster, in front of which a *chirag* (oil lamp) is lit. Shiva is depicted with snakes crawling over his body without harming him. Thus with his blessings they believe snakes will not harm them either.

When a wish is fulfilled they go to Kali Mata, Chint Purni or Naina Devi temples and offer *prasad*. Liquor and *bakra* (lamp) are offered to Kali Mata and *karahi*, that is, *mithe chaul* or *karah* are offered to the Devi. If the *kabila* together pledge a *bakra* to the deity then they pool money and buy one. Red thread (*gana*) is tied to its leg and is offered to the deity, which they call *sukh da bakra*.

The followers of Baba Balak Nath worship him on Sundays with the *prasad* of *rot* (large loaf of wheat) and *gur*, pray in front of his poster, offer *prasad* to him and the remainder is served to the community.

The followers of Baba Gorakh Nath have a distinct appearance. They wear earrings and a *chola-dhoti* of saffron or black colour. They catch snakes and make them swear by Guru Gorakh Nath not to harm anyone. He is worshipped because they believe that they have learnt the art of snake-catching from him.

Jathere or *pittar puja* (ancestor worship) is done on all occasions like birth or marriage and on Diwali. This is also routinely done twice a year or if an ancestor is 'harassing' somebody. Three large *rot* of wheat and *gur* (jaggery) are baked and *churi* is made out of it. Then *desi-ghee* is poured on the smouldering cake of cow dung for incense. Family members bow (*matha-tekna*) before it, and *churi* and *dhoop* are offered. The remaining *churi* is served among the *kabila* members as *prasad*.

Pir Nigaha is the place of Baba Lakh Data Pir in Moga district. There is village near Baghapurana called Langiana where every year, from the 12th to the 14th *Chet*, a big fair (*vada mela*) is held to honour Baba Lakh Data. Bangalas also worship the Pir. They arrive 10–15 days in advance and install their *kullis* near the venue of the mela. The worship of Lakh Data Pir is not an annual affair. Throughout the year these people distribute *prasad* in his name and each *kulli* has a flag as his symbol where they light *chirag* every Thursday. Both men and women can do it. Pir Lakh Data is also known as Lalanwala Pir because Bangalas pray to him for a *lal* (son).

They have intense faith in and consider him a very powerful pir with whose blessings each wish is fulfilled. After the fulfillment of desires they offer *sukh* (the way a pledge is solemnised or fulfilled by a devotee) in the form of *bakra*, *prasad*, *chadar* (a sheet of cloth) and liquor. *Khudo-khundi* (folk version of a hockey stick and ball) is also offered when they are blessed with a son. The offering is made with *dhol* and *baja* (harmonium). Men and women dressed in their best clothes and ornaments participate in the fair. Bangalas also perform the marriage of their children at this fair. More than 100 marriages take place every year as it is considered an auspicious day. After moving from place to place throughout the year, Bangalas come together at this fair in the month of *Chet*.

Lohri is celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm. Lohri is lit amidst a cluster of *kullis* and they sit around it and put *til* in the sacred fire. This ritual is performed by each individual. *Moongfali* (groundnut), *reodian* and *gachak* are distributed among all. They sing songs in their own language and also perform *bhangra*. Liquor is served to both men and women. Meat, hunted specially for this occasion, is cooked in each *kulli*. *Mithe chaul* is also cooked to celebrate the occasion.

In the case of the first Lohri of a newborn baby, *kabila* people visit that *kulli* and ask for Lohri. *Gur*, *moongfali*, *reodian* and *gachak*

are given to them. *Kabila* members also give *shagan* of one, five, ten or twenty rupees depending on the amount they have received from that family on a similar occasion.

The whole purpose of celebrating Lohri is to have fun. The Bangalas have been following this tradition for centuries. Throughout the day they beg Lohri from the people in the city or villages, and at night they enjoy it with their own *kabila* members. Till the fire dies out, they sit around it joking, singing and dancing. They also celebrate Diwali, Dussehra and Holi, though not with the same enthusiasm.

INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES

Bangalas do not have any social relations with other communities except through begging or selling their medicines. They do not go to the birth, marriage or death ceremonies of local people, and nor do they invite them. Though they consider themselves Rajputs (Hindus), the people treat them as Scheduled Castes. Before Independence they were not allowed to visit temples either.

Political connections are also negligible. Since most of them do not lead settled lives, they do not have voter cards and hence are excluded from political participation. Even their *kabila* does not have any political leaders such as an MLA or an MP. A few of them who lead a settled life and have voter cards do not have much interaction with political leaders. During elections politicians do visit them, shake hands with them and make promises, but after that they are forgotten.

The local people visit them only when they are in need. Either they are in search of snake poison, some medicine or a tortoise. It was remarked: 'This is the first time that somebody from a university has come to look into our lives and to know our origin of which even we are not aware. We are not Scheduled Castes but Scheduled Tribes.'

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The literacy rate in this community is negligible. Throughout the field investigation, the researcher found only one person who had completed school. A few of them have studied up to the fourth

or fifth class; most are not even able to write their name. They admit: 'It is not the fault of government. We are not interested in the education of our children since our main occupation is begging which does not require any qualification.' Further: 'We do not have money to provide education to our children. Moreover, even if one gets education s/he will not be able to get a job in such conditions of competition and corruption.'

They argue that they do not get any health facilities. 'We cure ourselves with *desi* medicines that we make. We cure the local people too with herbal medicines. We are in fact moving hospitals.'

There is no drinking water facility in most of their *bastis* or localities. Most of them live in *kullis* either on the banks of rivers or ponds and use that water. A few who are settled have hand-pumps and municipal water taps.

The Bangalas do not have government jobs at all. Begging and petty works like selling bed sheets, medicines and rag-picking is their living. As far as the means of communication are concerned, neither do they need them nor does the government provide these.

There is no facility of electricity in their colonies. A few settled Bangalas in regular colonies do have electricity but the charges are so high that they cannot pay and the metres are disconnected by the department. Few *kulli* dwellers do use *kundi* (illicit connection), but largely they use oil lamps.

Bangalas do not lead a settled life. They believe that Gugga Pir has cursed them and that is why they lead a nomadic life. Even if a few of them have their own *pucca* houses, they still go out for months together in search of snakes. They believe that if they try to lead a settled life and stop begging, then they would suffer from leprosy.

Right from the age of two or three years they train their children to beg. There is no question of providing them with an education when there are hardly any resources to give them two square meals a day.

At all bus-stands and railway stations one can see their naked children begging. The women also carry containers to the neighbourhood to beg for tea, *lassi* or stale bread. Till then the men wait for them in their *kullis*. They go hunting or begging afterwards and return only in the evening.

To collect medicinal herbs they have to go to the Himalayas and other hill areas. Another reason of their being nomadic is

that snakes are found only in the forests. They are also interested in *Jangli sur* (wild boars) that too are found in the Shivalik Hills. Though nomadic life is tough and full of hardship, they never tire of it. They keep on struggling to fill their stomachs and try to be happy. They start moving when the sun rises and come back when the sun sets. Such is their life. This is how they lead their lives even in the 21st century.

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Barad

Harinder Kaur

Barads are classified as Scheduled Castes in Punjab. Ibbetson notes: 'Barar, fem. Barri, a low caste given to begging and roguery. In Jullundur, the Barars make winnowing fans (*chhaj hai*!), baskets and sievers (*chhanra*) of reed. They also hunt with dogs. Their observances resemble those of the Chuharas' (Ibbetson 1970: 64). Singh (2003: 78) mentions:

Barar, Burar and Berar are recognized as Scheduled Castes in Punjab.... According to the *Census of India* (1911) the total population of the Barar is 6,119 which includes 3,300 males and 2,819 females.... The Barars of Banga (district Hoshiarpur) migrated from the district of Kangra (Himachal Pradesh) about one hundred and fifty years ago or six generations back.

The people of this community are timid and shy but social. They live in *kullis* (hut settlements) and semi-*pucca* houses. Their habitation is mostly on the western side of a village. The *kullis* are made from *kanis* (reed) and *kahi* (grass), and covered with tarpaulin. The semi-*pucca* houses have no concrete floor, sometimes even the roof is not cemented. During harsh winters, hot summers and the rainy season this is the only shelter they have.

Initially they were nomadic, but now most of the Barads lead a settled life. They could not provide much information regarding their history since a majority of them are illiterate and uneducated.

We are not even aware of our third generation, how can we trace our origin. History belongs to brave people who have done something extraordinary. Barad neither fought a war, nor killed a lion. They have never captured any territory that could make them popular or known. We are timid and shy people. Locals consider us untouchables, and we could not make a place in society as well as in history. We,

people are born in *kullis* and die there. So what could be our history? This is for the first time that somebody has come to us to ask about our origin and history. People keep distance from us as we 'stink'.

It is believed that they migrated from the Kangra district (old Punjab, now in Himachal Pradesh) to Punjab nearly 150 to 200 years ago, that is, almost seven generations before. The main reason for their migration was search for livelihood due to lack of business prospects in the hilly areas. The community is engaged in making *kanghis* (combs) which are used by *julahas* (weavers) to weave *khadar* (coarse cotton cloth). But due to modernisation, the handloom industry made way for power looms, and their business of *kanghi*-making 'failed'. The decline in business forced them to move from their native place in search of *rozi-roti* (bread and butter). This community was also engaged in making *chhaj* (winnowing fans) and *chhabrian* (baskets for chapattis) for a long time, but this business has also declined due to the availability of modern, factory-made goods.

According to the *Census of India (Punjab)* (1981), the total Barad population in the state is 4,761, that is 2,562 males and 2,199 females and in 2001, it increased to 8,679 with 4,519 males and 4,160 females. But if we go by their own estimation their number is approximately 12,000 to 15,000. Singdiwala Village (Hoshiarpur) has a large population of around 1,500. There are approximately 300 households of this community, in which about 500 persons have voter cards. But they do not have full-fledged Barad villages of their own. We were informed by the respondents that there are approximately 28 villages in Punjab that are inhabited by them. Their estimate belie the *Census* figures.

The maximum rural concentration of this community is in Hoshiarpur district, with 995 persons. Villages like Chalupar, Singdiwala, Raipur, Husainpur Guru, Piplanwala, Banga, Talwara, Shailakhurd, and Bara have a high concentration of Barads. Gurdaspur district with 3,539 persons has the highest population followed by Jalandhar (2,304), Hoshairpur (1,290) and Amritsar (836). The presence of this community in the whole Malwa tract is minimal. Muktsar has no Barads and Fatehgarh Sahib has just one person. Contrary to our observations however, Singh reports

that 'they are predominantly urban based (64.31 per cent) and are distributed in all the districts of Punjab, except in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar' (Singh 1999: 147). The *Census* 2001 shows that 1,807 persons live in rural and 6,872 in urban areas of the state.

Some Barads believe that their origin is from Kashi (Banaras), the town of Bhagat Ravidass and birthplace of Adharmis, the followers of Ravidass. There Barads were engaged in similar occupations as the Adharmis. The rest of society did not accept them and they were avoided by people; Brahmins hated them. They considered them untouchable and also committed atrocities towards them. The whole atmosphere was unbearable. The Barads could no longer tolerate it and left Kashi. They came to the Kangra hills in search of a new life. Some other respondents, however, deny this theory. They call it a pure myth. They argue that 'Nobody has even seen any *math* or *dera* of our ancestors in Kashi. No one goes there to worship our ancestors and our elders have no knowledge of this'.

In the hilly area of Kangra there were very few resources for livelihood. There too they worked for Adharmi *julahas* (weavers). The Barads used to supply them *kanghis*, as mentioned earlier. Life was much too hard in the hills. It was difficult to make ends meet there. They therefore shifted to other places. Some of them migrated to Kandhala Juttan in Hoshiarpur district about 200 years back; from there they came to Singdiwala.

These people speak the Pahari language and make their children learn it right from their birth. The language is close to Hindi and Punjabi, e.g., '*Handri ve sag rijhavi de*' (Cook *sag* in the earthen pot). They can also speak Hindi and Punjabi very well; some of them also know Urdu. With locals they communicate in Punjabi only, and Pahari is spoken within the community.

FOOD HABITS

The Barads are both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. They eat every kind of meat, e.g., pig, *baghela*, tortoise, *kumma*, goh, *giddar*, deer, partridge, porcupine, chicken, wild cat, and mutton, etc. They also eat the meat of *katta* (buffalo calf). Earlier when they were nomadic, they used to hunt with the help of dogs. Since wildlife is not available now and to buy meat from the market is out of their financial reach, they are turning vegetarian. Moreover due to

poverty they cannot afford meat daily but cook it only on special occasions.

All types of pulses and green vegetables which are available in the market are eaten by them. They are quite fond of roots and tubers and especially the pulses of *moong* and *masoor*. On special occasions *ladoo*, *jalebi*, *mithe chaul*, *peela karah*, and meat are cooked. They are especially fond of *jalebis*.

Sometimes due to poverty they are unable to cook *dal* as well and they just eat their *roti* with salt and red chilli. If possible the medium of cooking is vegetable *ghee* or mustard oil but often they have to go without it and cook things in water only. They also cook home-made *sevian* and *dalia* (porridge). They eat wheat, maize and rice and whatever cereal is available to them. Whenever there is an opportunity they take non-vegetarian food to their fill. Even their womenfolk eat non-vegetarian food.

Most of them consume liquor, cigarette, *bidi*, *ganja*, *sulfa*, *zarda*, *bhanga*, *charas*, *afeem*, *dode*, etc. As they have to do laborious and strenuous work they have got used to taking drugs but are not addicted to these. Elderly people enjoy smoking *huqqa* (hubble-bubble). Even some elderly women smoke but the new generation avoids it. If Barads catch a cold then they smell *naswar*, otherwise it is not taken. The women are not in the habit of taking drugs. They give two reasons for taking drugs. One, that farmers or landlords provide them many kinds of intoxicants during harvesting season to get a high output from them. And two, as they are malnourished and do not take healthy food because of poverty, they feel a lack of energy. Thus for hard labour they need to take intoxicants.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

Within the community there are no such sections from whom they maintain distance. But they are considered the lowest people by other communities. *Chuhras* and *chamars* (Adharmis) are considered untouchable but Barads are placed below them and are known as *chandals*. They had to tie a branch of a tree (*jhapha*) on their back which could leave prints so that a Brahmin may not tread on their footprints and get polluted. Society felt a severe hatred towards them.

There is no social hierarchy among them, not even an informal feeling of high and low. It is a very small community but consists of various *gotras* like Heer, Kalshi, Sehmar, Garde, Bhirde, Chumhar, Banvait,

Janvait, Chherte, Chandle, Bhundbhal, Kalsotre, Basotre, Natsotre, Khalsotre, Dadamu, Puar, Meene, Seene, Dheere, Jian, Pian, Lusane, Bungard, Sadwan, Seeru, Tular, Bhandle, Kandle, Ghahu, etc.

There is *gotra* exogamy, that is, Barads do not marry their children to the mother's, father's and *dadi's* (paternal grandmother) *gotras*. Earlier, the *nani's* (maternal grandmother) *gotra* was also excluded but nowadays it is not so. Strict tribal endogamy is maintained among them. They marry their children within their own community. Though other communities consider them untouchable, they too do not marry their children with local untouchables or Adharmis such as Chuhras and Chamars.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

They marry within their own community. Traditionally, they do not marry their daughters to people of other castes. If someone does this then he is declared an outcaste. There is a strict tribal endogamy and no space for love-marriages either.

Child marriage is still prevalent among them. When children reach the age of puberty they are married. Earlier, marriages were solemnised at such a young age that sometimes the children used to be in their parents' laps. But now the marriage age has been raised to 14 or 16 years.

Vatte da viah (exchange marriage) is prevalent among them. Earlier there used to be bride price but that is not so anymore. There is no demand for dowry, if at all it is given by choice. If somebody is keen to become a son-in-law then his family has to make the girl's brother their own son-in-law. Due to this act of an exchange there is neither demand for dowry nor is the daughter-in-law tortured since the husband's sister is part of the girl's family. Though they are poor they still believe in *punn da viah*.

After marriage the bride goes to her in-laws' house. But after six to seven months she either starts her own kitchen in the same house or makes another *kulli*. They make partitions in the hut either with curtains or mud walls. They have neither the capacity to build a separate house nor can their parents afford to do that. It is also difficult to make divisions in such small houses.

The *vichola* (mediator), who belongs to the same community, has an important role to play in fixing a marriage. He does tell 'lies' and with all kinds of tricks (*uchi-neevin gull*) tries to impress both families and settle the match. Almost all marriages take place

through a mediator. Dowry is not demanded but given according to one's ability. Divorces are very rare and are possible only with the consent of community panchayat. The practice of divorcee and widow remarriage is prevalent in the community. Widow remarriage takes place within the in-laws' family in a simple ceremony called *chadar pauna*. If there is no suitable male in the in-law's family whom the woman can marry, then she can marry some other needy person who should be either a widower or a divorcee. Virgin girls are not married to divorcees and widowers. Singh, however, gives contradictory information: 'Among the Barars [read Barads], desertion, separation, divorce and remarriage are not allowed' (Singh 2003: 79).

Marriage is a simple affair in this community. There has not been much change in marriage ceremonies. The only thing that has changed is the age of marriage, that too to a small extent. Due to poverty, illiteracy and backwardness, much change has not been possible.

FAMILY

The joint-family system still prevails but it is giving way to nuclear families. The eldest male member of the family is the head of the household. He imposes restrictions which are followed by all members of the family. Traditional values and norms are followed by the community. Women enjoy equal status as men and have equal say in family decisions as well as participating in economic activities. They go on *pheri* (hawking) to sell bangles, *jude* (small brooms), *jhadu* (broom), *innu* (cushioned loop for head to carry load), etc; there is no restriction on their mobility. The Barad community is well integrated. They do not interact with other communities apart from Adharmis and Mazhabis (Chuhra Sikhs) and only have economic relationships with them.

The joking relationships between *jija-sali* and *deor-bhabhi* are common. At the same time there are some relations where such jocularity is to be strictly avoided such as son-in-law and mother-in-law; daughter-in-law and father-in-law. When the researcher wanted to know more details about their relationships some of them replied that 'in reality we do not have time to think of jokes' — '*Gareeb te jawani te haasa kade aunda hi nahin*' (Poor people cannot think of youthfulness and happiness).

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Birth: When a woman gets pregnant she is not allowed to go on *pheri* or for labour. Some iron object and *dhaga-taveet* (amulet) are tied to her arm or put around her neck just to prevent *chhaya* (possession by evil spirits) of *bhoot-paret*. Mango tree leaves are tied at the door. She is not allowed to sit or sleep under a tree. She is given a special diet. In the advanced stage of pregnancy she is not allowed to sleep alone on a separate cot. Water in some earthen pot is always kept at her head under the cot.

The birth of a male child is celebrated. *Gur* (jaggery), *patase*, *laddoo* or *khand* (sugar) is distributed among *kabila* members of that locality. *Dai* (midwife), who belongs to their own community is given a 'suit' (clothes), money, *gur* or sweets. The birth of a girl child is not celebrated. It rather saddens them despite the fact that they need equal number of girls as boys as exchange marriages are prevalent among them. The only thing which is more important is that the lineage continues with the sons. The male child is made to wear *taragi* with glass beads on the thread which is tied around his waist after one month and a quarter of his birth.

On the fifth or the thirteenth day after delivery the ritual of *bahar vadauma* is performed in which *jathera* worshipping is done. If possible then *desti-ghee*, otherwise *dalda* (vegetable *ghee*), is poured on the smouldering cake of cow-dung and a lamp is lit. Both the mother and child are made to bow before it (*matha-tekna*), some *prasad* is also offered to the ancestors, with the rest being distributed among *kabila* members. The ritual is performed outside the *kulli* and this is how the mother and child are brought out of the *jhuggi* (hut). If possible then simple *dal-roti* with sweet rice or *karah* is served to the *vehra* (ward) people. Otherwise only *khand* (sugar) is served.

After this ritual the daughter-in-law is permitted to perform household chores. Due to poverty she cannot afford to take rest for long. After a month and a quarter she starts working outside as well, that is, she goes on *pheri*, otherwise it is difficult to run the household. It is often said that women of this community give birth to their children while working and bring them up that way as well. So says a respondent: '*Bardan dian jananian kumm kardan hi bache jumm dian ne te evein hi rul-khul ke paal lendian ne*'. As a result of this most of the children of this community are malnourished and are physically not active. Due to poverty they get neither a proper diet nor care;

even pregnant women do not get proper diet. Poverty is a curse for this community. While doing labour or going on a *pheri*, women carry their small children on their backs.

Marriage: The ceremony is quite simple though numerous rituals are performed, which are necessary for its solemnisation. In this respect it resembles larger Punjabi society and other tribal communities as well.

The first step in marriage is *mangani* (engagement). Whenever and wherever the mediator finds a suitable match he tries to impress upon both families that no match is better than this. Then he invites the girl's father and relatives to the boy's place. They reach there with sweets and *saugi*, *thhuthhi*, *chhuhare*, *makhane*, etc. Then the father of the girl gives *shagan* of one rupee to the boy and puts a *chhuhara* in his mouth and makes him eat that. Then other relatives also give *salami* to the boy. Food is served to the girl's father and relatives. Then with the consent of both the families the mediator fixes the date of marriage. Most marriages take place within one or two years of the engagement. This ritual of engagement is known as *kudmai*. Before departure, the girl's father or some relative gives *attha* (cotton thread rolled in the shape of 8) to the boy out of which he is supposed to tie *gana* on his wrist during the ritual of *mayian*, three to five days before marriage.

Three days before marriage, *mayian* are imposed on the girl whereas for a boy the limit is five days. It means that both the boy and the girl are not allowed to go out of their house or ward so that evil spirits cannot haunt them. The relatives on both the sides sing songs on this occasion, like:

Chhad de nakey te kahi
Aj teri lado mayian payee.

[Stop watering your crops. Now your loving daughter is getting married.]

and

Vël badhaveen ve munde de taya.
Aj tere bhatije nu mayian layian.

[O' uncle of the groom, give us money, as your nephew is getting married.]

As the *mama* (maternal uncle) ties the *gana* to the boy's wrist, similarly, the mother of the girl or other maternal relatives tie a *gana* to the girl. *Vatna*, a mixture of gram flour, turmeric and mustard oil,

sometimes including curd, is applied to both the girl and the boy. On the day of marriage the ritual of *nuhai* (bath) is performed. The boy's *mama* and the girl's maternal relatives like *mami*, *massi*, etc., give them a bath. After the bath, the *mama* of the bathed boy and girl respectively pick them up from the *chaunki* (wooden platform) where they have taken a bath and shift them to a *dari* (mattress). The boy and the girl are given *shagan* by all those present there.

A formal invitation is sent to the relatives and *vehra* (ward) people on both sides about five to seven days before marriage. *Nanke* (maternals) are given special invitation to which they call *nankiyandi-gath* in which parents of both the girl and boy go to the mother's parents respectively with sweets or *gur* and invite them for the marriage.

The *mama* enjoys special importance. When *nanke* reach there they are welcomed with great warmth and happiness. But the *dadke* also cast aspersions (*sithanian*) on them like:

thode manjian di jad patti ni, ayeen nankian
to which *nanke* respond
sadde budian di jad patti ni, machhrian dadkian.

Here the paternal relatives address the boy or the girl and say that the *nanke* have arrived and spoiled their cots. Similarly *nanke* answer that their old men were spoiled by the naughty women of the *dadke*. Then *dadke* in turn get offended and cast another aspersion:

Ihna khade si ber, jamme si sher,
hun ghurkian den gayian ni Kulwanto terian nankian.
[O' Kulwanto (bride's name), your maternal family ate berries and gave birth to sons like tigers who now scare others.]
They get the answer
Ehna khade si aloo, jamme si chaloo,
hun adeyan te ghumman gayian ni Kulwanto terian dadkian.
[O' Kulwanto, your paternal family ate potatoes and gave birth to the cunning ones. Now they have gone out flirting around.]

A day before marriage all *vehra* (ward) people are invited to dinner. *Dal-roti*, sometimes non-vegetarian food, along with *mithe chaul* or *karah* or some sweets are served to them. If one can afford it then country liquor is also served.

On the same night after dinner *nanke* and *dadke* together perform the ritual of applying *mehndi* (*henna*) on both the boy and girl. They sing folk songs and dance with passion. Due to poverty and the

strenuous work performed by them they hardly have any time to enjoy except for such celebrations.

After *nuhai*, when the boy is dressed up, then the *mama* ties a *sehra* (chaplet) on his turban, and women sing *sehra bunn ve munde deya Mamiya, aj din shagna da* [O' maternal uncle, tie a chaplet around the groom's head, on this auspicious day]. Then all the relatives on both sides give *salami* to the boy and girl in the form of money, clothes and other gifts. Then there is preparation at the boy's place for the departure of the *barat* (wedding party) to the bride's house for the wedding ceremony. Before departure, *jathera* (ancestral) worship is performed. As the *barat* moves the boy's sisters hold *injadi* and relatives sing songs like *bhaine phar le injadi veer di, doli lai aau kise Heer di* (O' sister, hold on to the *injadi* of your brother. He may run away to get his *heer* or beloved). *Injadi* is a piece of cloth, about 2.5 metres, held on one side by the groom and by his sisters on the other, before the departure of the *barat*. The boy then gives money to his sisters: it is called *vel karauna*.

On way to the bride's place *baratis* are served *jalebis*, which they call *paintee*. The whole ceremony is a joint venture of both families. Earlier only men used to go in the *barat* but nowadays some women also accompany them.

When the *barat* reaches the bride's place all elderly people from her side welcome the *barat*. Women welcome them by singing songs like *sadde navain sajan ghar aye, aj sadde bhag bhare*. Then the ceremony of *milni* takes place, in which the father of the groom embraces the father of the bride, similarly, *chacha* with *chacha* and *mama* with *mama*, and so on. No gifts like *khes*, blanket, money or rings, etc. are given, as is the case in other Punjabi marriages. Then the female members of the *barat* go to the bride's home. All are served tea with some sweets and snacks. Earlier people used to serve *shakar-da-sarbat* to *baratis* and even *roti* with *shakar*. Tea was not in fashion at that time. But now people like tea and sweets most of all.

As this community follows the Hindu religion, they perform *phere* to solemnise the marriage. Seven rounds are taken of the sacred fire and a pandit recites mantras at a *bedi*. In each round the groom leads and the bride follows. After the completion of the *phere* there is a ceremony of *bhanda mansana* in which relatives and friends of the girl give different kinds of utensils to the bride. The person who performs this ritual keeps the utensil near the couple and takes a handful of water (*chuli*) and throws it on

the floor. This way that utensil is donated to the bride and she takes it along to her new home.

After this the *baratis* are served lunch which consists of *dal-roti*, *mithe chaul* or *karah*. If someone can afford then meat and other sweets like *ladoo-jalebi* are also served.

After lunch the groom's parents and relatives show *wari* (clothes, makeup items, jewellery, etc.) to the bride's parents and relatives. Then the bride is made to wear the *wari* brought by her in-laws. Then comes the time for *vidai* (departure). The bride's father sends off the *doli* in the presence of his relatives and friends: a very sad moment for all of them. They cry and sing sad songs, *babul aj di rat rakh lai, na dheer nu gharon tor* [O' father, please hold me back for tonight. Do not make me leave your house!]. But the groom's relatives and friends are happy, as if they have won a trophy.

As the *doli* reaches the groom's residence his mother is ready to perform the ritual of *pani-varna*. Relatives start singing songs:

*pani var banne diye mai, banna-banni bahar khade,
sukhan sukhdhi nu eh din aye banna-banni bahar khade.*

[O' groom's mother, sprinkle holy water over the heads of the newly weds. On this is awaited auspicious day, the couple is at your doorstep.]

She makes the couple stand at the door and circulates a *garbi* over their heads, seven times. This *garbi* contains *kachi lassi* (mixture of unboiled milk and water) sugar, green leaves of grass (*dhoob*) or leaves of Pipal, *khammani* or *mauli* tied around its neck. This ritual symbolically welcomes the bride and her entry into the new family.

Next day in the morning after the bath, the newly wedded couple, along with a few women relatives go to a Mango or Pipal tree. The couple is made to take seven rounds of that tree (*Amb* or Pipal *nal phere*.) Women sing, *ral ja tabbar vich, lai lai phere sadde Amb de nal ni*. It is considered auspicious. *Jathera* (ancestral) worshipping also happens near that tree. *Desi-ghee* is poured on a smouldering cowdung cake and the newly weds are made to bow before it (*matha-tekna*). Relatives sing, *Matha tek ke jathere manaune, Barad parivar di vel badhe* [Pay obeisance to the elders so that the Barad family grows.]. The couple also offers *prasad* of *atta-panjiri* to *jatheras* and the rest is distributed among the couple, relatives and friends.

After *jathera* worshipping the groom himself unties his *sehra* and puts it in the bride's lap. The bride then ties this *sehra* to the tree. Then the ritual of *gana kholna* is performed. The bride first unties the *gana* of the groom, then the groom does the same for the bride. Both these *ganas* are then tied to the Mango or Pipal tree. Women sing,

*gana tera kholna manaune jathere ni,
gana tun vi khol de mana lai jathere ni.*

After performing all these rituals the new couple, along with relatives accompanying them, return to their huts. Now it is time for the departure of guests. When all the ceremonies of marriage are over then the close relatives like *nanke* who were staying back are given a warm send off with sweets and gifts. Earlier *nanke* used to stay for a month but now they return after one or two days.

Death: When a child dies s/he is not cremated but rather buried. A three to four feet deep and two to three feet long grave (*kabar*) is dug and the child is buried along with some clothes, toys and *paise* (coins). No other ritual or ceremony is performed on the death of a child.

If a young or elderly person dies then the first to be done is to lay the dead body on the ground. Then it is given the last bath. After that the body is laid on the pyre and an empty *chhaj* (winnowing fan) is kept at the head of the body, and community members put grains and money in it. Then the body is taken to the cremation ground. Before putting it on the funeral pyre, it is kept on the ground and seven *atta-pinnian* or *pede* (wheat flour balls) are kept on its head. Then a pitcher full of water is circulated around the body and is broken on *atta-pede*. This ritual is known as *dhamark*. It symbolises that everything in this world has finished for the dead person (*ann-pani khatam ho gaya*). S/he is no more a part of society and its relationship with society has come to an end. Women cry and sing *keerne*:

*Vē bapu tin sau kulli valeya,
aj teri jind da diva bujh gaya.*

[O' father, the owner of 300 huts, today the lamp of your life has extinguished.]

Or

*Asin tera jagavan ge chirag
tenu krangle sada yaad.*

[We shall light a lamp in your memory, and remember you forever.]

They also pray that the soul may rest in peace and should not disturb the *kabila* people and shower boons on them:

Kabile te sukh vartavin ve bapu mar jan valeya.

On the third day, remains of the dead body (*asthian*) are collected. *Kachi lassi* (mixture of unboiled milk and water) is sprinkled over the *siva*, the cremation site. Then, only *kanis* (those persons who carried the dead body to the cremation ground) collect *asthian* and put them in a small earthen vessel (*kujji*) and tie the same in a small cloth. If they can afford then they go to the Ganga. Otherwise most people immerse these remains in the nearby canal, *nala*, *talab* or *chhapar* (pond). If none is available near their *basti* then they bury them.

On the sixteenth day the ritual of *solvan* is performed in which sixteen earthen *kujjis* (vessels) are filled with water and covered with earthen lids. It is called *kujja bharna*. *Roti* and *prasad* are kept on all the *kujjis*. Then the ceremony of *akhri pani* (last water) is performed. After that all the *kujjis* are distributed among the daughters. The rest of the *prasad* is distributed among friends and relatives. If the family can afford it then simple *masoor dal* and *roti* may be served to the *kabila* people.

Most of the life-cycle rituals of the community regarding marriage and death are similar to those of the Adharmis because of their closeness and interaction with them due to economic reasons.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The main occupation of this tribe was making *kanghis* and these were sold to Adharmi *julahas* (weavers) who used these to weave *khadar* (coarse cloth) on *khaddis*. Due to modernisation and changed technology, handlooms lost their importance and their business of *kanghis* suffered a setback. But some *julahas* are still weaving on *khaddis*, thus some members of this community are still pursuing their traditional occupation.

A few household items like *jude*, *manje* and *charmakhan takle dian* are made by women. These things are sold by them only when they go on *pheri*. *Jude* and *manje* are used to clean the floor whereas *innus* are used to protect the head while carrying a weight that is placed on it. These are mostly used by women while carrying water pitchers from wells or while clearing cow-dung (*gotha-kuda karna*).

After migrating to Panjab, the Barads started making *chhaj* (winnowing fans) and *chhabrian* (baskets) for the agriculturists. *Chhaj* were used to winnow the grains and baskets to store or carry them. With modern technology these things also lost their importance and again their business suffered a setback. Then they switched over to making *murhe* (sitting stools made of reed) and *saff* (mattress).

Another occupation of women is selling bangles, *mehndi* (*henna*) and hairpins, etc. They go from village to village and door to door to sell these items. They mainly visit Adharmi localities. In return, they get grains, wheat flour or money.

They have a close association with the Adharmis. Due to extreme poverty, the ancestors of this community requested Adharmis to give them shelter, that is, to arrange some work for them so that they could get items of daily need in lieu of work. Otherwise their survival was difficult. Thus they chose Adharmis as their *jajmans*. They go to them whenever there is a birth, marriage or death in Adharmi families. Barads also provide domestic help to them. In lieu of this they get grain, money, clothes, etc. Male members of the community also act as *nai* (barber) for Adharmis.

Nowadays most of these people do wage labour. Either they work in cities or go to villages for agricultural work. They are not engaged in any kind of trade because they do not have money for investments. Some of them are also *kabadias* and some go on *pheri* to sell small items of daily use.

As a result of modernisation a few people have engaged themselves in making shutters. Some have also learnt the skill of motor repair, and driving. A few of them also work as masons. Singh provides the details of the working population as per the *Census* (1981):

27.39 per cent are workers (47.35 per cent males and 4.14 per cent females). Of them, 30.75 per cent are engaged in manufacturing and processing, etc. (17.71 per cent in the household industry and 13.04 per cent in other-than-household industry) which is probably indicative of their persisting involvement with their traditional occupation; 18.79 per cent of the workers are returned as agricultural labourers; and 5.60 per cent as cultivators; the balance 44.86 per cent are returned under various other services. (Singh 1999: 148)

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

The Barads have their own panchayat. It operates at two levels: one at the level of each *basti* (local) and the other, *vaddi* (greater)

panchayat, which includes a few villages. In it one member from each basti or village panchayat is taken. There is no fixed number of members. All are chosen unanimously. The only criterion is age and wisdom.

This community is basically very docile. They do not have complex issues to resolve. Petty issues like small feuds and fights, abuse, brawls, or if somebody has abducted another's wife, are settled by the *kabila* panchayat. They never go to the civil courts or the police stations. Initially these issues are taken to the *basti* panchayat. If it is unable to resolve the matter or the people concerned are not satisfied with the decision, then the case goes to the *vaddi* panchayat. Its verdict is final, everyone has to obey it. If someone disobeys then s/he is excommunicated. Nowadays judgements are written and witnesses are also recorded.

For small issues a small fine of five, ten or twenty-five rupees is charged but if it is a case of abduction, rape or molestation then the fine is Rs 225. If the abducted woman agrees to stay with him then she can but the person has to pay the amount as a fine to her husband. Such episodes of abduction, rape and molestation are quite common. If the culprit declines to pay the fine then he is declared an outcaste. If the husband is a drunkard and does not earn anything, and his wife develops a relationship with some other person and starts living with him then that person has to pay a fine to her husband.

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

They have faith in Lord Shiva, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman and 'Mata' but do not have their own temples to worship them. Ancestral worship is prevalent. There is no specific place for worship but *dhoop-batti* (incense-burning) is done in their name. The *kabila* flourishes with their blessings. Ancestors are worshipped on Sunday and on special occasions like birth, marriage, etc. Each family worships its own ancestors. People of different *gotras* have their own *jatheras* to worship, e.g., people of Heer *gotra* have their ancestral place at Nehrian near Amb in district Una (Himachal Pradesh) and the Chandals have their ancestral place at Anandpur Sahib. *Jatheras* are sacred to them as well.

This community also believes in Gugga Pir and Sakhi Sarvar but they are not the followers of Islam. They also offer *rot* (big loaf of wheat) to Lalanwala Pir. Everyone in the community is a follower

of Baba Nakodar Shah. Barads from all parts of the country get together every year (in the month of *Harh*) at Nakodar Shah's *dharmsthala* which is situated 3 kilometres away from Mata Chintpurni towards Sheetla Mata's Mandir.

The people of this community in village Chalupar (Hoshiarpur) have their own Mata to worship. This is not a Hindu deity. According to the respondents, long ago a girl-child was born to a Barad family who died on the same day. The wise men of the community believed that she would come to life, hence kept her body for three days at home. Her arrival was believed to be auspicious and they thought that she was some divine soul who would surely come back to life but she did not. Finally, on the third day they buried her. Subsequently, every year on that day and at the place of burial, the Barads of Chalupar village only organise a *bhandara*. Other communities, however, believe it to be otherwise, of some Hindu deity, which is not the case.

Barads consider this girl Mata, a deity. A red-coloured *dupatta* with *gota kinari* (edging lace) is offered to her. The colour of her flag too is red. Initially this place was a heap of mud where they used to light a *chirag* (lamp) and do *dhoop-batti*, but now it is made of bricks and cement. This land has been donated by the village panchayat. The Mata is not worshipped by the whole community, this practice is confined to the Barads of Chalupar village only (as mentioned earlier). Whenever a small child dies the Barads of this village bury it at this place. Ancestor worshipping is also performed over here; *prasad* and a red *dupatta* are also offered. It is very sacred for the Barad community of this village who hardly worship any other deity. They often say: '*Sada koi dharm nahin hai*', that they have no religion. Cow-worshipping is also practiced by them.

As far as festivals are concerned, they celebrate Diwali, Dussehra, Lohri, Holi, Maghi, Baisakhi, and the Gurburabs of the Sikh *gurus*, etc. But celebrations are simple. They complain, '*Teohar tan paise walian de hunde ne. Garib nu tan roti mil jave ohi usda teohar hai*', that festivals are for the rich only. If a poor person gets two meals a day, that is his festival.

Sukh: If somebody makes a pledge then they offer black ram to their ancestors. Sometimes it is sacrificed and sometimes they let it free by tying a red thread (*mauli*) on its leg. If it is to be sacrificed then they clean its hooves with *kachi lassi* (mixture of unboiled milk and water). Then they sprinkle some water on the ram and if it quivers then it is inferred that the ancestors have accepted it. Then

it is sacrificed in one blow. But if it does not quiver then it is taken as not accepted by the ancestors, hence not sacrificed. Sometimes it takes five to ten days to get through this process. Blood of the ram is not offered to the ancestors. After sacrificing, the meat is cooked and served as *prasad*. People of other communities can also partake of it. It could be a collective affair at the level of community or at the level of *gotra*, or it may simply be a family affair.

INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES

Inter-community relations of the Barads are reflected in their interaction and participation in the social activities of other communities, which are negligible. These people are still considered lower than the untouchables and are known as Chandals. As mentioned above, earlier they were made to tie a branch of a tree on their back so that they did not leave their footprints on which Brahmins may have tread upon and got polluted. They were also not allowed to enter Hindu temples. They were not even permitted to fetch water from the wells of upper castes.

Earlier there was great discrimination against their children in the schools. They were made to sit at the back and were not given any attention. Teachers and other students used to beat them. They also used abusive language for them like *oye Barada; Barad kamini jat; sale kanghi bannh; oye binney vechan wale di aulad* [O' Barad, Barad, the mean caste; bloody comb-makers; O' son of a *binnu* (*innu*) seller, etc]. The discrimination has, no doubt, become less since Independence.

The interaction of the community right from earlier times has only been with Adharmis, but it is purely an economic relationship. They do visit them in their 'highs and lows' (*uche-neeven'ch*). They stand with them in their happiness and sorrow. All small artifacts made by them like *kanghi, jude, innu*, etc., are sold to Adharmis. With other local communities they have economic relations with only those to whom they provide labour either in agriculture or construction and get wages.

Politicians visit them when they need votes. Otherwise nobody ever comes to them. They do not have any MLAs or MPs from their own community but they do have their *panchs* in the village panchayats. Sometimes a sarpanch is also elected from this community. They say: '*Rajniti tan takde lokan di hundi hai, garib nu*

kaun puchhdai’, politics is the trade of the rich only, who cares for the poor. But they do agree that socially, economically and politically they are more privileged now as compared to the pre-Independence era.

According to an elderly man:

all these social, economic and political relations emerge out of needs. As we were initially making combs we came close to *julahas* since they were in need of *kanghis* (combs) to weave cloth on *khaddis*. Thus we were fulfilling their need. Adharmis gave us shelter, otherwise our community could not have survived so long. They gave us some work in their houses. This is how we came more close to them and started offering them services of cleaning utensils, washing clothes, etc. We also act as *nai* (barber), for *gandh pachauna* (to convey messages either of birth or marriage). This is how we could make Adharmis our *jajmans*. We can change our *jajman* at will. There is no restriction as such. No doubt we are lower than Adharmis but we are allowed to take water from their wells as we are not Chamars or Chuharas, rather we are tribal.

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The literacy rate among them is dismally low. Most of them have studied up to fifth and seventh standard only. A few of them have gone up to high school (passed class 10) and are working as peons or homeguards. Some of them have done JBT (Junior Basic Training) courses also and are working as teachers in schools.

Health facilities in dispensaries are negligible. No one attends to them, ‘*Garib di koi puchh-padtal nahin hundi.*’ The medicines are hardly available in the dispensaries. Sometimes they are not provided even quinine (the anti-malaria drug). It is widely assumed in the community that the medicines supplied by the government to the dispensaries are sold to the local chemists.

The facility of drinking water is also insufficient. Mostly there are one or two taps in a *basti*. They cannot afford to have hand-pumps. There are long queues and it take hours to get one bucket of water.

There is no facility of government phones. They are also not in a position to buy their own. There are hardly 10 private phones in the whole settlement (Singdiwala). Postal and telecommunication

facilities are there and they do make use of them. Because of poverty they cannot afford to travel unless necessary thus they share their happiness and sorrows by sending postal cards, which have also become expensive.

There is no electricity in the *kullis* and *bastis*. Few settled ones who live in semi-*pucca* houses do have electricity connections but cannot afford the bills. Some of them are longing to have an electricity connection but the bills are so high (Rs 25,000) that they cannot afford it. Thus, most of them use oil lamps. Some of them cannot afford these as well, so they burn *khori ghah*, a kind of grass, to get light.

The facilities provided by the government are mostly availed by Adharmis only. Panchayats are also partisan. After Independence this is the first time that Singdiwala panchayat has bricklined three lanes and sewage channels of their *basti*. The government has also provided the facility of free electricity but to few households only. The panchayat is also making latrines in this *basti* now.

The Barads complained, 'We do not own any *sath*, marriage place. We cannot show our resentment either as the system is not in our favour. We are just passing time. *Sadi kehra sarkare-darbare puchh hai* (We have no say in the government).'

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Gandhila

Malkit Kaur

According to Ibbetson:

The Gandhilas are a low vagrant tribe, who are said by Elliott to be 'a few degrees more respectable than the Bawarias', though I fancy that in the Punjab their positions are reversed. They wander about bare-headed and bare-footed, beg, work in grass and straw, catch quails, clean and sharpen knives and swords, cut wood and generally do odd jobs. They are said to eat tortoises and vermin. They also keep donkeys, and even engage in trade in small way. (1916: 290)

They call themselves *Gandhile*. No other name was mentioned. Earlier they were nomadic in nature but now they have settled down and live in groups. In Punjab, they are settled at three places — Banur, the surrounding villages of Patran and Shatrana and in the village Mubarkpur (near Zirakpur). According to the people of this community, their forefathers also lived in the same place. Those settled in the villages of Patran and Shatrana mentioned that they were earlier called Bauria.

They said that among the five people of their community who were killed in a fight against Akbar, one was Kesar Mal Gandhila after whose name they came to be known as Gandhila. The cause of the fight with Emperor Akbar was a beautiful girl, not from their community but a Brahmin named Sham Kaur. She had been kidnapped as a child by a prominent person of their community with the intention of marrying her when she grew up. As a woman from another family in their the community had breast-fed this girl, she had to be treated as a sister by the men of this community. Some respondents also mentioned that this girl was rescued by the people of their community from some goons as she pleaded for her safety.

Another girl of the Gandhila community, (who were part of Bauria tribe at that time), named Shedo, who was the same age as Sham Kaur became her friend. Both grew up playing together as friends. Sham Kaur grew up into a very beautiful lady with long silky hair. When Akbar came to know about these two girls, he ordered his soldiers to bring them to him. The Gandhilas took it as insult to give their 'daughters' to the Mughal ruler. Therefore they fought with Akbar's army. Later, they came to Safidon (Haryana), but Akbar's men followed them there also. Many persons of this community, along with both the girls (Sham Kaur and Shedo), were killed while fighting.

Another version of this story goes on to say that when these five men along with the two girls were killed, the remaining community hid in different parts of the forest. During this period, in order to disguise themselves, they started calling themselves Gandhila. Since then, these people have been known as Gandhila. From Safidon these people came to Punjab and settled in different villages. Before this they were nomadic people. The seven people (five prominent men of the community and two girls) who were killed fighting against Akbar's army are considered martyrs and are worshipped by the whole community. The five men killed were Jafaria Mal, Saabal Mal, Jeet Mal, Kor Mal, and Kesar Mal.

In the house of every family in the villages of Patran we found posters of these seven persons, who are worshipped for their bravery and for keeping the honour of the community intact by sacrificing their lives. All those living in Patran and the surrounding villages were aware of their origin though those from Banur and Mubarakpur expressed their ignorance. However, when told about the history as narrated by those from Patran, these people also agreed and also brought out similar posters.

They were declared a criminal tribe and were covered under the Criminal Tribes Act during the British period. The Act remained in force till 1952. They were certified as Scheduled Tribes till 1970, after which their name was included in the list of Scheduled Castes. Those from Banur were not aware of the Criminal Tribes Act having been applied to them, while those from Patran were.

The people of this community now feel uncomfortable with the name Gandhila. They say: 'We do not know why our ancestors

adopted this name. Now if somebody calls us Gandhila we feel ashamed and lowly.' In Punjab they are settled in three places, Banur, Patran and Mubarkpur. In Banur, they are settled in a colony called Kakda *basti*, which has about 50 to 60 households located along two very narrow and congested lanes. They have very small, congested and mixed, *kacha* and *pucca*. Their living area is very filthy. With flies and a foul smell all around, it is difficult to sit there. In Patran, their main concentration is in the following villages (the number of households is given in parenthesis): Arnetu (40–50), Sadharanpur (60–70), Naivala (40–50), Seona (35–40), Momian (25–30), Jonpura (20–25), Bakraha (9), Kartarpur (5), Daroli (3), Galoli (5), Khanauri (10–15) and Kalvanpur (10–15).

In the city of Patran, they have a colony of 50 to 60 households near the octroi post. The third place of settlement is Mubarakpur village, about 25 kilometres from Zirakpur. It has about 70 to 80 households. Earlier they were nomadic but are now settled permanently. They said that they were born at their present place and they have seen their fathers and grandfathers also live there itself.

According to them their population in the state is about 30,000 to 40,000. Their community people also live in Uttar Pradesh, but these people do not have any interaction or relation with them. Those living in Banur and Mubarakpur do not generally marry those living in the villages near Patran. One of the reasons given was the traditional occupation of hunting practised by those from Patran.

These people prefer living in their community only. According to one Jutt Sikh of the village of Seona, these people prefer living as a closed community (*sungad ke rehna pasand karde ne*). He illustrated this by citing the case of a person of this community who had bought a small plot on the outskirts of the village and his family shifted there. But the whole community persuaded him to return to their *basti*. In the village also, they live in very congested areas. In about 90 per cent of the households, the number of rooms per household was one or two. Their language is Pashto, but according to some it is Farsi.

Other people residing in the village said that they do not teach their language to any person and try to keep it secret. When they speak among themselves others cannot understand it, and with

others they speak Punjabi. Now they use Punjabi amongst themselves as well. According to them, their language is similar to that of the Gadaria, Sikligars, Nats and to 'those who sell *shilajeet*'.

FOOD HABITS

Earlier, as a nomadic community, their main occupation was hunting animals, and this was their source of livelihood too. Their main food was meat. They still are non-vegetarian. Earlier they ate tortoises as well but now they eat fish and pork mainly. Now fish is becoming less readily available too. Vegetables are cooked in oil, although they have started using *ghee* as well. Of the pulses, they eat *moong*, *masar* and gram, and wheat, *bajra* and maize as cereals. They also use garlic, onion and ginger. About 90 per cent of the men take alcohol, *zarda* and smoke *bidi* but they do not take *paan* and *naswar*. Alcohol is purchased from the market and illegal distilling of liquor is also done at home. They do not eat beef, it is forbidden. On special occasions they cook rice and sometimes meat as well.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

The community is divided into different *gotras*, which are exogamous. Some of the popular *gots* (*gotra*) are Khedriye, Lorviye, Karediye, Mataniye, Chhuan, Titarmariye, Bhandare, Mandaal, and Kunwaar. For marriage purposes, they leave two *gots*. Those in Mubarakpur and Banur said that they were all Chhuan (may be Chauhan) and they do not consider any *got* while arranging marriages. Most of the marriages have taken place between those from Banur, Mubarakpur and Sular (from Ambala in Haryana). Very few marriages (only four and five in Banur) have taken place with those from Patran and its surrounding villages. Earlier, there used to be a *nambardar* of each *got*. People of different *gots* light earthen lamp (*diya*) on different days of the week.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

These people marry within their own community and marriages are arranged by a mediator who is also from their community. The message of the marriage is carried by the sister and the brother-in-law of the boy or the girl to their respective relatives. Nowadays, some of

them have started performing the Anand Karaj marriage ceremony under the influence of Sikh religion (most of their villages in Patran are dominated by Sikhs). Earlier they practiced exchange marriages (*vatte-satte da viah*), but now its frequency has declined. Those from the Patran villages said that usually a *pandit* is called to perform the *phere* but sometimes the son-in-law can also do this job.

Widow remarriage is prevalent. Levirate marriage is prevalent only with the younger brother-in-law. Child marriage was prevalent earlier, but now the age of marriage has increased. All respondents mentioned 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys, perhaps by listening to radio and watching the television they know that this is the minimum legal age for marriage. But cases of child marriages are still there, as we were told by other people. No cases of divorce have been reported. Dowry is prevalent but not demanded. The impact of Sikh religion was evident in most of the Sikh dominated villages in terms of conducting marriage rituals. A decline in the incidence of exchange marriage has been reported as well. Now some NGOs in the Patran villages are also helping them to conduct marriage ceremonies. Names are noted down at the 'club' and then the marriage ceremony is performed. They do not mind performing the marriage ceremony, Sikh or Hindu. 'People from the "club" can perform it in any manner, we do not mind,' they said.

FAMILY

Families are mainly nuclear and male-dominated. The number of such nuclear families is increasing. Respect for elders is expected and they are obeyed. For women, relations to be avoided are with the father-in-law and elder brother-in-law. Playful relations exist between *deor-bhabhi* and *jija-sali*. Property is inherited by sons only. Nowadays respect for elders is declining and they are not being looked after properly. Women have lower status as compared to men. They are expected to not interfere when men are discussing matters. The final decision is that of men, but women are also respected. Women observe *pardah* in the presence of the father-in-law and the elder brother-in-law. Earlier, *pardah* was observed before the son-in-law also, but it is not so anymore. One Jutt Sikh male informed us that when they go out, both husband and wife walk together and whenever there is any conflict with other people, the women are always ahead of men, fighting at the front.

Household work is the sole responsibility of women. In Banur most women were engaged in making brooms from date palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) leaves. And once these brooms are ready, these are taken by men to sell. Earlier, men used to take these brooms on donkeys to different villages and would return home after four or five days once all the brooms were sold. Now they take these brooms on bicycles. They mentioned, 'Maybe because we used to take brooms on donkeys to sell we are called Gandhila'. Women also go to work along with the men and, sometimes, go for agricultural labour, either alone or with men.

The community lives in one place with very little interaction with others. Members of other communities reported that 'They live as one group and help each other in different situations'. Their interaction with other communities is limited mostly to economic relations. In politics also their participation is limited only to casting votes. We came across only one leader of the community in Patran. At other places, their leaders were from other communities like Sansis, Harijans, etc.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Birth: During childbirth, in earlier times, the mother was kept confined to a hut which was built separately for her. The mother and child were kept there for 40 days and no man was allowed to go there and see the child till that period was over. Now this practice has been stopped.

Namkaran (naming ceremony) the child is done by the family members. Earlier they had Hindu names, but now they have started using 'Kaur' and 'Singh', under the influence of Sikh religion. But even now the use of 'Ram' and 'Singh' is common in the male names.

The first hair cut from the child is offered at the temple of Kaithalwali Mata along with sweets prepared from wheat flour, *ghee* and sugar (known as *gulgule*). This ceremony, called *sukh luhana*, is performed only in the case of a male child.

Marriage: The community performs the wedding according to Hindu ceremonies. *Phere* is the main ceremony, for which a *diya* is kept and around this on the four sides, four nails, according to some seven, are fixed in the soil. Around these nails, seven rounds of cotton thread are tied. A *pandit* is not called for performing the *phere*. The family members themselves chant 'Ram, Ram', and the *phere* are performed. The residents of Banur area are more under

the influence of Hindu religion and marry with those from Mubarakpur and Sular (in Ambala, Haryana). They mostly have Hindu names like Soma, Ram, Sharvan, etc. Those from Patran and its surrounding villages perform Anand Karj and use Kaur and Singh with their names. In Patran, if a pandit is not available, the elder son-in-law officiates the *phere*, but in Banur and Mubarakpur this is done by an elder from the community. For the first three *phere*, the groom leads the bride, after which he digs out two nails with his toe. After this, the bride leads in the remaining three *phere* and digs out one nail with her toe. In the last *phere*, again the groom leads and digs out the last nail.

Death: Dead bodies are cremated. On the third day of cremation, the remains of the body are collected (*phull chugne*). Earlier they used to take these remains to Haridwar for immersion in the Ganga. But now those from Patran take the remains to Behr Sahib near Khanauri, where there is a temple. Those from Banur and Mubarakpur go to Haridwar. They reported that they have their own Pandit, Veebhan, there who performs all the necessary ceremonies. *Bhog* ceremony is performed on the eleventh or thirteenth day and sometimes on seventeenth day. Usually it is the thirteenth day for a man and eleventh day for a woman. At the *bhog* ceremony 12 small earthen pots (*kujje*) are kept with cooked rice on top of these. Then all the pots are emptied either by the son or husband while facing the sun. According to some respondents, the *bhog* ceremony is also performed at a common place outside their houses by taking 12 handfuls of water (*chulian*). Usually the *bhog* ceremony is performed by a *pandit*, but if he is not available then any elder of the community can perform it. Cooked rice is distributed after the *bhog*.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

When these people came to Punjab their principal occupation was hunting and fishing. Only men used to go hunting, not women. If a person fell sick, his share of the hunt was still given to him. A widow was given two shares from the hunted animal. They mentioned that because of their occupation of hunting, some feeling of un-touchability against them existed earlier as well. They also used to rear goats, besides making and selling brooms.

Now, since the forests have vanished, these people have started working on farms, in *mandis* and at shops. In Banur and Mubarakpur area, they make brooms from date leaves. In all the

houses, one can see heaps of date palm fronds. Most women are engaged in making brooms and once ready, these are taken by men on bicycles for selling.

In the villages of Patran most of them were working as labourers. They perform wage labour but do not work as *seeri*, as reported by some persons from the Jutt Sikh community. They prefer working as labourers with more freedom than as permanent workers employed by farmers. They do all kinds of labour. It was also mentioned by village people in Patran that they go to work wherever they can find employment and even travel long distances. They are considered hard-working people.

Some men in Banur also work in music bands. They play musical instruments like *been*, *chimta*, tambour, etc. They go to marriages and other functions to play music. Some men in Banur are working as hawkers and their women work as domestic maids cleaning houses etc. Some men are working in mandis. They also work in shops and as labourers in construction work.

SOCIAL CONTROL

Earlier these people had their own panchayats. The chief was called *nambardar* and was responsible for resolving petty conflicts and other issues. All major issues or conflicts were settled by the members of the panchayat. The most common type of deviant behaviour was related to eve-teasing, quarrels and theft. Any decision taken by the *nambardar* was accepted and followed. Punishment was given in the form of a penalty in cash and sometimes physically too, like putting a weight on the head and not removing it till a confession had been elicited. Sometimes the person was half-buried in sand. But now the role of these traditional panchayats has diminished and people have started going to police stations. But still, often when a problem arises, five or six elders will sit together and resolve the issue.

Many respondents stated emphatically that they are not involved in any kind of quarrel, conflict or theft, etc. In their words: 'We do not pluck even mustard leaves for *sag* from a field without the permission of the farmer.' It may be due to their categorisation as a criminal tribe by the British that they now want to prove that they are not criminal. In Banur there is no FIR (First Information Report) registered against any person of their community at the police station.

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

They follow the Hindu religion. They worship the five martyrs who sacrificed their lives protecting the honour of the community. Sham Kaur and Shedo are also worshipped by them. In addition to these, they worship Gugga Jahar Pir. Those from the Patran area visit Safidon Mandi on Dussehra, but those from Banur and Mubarakpur do not go there. When a wish is fulfilled, then a *bakra* (ram) is sacrificed and five bones of that *bakra* are taken out. Then they bow their head to their ancestors and offer these five bones to them. They light a *diya* (small earthen lamp) either on Sunday, Thursday, or Tuesday, depending on the *got* they belong to. Each *got* has a separate day for lighting. They perform *sharad* (ancestor worship), which is called *humman dena*, in which rice or *hakwa* is used for *bhog*. They also go for pilgrimage to Seekh Pathri, *Gugga Mari* in Bangar (Rajasthan), and Naina Devi. In some households posters of Hindu gods and goddesses are kept and they bow before them.

Now some of them have come under the influence of Sikh religion. Hence they perform their marriage and other ceremonies according to Sikh rites. Many of them have also become followers of Sirsewala Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and some have become Radhasoamis. They also visit the Sheetla Mata Mandir in Seel village near Raipur Rani.

INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES

These people live in groups and no household can be found outside that. Earlier, they hardly interacted with other people. It has now increased but is still limited to economic relations. They are happy with their own people. In politics their participation is limited to casting the vote. Their political leaders are mostly from other communities. The community has had to tolerate injustices as they had been labelled 'criminal'. They consider it a major reason for their backwardness.

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Not much of a developmental impact can be seen. These people are living in very dirty, congested surroundings, full of filth and smell. People from other communities also remark that these people do

not keep their surroundings clean. That is why there is a large incidence of tuberculosis among them.

Illiteracy is rampant. The new generation is going to schools, but even they drop out at the middle school or matriculate level. They take to wage labour. Girls are still more disadvantaged. Their level of literacy is very low. Even when they go to school, the majority of them drop out. Only a few study up to primary or at the most, middle level. Among the entire population only five or six persons are in government service.

Earlier they used to do their own medical treatment using various herbs found in forests. But now they are dependent on private medical practitioners as in government hospitals often they do not get medicines. It is also easy, moreover, to approach private doctors. They do believe in *jadu-tona*, evil-spirit and evil-eye.

They have a supply of drinking water. In Banur and Mubarakpur, there are common taps. In Patran area, hand-pumps and taps are the sources of drinking water. Electricity is available in all the houses.

Earlier, the means of communication available were poor. A respondent of Patran remarks: 'It was only in the last 15 to 20 years that we came to know that people are also living in Banur and Mubarakpur'.

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Nat

Deepak Kumar

'Nat' is derived from the Sanskrit word *nata*, which refers to a dancer. It is a community of people that have been traditionally associated with dance and acrobatic stage-shows, performed as a source of livelihood. Popularly, they are known as 'rope dancers'. According to E.H.A. Blunt, 'this community included all those non-descript vagrants who wander about from country to country, making a living' (quoted in Singh 2003: 334). Similarly, E.W. Crooke writes that 'the problem of the origin and etymological affinities of the Nats is perhaps the most perplexing with the whole range of the ethnography of northern India...' (quoted in Singh 1998: 2596). However, the community itself believes in a warrior ancestry, traceable to the Gour-Thakurs of Gujarat, descendants of the legendary Amar Singh Rathod. Crookes also 'refers to them as a tribe of so-called dancers, acrobats and prostitutes who are found scattered all over the province' (*ibid.*). H. A. Rose divides them into categories or classes: 'those whose males only perform as acrobats, and those whose women, called "Kabutri" perform and prostitute themselves' (Ibbetson and Rose 1970: 164). For J. F. Watson and J. W. Kaye, 'Nats correspond to the European gipsy tribes, and like them, have no settled home' (1868: 110). Watson and Kaye describe them as 'errant thieves and their principal occupations are conjuring, dancing and tricks of legerdemain' (*ibid.*: 105). Dacoity was their 'hereditary profession'.

The Nats are spread across central and northern India. In Punjab, the *Census* of 2001 puts their population at 1,071 (741 rural and 330 urban). They are concentrated in the districts of Amritsar, Ferozepur, Sangrur, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar. They have migrated mainly from Kathiawad in Gujarat and Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Those from Kathiawad cite natural disasters like earthquakes as the reason for their displacement, while those from Saharanpur came in search of employment and better economic opportunities. Some of

their family members from these parts make occasional trips to Punjab during the months of *Chet Vaisakh*, the peak season for agricultural labour.

The decreasing interest of Nats in their acrobatics in the wake of modern sources of entertainment has made these people redundant and made their struggle for livelihood more arduous. They are extremely poor, and live in *jhuggis* (huts) they build for themselves on the periphery of the villages, or along roads and railway tracks. They speak Gujarati amongst themselves, but with locals they speak Hindi and Punjabi.

FOOD HABITS

Vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism is not much of an issue for the community except that there are certain days when non-vegetarian food is prohibited, namely Mondays and Fridays. These days are considered sacred by the community, hence the intake of flesh is prohibited. In fact, on Monday they observe a fast in the name of Lord Shiva and on Friday for Santoshi Mata. Besides that they also avoid non-vegetarian food during *Navratra*.¹ For the remaining days there are no prohibitions. They relish goat meat, chicken and fish.

Consumption of intoxicating drinks is prevalent among all the adult members of the community, including women. Boys are generally allowed to drink once they are 30 years of age and women after marriage. From food items to the use of cooking fuel, choices are determined by economic factors rather than anything else. They do not use gas cylinders for cooking but use earthen hearths. Dry wood and cowdung cakes (*pathian*) form the fuel for cooking. The food they consume is mostly cooked in mustard oil. Garlic (*lasan*) and onion (*piyaz*) are frequently used for cooking.

Their staple diet includes lentils, particularly *moong* and *arhar* dals, and seasonal vegetables, mainly potatoes. Though *sag* was also reported as their preferred food item it was later discovered to be a generic term for all types of green vegetables.

On festive occasions, they prepare boiled rice. Though they do not fuss about the distinction between vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism, they do make exceptions regarding consumption of beef and pork, which are strictly prohibited. Another eatable drawing severe sanctions is *paan*. Use of *zarda* and *bidis* is quite prevalent among both men and women.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

There are no major social divisions. However, the community is segmented along *gotras*. Only three *gotras* are considered high by them: Mahakarhia, Gaurhna and Mota. These are considered superior and sacred by the members of the community; these persons do not marry with the rest. The *pradhan* or chief is also from these *gotras* only. He must be the eldest son.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

The usual reported age for marriage is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. However, the actual age of marriage is a few years less, both for boys and girls. Mate selection for the prospective groom or bride is a community affair. Love marriages are prohibited. Permission of the community members is necessary before consummating any marriage. Marrying outside one's community is strictly prohibited. While selecting a mate, two *gotras* from mother's side and three from the father's side are excluded. Proposals for marriage are initiated by the groom's family. Exchange marriages are allowed, but marriage with brother-in-law's sister is not allowed. This fact, is stated as a custom opposed to that of the Muslims, highlighting allegiance towards Hindu religion.

No dowry is given in marriage. In fact, it is considered bad to ask for it or even to offer it. Only some clothes are given to the girl as a gift from her mothers' family (*nanke*) which is referred to as *charhava*, meaning offerings.

Divorce is allowed but only under special circumstances and that too not without the permission of the caste panchayat. Widow remarriage is also allowed both in case of men and women, with due permission of the panchayat.

The levirate form of widow remarriage is prevalent, but the widow can be married only to her younger brother-in-law not to the elder one. To resolve marital disputes and problems the people may, take recourse to the community panchayat and not to modern institutions of the state, like civil courts or police station. The preferred form of residence is neo-local, but the new *jhuggi* (house) is generally set up adjacent to the groom's parents'.

Three significant changes experienced in the recent past have been reported by the respondents. First, the age of marriage has increased drastically from earlier times when the children used to

be married at a tender age. Second, with the rise in marriageable age the practice of *muklawwa* has also altered. Earlier *muklawwa* used to be sent after 15 years but there is no time gap these days. Moreover, *suhaag raat* used to take place after two days but nowadays it happens after just one day. Third, another custom that has changed is the number of days spent in celebrating the marriage. Earlier, with long distances to travel, the groom and his relatives used to stay for three days at the bride's place. There was much festivity and celebrations then. Due to faster means of communication available today, the groom and his party return home with bride on the same day.

FAMILY

Families are well-knit units in themselves and numerous families camp together wherever they settle in a region. They follow patriarchal norms. The eldest male is the head of the household. Elder men are considered wise and their suggestions are heeded to in all matters. Even elder women are respected and their opinion is sought on various issues and is seldom overlooked. Women also accompany the men when they move from place to place displaying their acrobatic skills. Their troupe typically consists of an elder lady along with children, both boys and girls, ranging between four to fourteen years of age. The girls in the troupe are trained under the tutelage of this lady. After marriage, the girls stay at home and only those who have to train and help younger girls move with the troupe. So in most cases, the whole family moves together, from place, to place in search of a livelihood.

Playful relationships exist between *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) and *deor* (younger brother-in-law), and between *sali* (sister-in-law) and *jjja* (brother-in-law). However, these dimensions of the relationships get manifested only on special social occasions, like marriage, etc. Married women are supposed to wear a veil (*pardah*) in the presence of the father-in-law or elder brother-in-law. Whatever meager property the family owns, it is divided equally between the sons. Daughters are not given any share in the property.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Birth: The birth of a child is celebrated differently for boys and girls. In case of the former, birth is announced by drum beating

(*dholki*). The drummer takes a round of the whole settlement announcing the arrival of the son. In case of the birth of a girl, a kitchen plate (*thali*) is beaten by someone standing in one place. Liquor is served among friends and the relatives to celebrate the birth of a son. Nowadays some people serve sweets too to mark the occasion. A *nimbu* (lemon) is also tied at the door of the house where a child is born.

The new born child's hairs are not shorn for a few days. Usually the first hairs are shaved after five days and it is shorn according to a prevailing custom. The shorn hairs are called *suche waal*, meaning pure hair. The custom is to shave the hair and hand them over to child's *phuphi* (father's sister), who offers these to the Ganga at Haridwar. The hairs are kept inside two cooked fried wheat cakes (*pooris*) along with a rupee-and-a-half before being released into the river.

Besides this, five *pooris* each are offered as *prasad* to all the Hindu deities. Later on, the child's *phuphi* is given a *sari* by the child's parents. Nowadays, because of the rising cost of travel the hairs are very often released into in a nearby drain or rivulet.

Marriage: Marriage ceremonies too are performed as per Hindu customs. It is ritualised through Gujarati *phere*. According to this custom, four *gadbis* are placed in four corners of a square circumscribing the sacred fire (*havan-kund*). A white thread is tied around these *gadbis* forming the boundary of a square within which the bride and the groom have to take seven *phere* around the sacred fire. During the *phere* the groom walks in front followed by the bride. The groom's family puts some money in *gadbis* according to their economic ability. This money is later given to the *pandit* performing the marriage ceremony. He is a Hindu and could be of any caste.

The groom usually reaches the spot of marriage on a mare and it is his *mama* (maternal uncle) who helps him mount it. Similarly, in the case of the bride, when she has to leave her parents' house accompanying the groom, she uses a palanquin into which her *mama* helps her.

Death: Nats nowadays cremate their dead according to Hindu tradition. However, about 30 years back they used to bury them. The cause for this drastic shift is given as the rising cost of land and the inavailability of burial sites. However, the explanation sounds insufficient and unconvincing. The burnt remains of the

dead are collected from the cremation site on the third day. This practice is referred to as *phull chugna*. However, the remains are not collected on Tuesdays and Fridays. The remains are then taken to Haridwar and released into the Ganga. The members of the family bring along the sacred water from the river (*Ganga jal*) which is sprinkled in all the *jhuggis*. The *bhog* ceremony is performed after 13 days with the recitation of the *Ramayana*. Some people perform the ceremony after 10 days itself.

Two major changes have been recorded with regard to the rites of passage of death. Earlier the dead were buried and not cremated as it is done today. Second, in the event of the death of an old person the family used to celebrate by serving liquor to the community members and also pouring it on the burial site of the deceased. Drums were also beaten on such occasions.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The community does not own any land and hardly owns any other fixed assets either. The only source of livelihood is their acrobatic skill, which they learn from an early age. The traditional occupation of the community is performing acrobatic feats and they used to earn a livelihood by staging such performances at various places. Their job demanded frequent travel from town to town and village to village. Their shows used to attract large crowds in the past, but with the spread of television and other forms of entertainment, their traditional art now has fewer takers. As a result, some of them have tried shifting to new occupations to ensure a regular income. In Punjab, they have diversified their occupation by taking up various other jobs which are not only more remunerative but also are a steady source of income. Many of them now work with marriage bands.

The economic condition of a majority of the members of this community is very poor. Following their traditional occupation, which requires them to remain on the move, there is very little formal education that their children could get. That is why their children could get no training for modern occupations. This fact militates strongly against their life chances. Another problem that they face in continuing with traditional occupations is that at the prime of their life they retire from active performances and are not able to take up other jobs for lack of expertise.

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Theft, eve-teasing, marrying outside one's caste, seeking dowry, and gambling are considered some of the most virulent vices among them. Such deviant acts are reported to and kept under check by an elected body of the community. This body consists of four members elected by the community at the local level. These members are usually the eldest and the wisest of all. Their election is done through consensus. The elected body has a leader called the *chaudhary* (headman) or *pradhan* (chief). The leadership, as mentioned earlier, travels from generation to generation within a few *gotras*. All matters of dispute are resolved and attended by this body. Earlier no one could dare defy its authority but now some people do approach the police or the civil courts. There is no *sabha* or body of Nats at the state or national level.

Some forms of sanctions imposed against the defaulters and deviants are public rebuke, imposition of fine, physical beating, and excommunication. The punishment is shared by all the members of the community. The fine could be either in cash or in kind. The guilty person is asked to purchase some liquor bottles and serve it to all the members of a settlement. In some cases five thrashings with shoes are also given. Though the quantum of punishment may sound small to an outsider, the significance of such token punishments when administered in public has a severe effect on the members and has been reported by them to be highly effective. On the other hand, to encourage certain acts and practices of the persons, the members of the community are given *ladoos* and *patase* (sugar bubbles).

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

Nats are avowedly Hindus. They believe in the practices and traditions of Hindu religion and abide by them. They also consider themselves to be the descendants of Raja Amar Singh Rathod hence call themselves Rathod-Thakurs, a respectable Rajput clan. They also worship their ancestors and perform rituals to propitiate them. They also perform *masya*, a popular form of performing rituals in the name of ancestors in the Hindu tradition. They pray daily but usually do not visit temples.

They have adorned their houses with posters of Hindu gods and goddesses. Besides the major gods and deities of the Hindu religion, they also worship their own Guru, Baba Moti Ram. His shrine is

situated in Lahore. Every year after Holi, a *mela* is held in the name of Baba Moti Ram at Lahore. The *mela* is also held at village Thai Kheri in the Muzzafarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh. Every alternate year Baba Moti Ram's *mela* is also held at Saharanpur in the month of May. On this occasion *langar* (community food) is also served to everybody. *Langar* consists of simple rice and lentils. Besides worshipping the Baba and Hindu gods and deities, they also visit various pilgrimage sites of the Hindus, which they say has a profound effect of religion on their day-to-day life.

INTER-COMMUNITY LINKAGES

Social relations of the community are strong within but with outsiders these are limited and formal by virtue of their traditional occupation. They do not have their own means of transport and have to depend on public transport. They have also developed relations of mutual support and benefit with electricians, stage managers and other artists. These relations are formal and utilitarian and do not get extended to family ties. They practice strict rules of endogamy.

They often provide physical support at times by participating in rallies and canvassing when paid. Almost all of them are registered voters. Despite being devout Hindus, some Nats in Punjab regularly visit *gurudwaras* too.

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The education level of the community is dismally low. According to a respondent: 'Only about 30 per cent of them are educated and that too in Anganwadi schools'.² Their dropout rate is very high owing to the nature of their occupation. Poor education is a big hurdle in exploiting new economic opportunities.

They generally depend on subsidised government hospitals for medical help, that too is for minor treatments only. They do not have water facilities in their homes. They have to fetch water from a nearby hand pump or a municipal tap that could be as far as half a kilometre. They do not have electricity either though they light their huts with *kundi* connections.

Employment levels among the members is also dismal. The majority of them are self-employed and practice their traditional occupation. Only some have shifted to marriage bands. Employment in the government sector is nil. To make matters worse, their traditional occupation is also on the decline.

Most of them use public telephones to keep in touch with their relatives outside the region. Some of them collectively own a mobile set as the nature of their job keeps them on move. This also helps them in their business for bookings, etc.

They have got no benefits from the state under housing schemes. They have also not been issued yellow cards or ration cards for purchasing subsidised food items.

NOTES

1. This celebration (*Nav* = nine and *ratri* = night) for nine days invokes nine incarnations or forms of Goddess Durga, hence also known as Navdurga, such as Shailaputri, Bharmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skanda Mata, Katyayani, Kaal Ratri (Shubhamkari), Maha Gauri, and Siddidatri. The *puja* begins on the first day of Ashvin and continues on for nine days invoking each incarnation in the order listed above. Durga is a personification of power or *shakti*. She is known by several names such as Kali, Lalita, Chandika, Bhavani, Ambika, Ashtabhuj, etc. She punishes the wicked and wields weapons like the *trishul* (trident), *chakra* (wheel), *parshu* (axe), and *talwar* (sword) in her hands besides other things. She rides a lion. Navratras are followed by Dussehra on the tenth day. These nine days are considered auspicious for marriage, buying property, starting new projects, etc.
2. Anganwadi is a part of the Integrated Child Development Project of the Government of India. The key objective of this programme is to cater to the developmental needs of children in the age group of three to six years. Pre-school education aims at ensuring the holistic development of the children as well as offers them a learning environment which is conducive for the promotion of the social, emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic development of the child.

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Sansi

Harvinder Singh Bhatti

The Sansis are a major group among the former criminal tribes. Numerically also it is one of the largest communities. Earlier accounts of the Sansi testify that when these were nomadic they moved around in North Indian states for livelihood following the seasons. The process of their settlement coincided with the colonisation of Punjab and the northern region.

The Sansis have not attracted much academic attention, only a few scholars have given descriptive accounts of the various aspects of their life. Notable among these are D. Ibbetson and H. A. Rose (1883, rpt. 1970, vol. III: 362–79), S. S. Bedi (1979), Sher Singh Sher (1965), and Dariya (2006). The earliest account, by Ibbetson and Rose, is based on the *Census* reports of 1881. Later accounts are more or less based on these reports.

The Sansis are settled in various villages of Punjab but continue to maintain a distinct social identity. Though large-scale changes have taken place since the times of Ibbetson and Rose, some essential characteristics still remain which distinguish them from others.

They believe that they belong to the earliest period of Indian civilisation, giving evidence from the *Mahabharata* and folklore about Sainsar Bau. Their first written account is available in *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* (1970). It says:

The Sansis are the vagrants of the centre of the Punjab, as the Aheris are of its south-eastern portions. They are most numerous in the Districts around Lahore and Amritsar and are also found in considerable numbers in Ludhiana, Karnal and Gujrat. They trace their origin from Marwar and Ajmer, where they are still very numerous. They are essentially a wandering tribe, seldom or never settling for long in any one place. They are great hunters, catching and eating all sorts of wild animals, both clean and unclean, and eating carrion. They keep sheep, goats, pigs, and donkeys, work in grass and straw and reeds, and beg; and their women very commonly

dance and sing and prostitute themselves. They have some curious connection with the Jat tribes of the Central Punjab, to most of whom they are the hereditary genealogists or bards; and even in Rajputana they commonly call themselves *bhart* or 'bards'. They are also said to act as genealogists to the Dogras of Ferozepur, the Rajputs of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur, and the Sodhis of Anandpur. (Ibbetson and Rose 1970: 362)

He further gives demographic details as,

About 11 per cent are returned as Mussalmans and a very few as Sikhs. The rest are Hindus, but they are of course outcastes. They trace their descent from one Sans Mal of Bhartpur whom they still revere as their Guru, and are said to worship his patron saint under the name of Malang Shah. They are divided into two great tribes, Kalka and Malka, which do not intermarry. They have a dialect peculiar to themselves. (Ibid.)

They also elaborate the official view about this group:

The Sansis are the most criminal class in the Punjab; and they are registered under the Criminal Tribes Act in nine districts. Still, though the whole caste is probably open to suspicion of petty pilfering, they are by no means always professional thieves. (Ibid.: 363)

They quote what the Punjab Government wrote in 1881:

Their habits vary greatly in different localities. A generation ago they were not considered a criminal class at Lahore, where they kept up the genealogies of the Jat (read Jutt) land-holders and worked as agricultural laborers. In Gurdaspur, on the other hand, they are notorious as the worst of criminals.

Where they are professional criminals they are determined and fearless, and commit burglary and highway robbery, though their gangs are seldom large. The thieving Sansis are said to admit any caste to their fraternity on payment, except Dhedhs and Mihngs; and the man so admitted becomes to all intents and purposes a Sansi. (Ibid.: 363)

According to an old man of the community:

We belong to an earlier mythological period. Our ancestors were the contemporary of warrior-*rishi* Parshu Ram. Our ancestor, Sainsar Bau had conflict with Parshu Ram. They fought with each other.

Sainsar Bau was defeated and compelled to retreat to the forests. As a consequence his progeny became nomadic.

There is some confusion created by some writers, especially by Sher Singh Sher (1965), about the actual position of Sansis in Punjab. Ibbetson and Rose and later, Bedi, had clarified that the Sansis should not be confused with a Jat (Jutt) clan named Sansi to which perhaps Maharaja Ranjit Singh also belonged. Ibbetson and Rose have given the following account of this group:

A Hindu Jat clan (agricultural) found in Montgomery and Amritsar. In the latter District Raja Sansi a village 7 miles from Amritsar is the ancestral home of the Sindhanwalia family which claims Rajput descent and belongs to this *got*. They are also found in Gujranwala. In Gujranwala they are described as an offshoot of the Bhatti clan and they take their name from one Sansi, whose great-grandson, Udrat, came from Bhatner in Hindustan 18 generations ago, and adopted a pastoral life in that district. (1970: 362)

In their conversations, most of the respondents emphasise that they do not belong to the lower caste rather they are originally from a warrior tribe that has been wronged by history. An old man stated: '*Sadde vadaroo tan raje see par kise di een na manan karke sanoo janglan vich bhatkana pia*'. That their ancestors were kings, since they did not accept anyone's subordination they had to suffer in the wilderness. Various legends popular among them describe their origin. These are based on information given by various informants and the accounts have been noted by scholars like Ibbetson and Rose, Bedi, Sher, and Dariya.

In Sialkot it is said that once a Raja of the Punjab expelled his daughter from his city.

Wandering in the waste lands she gave birth to Sansi, who became a noted freebooter and had two sons, Bhidu and Mahla, from whom are descended 23 Sansi *gots* or *gotras*. (Ibid.: 363)

But in Gujrat (now Pakistan)

they claim descent from Raja Sans Mal, a nomad of the Lakh Jangal. From Mahla, his eldest son, sprang the 12 *gots*, while Bhidu, his second son, had 11 sons, from whom are descended the Kikans and Bhedkuts. Sans Mal, Mahla an Bhidu are all propitiated as deified ancestors prone to exert an evil influence on the descendant who incurs their displeasure. (Ibid.: 364)

According to the Jhang version

The Sansis are of Punwar Rajput origin and are chiefly found scattered over Western Rajputana. They are descendants of Sansmal, whose wife was barren but obtained from a *faqir* a promise of offspring on the condition that she should beg from Hindus and Muslims alike. She then bore Beda, three years later Mala, and lastly a daughter. Sansmal was excommunicated for begging, and his son Beda followed his father's calling, but Mala took to grazing cattle. One day Beda wished to cut a stick, but as he had no knife, Mala cut it. The brothers then quarrelled over the stick, whereupon one Dhingania, a Nat of the Jharia tribe, intervened and decided that Mala should pay his brother five pice for the stick. Sansmal's daughter eloped with Dhingania, and her parents refused to receive her, but relented on his agreeing to furnish Jharia brides to Beda and Mala. In addition to their 23 sons the two brothers had several daughters, but Dhingania's 13 sons also founded 13 *gotras*, so that there are in all 36 Sansi gotos or gotras.

The Sansis of Gujranwala and Gujrat are Muhammadans as are a few in Sialkot; but of the north, in Jammu, and south, in Lahore, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, they are Hindus (ibid.: 366). According to Sher Singh Sher (1965), the population of Sansis in Punjab according to the 1951 *Census* was 18,114 (Punjab — 15,000, Pepsu — 3,114). In 1981 their number rose to 61,986 — rural 54,727 and urban 7,259.

Presently their main concentration is in Ludhiana, Patiala and Sangrur districts in the Malwa region, Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts of Majha region and Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar of the Doaba region of Punjab. Sansis of some villages of the Gurdaspur district (Dida, Alowal, Nurowal, Gandian, Gajikat, Boparai, Shampura, Panihar, and Bhattian) and of the Sangrur and Patiala districts (Bhadson, Rohti, Bagrian, Kakrala, Saidoheri, Hirdapur, Kaliyan, Maraud, Noorpur, Kala Jhar, Kheri, Banera, Daulpur, Samundgarh Chhanna, Langdoyi, Bijalpur, Tarain, and Munshiwal) are particularly backward and notorious for petty crimes.

The British concept of a well-ordered administration in well-defined boundaries had no place for a nomadic population. Their concept of development, both industrial and agricultural, and social and cultural development through British education were at variance with the life and conceptual framework of the non-settled or nomadic populations. After the introduction of new developmental policies, scores of such groups were unsettled and dislocated from

their traditional occupations. When these groups adopted new or multiple vocations for their survival they came under the suspicion of the British administrators. The British owing to their bitter experience of 1857 became very suspicious of the native groups, particularly those who were always on the move.

The Sansis were most numerous and enterprising among these groups. They were especially chosen for brutal treatment by the administration. Reformatories were set up for these people, in which almost the entire adult population was put, separating them from their families. Wherever reformatories were not set up, their movements were restricted to a defined area. They were compelled to report daily at the police station to show their presence (Major 1999: 65–66).

Sansis suffered the worst kind of discrimination and suppression and consequently they became bitter towards the state and the larger society. The delinquency and crime into which they were forced became not only their profession but a way of rebellion. Ibbetson and Rose testify that Sansi women were boastful of their son's improvement and their execution (1970: 366).

Sansis wore *tragi*, a cotton cord round the loins, and said not to be used by any other class. Punjabi Sansis usually wear the hair long and keep twisted, within its coils a small sharp knife, called *kapu*, used for purse-cutting. The nails of the right thumb and index finger are kept long for similar purposes. Sansi women dress elaborately for festive occasions, but the usual attire of both sexes is rarely anything more than a *langoti*. (Ibid.: 379)

The situation now is different. Sansi men and women wear clothes worn by the Punjabis. Elderly men usually tie a turban because many of them have adopted the Sikh religion. Earlier their elders were also tying turbans but these resembled those of the Haryanvi or Rajasthani men. They wear *kurta* either with *pyjama* or with *chaddar*. The new generation is given to trousers and shirts. The women are also shifting to *sakwar-kameez* though earlier they used to wear *ghagra-choli*.

Sansis use two languages, one within the community called Parsi and another with the outsiders. Both are dialects of Punjabi language. They have created their own language to camouflage themselves or to keep secrecy as they indulged in crime. Ibbetson and Rose quote Bailey:

Being criminals they conceal their language with scrupulous and extraordinary care....The Sansis dialect may be subdivided into two, the main dialect and the criminal variation.... All Sansis can speak Punjabi, but do so with an accent and intonation peculiar to themselves. (Ibid.: 368–69)

FOOD HABITS

Sansis are traditional hunters, they catch and eat all sorts of wild animals, both clean and unclean. Their ceremonial food during marriages etc. is essentially non-vegetarian. The bridegroom and bride are given specific parts of the goat, which is sacrificed and cooked on this occasion. According to a respondent: ‘*Sadde tan koyi rasam meat-sharab ton bina poori nee hundi,*’ that no rite in their community is considered complete without meat and liquor.

Sansi men are fond of taking liquor. They have developed special techniques to distil and sell it. The Sansis of Gurdaspur district are particularly notorious for illegal distillation and its trade. Their women, however, do not take liquor or other intoxicants. Some older women do take *naswar* or *bidis* (cigarettes).

They use wheat flour to cook *rotis* and eat seasonal vegetables, cereals and rice. They have a special liking for fried and spicy food. They take their meals three times a day in summers but in winters when the days are short, they skip the mid-day meals.

Traditionally, they would demarcate themselves on the basis of which of the unclean animals different sections of the community eat. It has also been reported by all the respondents that they do not eat beef or pork. Some respondents reported that they do not eat meat of *chopaia*, four-legged animals, which seems contrary to actual practice as *bakra* (ram) is their favourite meat. But an elderly man clarifies that by *chopaia* they mean cow and pig: ‘*Purane jamane vich tan har kisam da meat kha lainde see, par ajkal shikar vee ghat gaya, humn gau te soor da mass vee khana chadge*’, that in olden times they used to eat all types of meat but since hunting has become scarce, they have also stopped eating beef and pork.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

Sansis are divided into two major groups known as Mahla and Baidu. Both these groups intermarry and are further divided into 23 *gots* (clans). It is believed that Mahla was the elder son

of Sans Mal who had 12 sons (from whom 12 *gots* originated) and the younger one Baindu had 11 sons from whom emerged 11 *gots*. According to a respondent of Samrala: ‘Sans Mal *di dhe* Rasalan *de vi 13 larke san, uhnan ne vee 13 got chalaye, par eh got Chhadi nan nal jane jande ne,*’ that Sans Mal’s daughter Rasalan had 13 sons who also established their *gots* but these are known as *Chhadi gots*. According to some respondents Baindu and Mahla groups do not marry with these groups and call these *Chhadi* (left out).

Ibbetson and Rose give the details of Sansi *gots* in Sialkot and Gujrat (now in Pakistan):

<i>Sialkot</i>		<i>Gujrat</i>	
Sehju	Ghoghar	Suja	Lodi?
Sarwani	Shambir	Sarwani	Khokhar
Bagaira	Sakru	Seru	Shamir
Nandu	Khushaliwal	Gawala	Jairam
Bhidu	Chetuwal	Nandu	Khanu
Lodi	Gil	Bhelad (? ra)	Hiba and Ugi

Source: Ibbetson and Rose (1970, Vol. III: 363).

Note: Lodi and Bhelad appear with a question mark perhaps because The authors seem to take the count to 25 *gots* while they mention that the number of Sansi *gots* is 23. Perhaps they are not sure of their location.

The *gots* descended from Mahla, as per Ibbetson and Rose (*ibid.*), are:

- Shera
- Khanawal
- Bathnawal
- Kewalwal
- Haibawal
- Massowal
- Sundarwal
- Piddewal
- Singewal
- Tatwal
- Mihdnwal

Sher has given area-wise details of *gots* including those of other castes too. The number of Sansi *gots* has thus increased. In Amritsar district alone he mentions 57 *gots*. His description, however, does not match the ground reality as he gives *gots* different names in different districts. The primary differentiation amongst the Sansi *gots* or other sub-divisions is based on kinship rules.

Apart from kinship principles there are other parameters of social divisions. Ibbetson and Rose observed:

It would perhaps be more accurate to say that the Sansis should be classified thus: (1) The settled Sansis, who are subject to the Criminal Tribes Act, but who confine themselves to petty crime committed near their own villages or in neighboring districts. (2) The nomad Sansis who have two main branches, (a) *Birtwan* and (b) pure-nomads and vagabonds. The latter are often called *rehluwalas* by villagers because their women sing *rehlus* or ditties and dance, but they are probably the most criminal of all the Sansis and their customs are more primitive, for while other Sansis burn or bury their dead, the real vagrants expose them in the jungle. The *Birtwan* doubtless derive their name from *birt*, an allowance made to them by their Jatt patrons in Hoshiarpur (and doubtless elsewhere). (Ibid.)

Birt is an elementary form of *jajmani* system in which some families of the members of a group provide services of a particular kind throughout the year or on seasonal basis and get a reward for it. Usually such relationships are hereditary and pass on from generation to generation. *Birt* is equal to *laag* (payment of service in *jajmani* system)

The functions of the sub-divisions are multiple; besides providing identity to an individual within the community, these divisions define the boundaries of exogamy and endogamy. In the context of social behaviour and social control, these divisions provide a framework of values to the groups and individuals.

Historically, they try to associate themselves with the Rajput warriors who were defeated by the Muslim invaders and thus displaced from Rajputana, their ancestral place. In the time of British rule they were fighting against them and did not accept their dominance, hence their persecution under the Criminal Tribes Act.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Sansis are endogamous; no one is allowed to marry outside the tribe. If someone does then one faces excommunication from the community. They are patrilineal and practice clan exogamy. They strictly observe incest rules that are extended to patrilineal parallel cousins. In certain cases cousin marriage is allowed. Earlier, *vatta-satta* (exchange) was also prevalent. Village exogamy is practiced though preferred within the region. They do not marry cousins on *bhua's* (father's sister's) side but she can demand her niece in marriage.

In case of widowhood there is a custom of the levirate form of marriage. If the unmarried brother of the husband is not available then she may settle with a married brother. This is done with the permission of community panchayat. According to an adult male informant: '*Sadde koi aurat vehlee ni rehandi. Je ik pati mar gaya tan doosre da parbandh karna bhaichare da kumm hai, is karke usnoo kise hor de ghar bitha ditta jandai. Is rasam noo chadar pauna kehande ne.*' No woman remains idle in our community. If the husband dies then finding another one is the duty of the community. Normally she is settled with another one. This custom is called *chadar pauna*. The rule of surrogacy is also prevalent. In the case of the death of the wife or of barrenness and infertility, the wife's sister or someone else from her family is taken as the wife. The above informant continues: '*Jekar bachcha na hove, jan gharwali di maut ho jave tan usdi bhain jan usde parvar vichon koi hor ladki nal viah karan da rivaj hai*'.

Divorce is sought not from the civil courts but the panchayat. The matter is decided after listening to both sides. Remarriage in case of widowhood or divorce is common. Earlier, the age at marriage was 12 years but now it is 18. All marriages are arranged, there is no concept of love marriage or marriage by choice. There is no possibility of inter-caste marriage. Monogamy is mostly preferred. Polygyny is allowed in certain circumstances, particularly in case of infertility. Polyandry is absent. Dowry is always small, comprising of articles of domestic use, but it is never demanded. Earlier the practice of bride price was also prevalent, especially in the case of a second marriage. Post-marital residence is invariably patrilocal, in some exceptions the husband can stay with the family of bride if they have no male offspring. The settled Punjabi Sansis now prefer marriage through Anand Karaj as most of them have adopted Sikhism.

FAMILY

Traditionally they live in joint families where the father or the eldest brother is the head. If the male members of the family are executed or jailed, then the womenfolk would take over the responsibility. They command equal respect. Ibbetson and Rose have commented:

The Sansis are much under the influence of their aged women and the traditions cherished by them are a great obstacle to the reclamation of the tribe. Women whose sons have been imprisoned, died in jail or executed are said to boast of the fact. (1970: 366)

But now due to occupational changes and other factors joint families are giving way to nuclear families. Many respondents said: '*Rozgar de karan ghar tutt rahe ne, parvar chhote ho rahe ne*. The families are breaking down and becoming smaller due to employment-related factors.

Familial relations are based on patrilineal principles. The brothers have both solidarity as well as competitive relationships. The playful relationships are between *deor-bhabhi* and *jija-sali*. The conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and between sisters-in-law is missing, maybe due to survival constraints. Inheritance is strictly patrilineal. Status of the aged and of women is high. No case of female foeticide or infanticide has been reported among them. Aged women are respected by all members of the community, though they are not allowed to take part in the deliberations of panchayats. The father's sister is given a special place in her parental family after marriage.

Traditionally, the gender division of labour was based on the type of occupation. In their nomadic past, the men would hunt or steal, and the women would help them. But with settlement the men turned to labour in agriculture or other sectors and women took to house-keeping, collecting fuel wood, cooking food or doing light agricultural work, like plucking cotton or digging potatoes. They, however, prefer working collectively as a team rather individually. According to a senior informant: '*Saddian jananian Jutt jimidaran de gharan vich kumm karan nalon khetan vich kumm karna jiada changa samjhian ne*'. Our their women prefer working in fields instead of working in the houses of Jutt landlords.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Birth: According to Bedi:

At the birth of a child, the state of impurity is observed for 10 days. On the 10th day *dasutan* ceremony is performed, which consists of a general cleaning up of the house, the performance of *havan* by the priest for the purification of the child and mother. The girls of the same *got* are fed on the 3rd or 10th day and black sugar (*gur*) is distributed on the birth of a son. For 1-1/4 months (40 days) the mother is not allowed to cook as she is not considered altogether clean. After 1-1/4 months a feast is held and the daughters and sisters with their sons, who are treated like Brahmans, are fed sweet rice. The household is then considered to be free of all impurity. The head of a boy is shaved when he is 2-1/2 months old.

...At the time of birth of child the women of other group are not allowed to enter because of the fear of the entry of some evil spirits. The incense of *guggal* is burnt to ward off evil spirits. After the birth, a lock of hair of the child is cut and tied into a cloth and hanged on the roof. The belief is that by cutting hair the perfection of the child is destroyed and then evil spirits may not torment the child. (Bedi 1979: 566)

Marriage: The following accounts given by Ibbetson and Rose are elaborate:

The betrothal ceremony consists of a visit from the boy's father to the girl's house and the presentation of a rupee with some rice to the girl and the distribution of sweets, and a corresponding visit from the girl's father to the boy's house and the presentation of a rupee and a little rice to the boy. The date of the marriage is fixed in consultation with the priest (Brahman). The marriage procession consists of the bridegroom and some four or five men, who are entertained by the bride's father. The marriage ceremonies are simple though in conformity with Brahmanical rites. Seven *phere* (rounds) are taken round the fire and mantras from the Vedas are recited. The father gives clothing and utensils to his daughter in dowry, as he can afford. (1970: 367)

Further:

A curious custom is observed at the time of marriage. On the night of marriage, before day break some *sharbat* is mixed in a pitcher. A pit is then dug in the courtyard of the house and the branches of a fruit tree are put into the four corners. Some of *sharbat* and a pice are placed in the pit and the bridegroom taking the pitcher on his head walks seven times round. The bride follows, accompanied by her mother's brother. After this the bridegroom gives some *sharbat* to the bride and the remainder is divided among the men present. (Ibid.: 370)

Other rites at the time of marriage resemble those of other groups, for example, first the boy is reserved by the parents of girl (*rokna*), this is done through the ceremony of *chhuhara launa* in which girl's father puts a *chhuhara* in the boy's mouth. According to Bedi:

In Dera Baba Nanak, five or seven persons from boy's group go to girl's house. They take a bottle of liquor with them, they put the liquor into a pot from which both sides drink and a portion is spilled

for the mother earth and they pray to mother earth for the well being of the couple. Then they give some rupees to the girl, this is called *rokna*. (Bedi 1979: 570)

Presently, after fixing the date of marriage, the invitation letter (*gand*) is sent to the relatives. Common Punjabi rites like *mayian launa*, *gharoli bharna*, *vatna malna*, *mehndi launa*, *ghodi chadna*, *surma pauna*, *ḡandi katna*, *dhukaa*, *milni*, *lavan-phere*, *gandh chitrawa*, *gana kholna* are also observed. But some practices are exclusive to them as they take a *bakra* (ram) along with the marriage procession. This is sacrificed at the time of arrival at the girl's place. It is cut into pieces and one half is kept with the boy's family while the other half is given to the girl's family. The head, liver and the feet are kept for the couple. Both families cook this meat separately. Then both families distribute it amongst their community members. Some portion of this meat is thrown into the sky to appease the evil spirits, which is called *kaljogna manauna*.

Now almost all Sansis of Punjab sanctify their marriages through Sikh rites of Anand Karaj, but in past, Ibbetson and Rose, Bedi and Dariya have noted, there was custom of taking seven rounds (*phere*) around a small water body (*chhapari*) created especially for this purpose in the house. But no respondent has told us about it. According to one person: '*Hun sare hi nand padaun lag gaye ne*'. 'Now all have started sanctifying marriage through Anand Karaj'.

Death : Regarding death ceremonies, Bedi writes:

The person is put on the ground before the death. This rite is known as *nagina*. It is believed that the one who dies in the lap of mother earth, does not face after-death troubles. The cremation is avoided after sun setting, if dead body has to be kept for night then a stick measuring equal to the body is cut, the belief is that dead body increases in the night but if you cut a stick equal to it then it does not increase. (1979: 573)

Kapal kirya, a ceremony of breaking the skull during cremation is performed. The *phull* (last remains) are picked up on the third day and the persons who carried the dead body are fed on sweet rice. The mourning lasts for three days. *Kirya karam* (death rites) were earlier performed like Hindus, but now the trend has changed as in most cases a *bhog* is organised according to Sikh rites.

Earlier, the last remains were immersed into the Ganga or in some river or a pond nearby but now many of them do this at

Kiratpur Sahib, like the Sikhs. Children upto six years are buried. On the anniversary of a person's death, the fraternity is fed and a *bhog* is organised.

It seems that rites of Sansis have been changing with time. Earlier they used to leave their dead in the forest, or would break some limb before burying or cremating the dead. But no respondent has reported such a custom from any part of Punjab. An educated Sansi from Harion Khurd concluded: '*Jehre jehre pindan vich Sansi vasde ne uthe de hi riti rivaj manne jande ne. Punjab de bahle pindan vich Jutt Sikh vasde ne is karke uh Jutt Sikhhan vale riti rivaj mannan lag pae ne*'. The Sansis are adopting the life style and customs of the villages in which they are residing. As most of villages of Punjab are dominated by Jutt Sikhs, they are adopting their customs.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The Sansis are traditionally a poor community, having little or no resources for survival. They survived on small-scale animal husbandry, rearing sheep and goat. They kept dogs for hunting and donkeys for transportation in the early nomadic days. They did not have large tracts of land or the required skill and instruments for agriculture. They also could not develop the occupation of animal husbandry into a large-scale enterprise. Thus, their mainstay was labour or petty crime. They practice numerous occupations, like keeping genealogies of Jutt patrons, singing, hunting, and begging. All these go well with petty crime.

There is now a change in their occupations. They no longer keep genealogies of the Jutts but work as agricultural labour. Those with little education prefer government employment. The enterprising among them do small-time shopkeeping, while others are vendors who go from village to village selling articles of domestic.

In certain areas of Sangrur and Gurdaspur districts some Sansi families are still associated with crime. Numerous stories about their legendary skill of making country liquor are prevalent in Gurdaspur district. One such story relates to Dida village:

It is said that once some foreign tourists came to this village who were served country liquor. They liked the liquor and when they asked about its brand, they were jokingly told by the host 'it's *Dida*'. Later they wrote to their government that *Dida* liquor should be imported from Punjab.

In the Malwa region they are notorious for chain-snatching, pick-pocketing and drug peddling' while in Gurdaspur they are involved in the illegal distillation and peddling of country-made liquor. Wherever they are involved in such crimes their common refrain is: '*Ji pulas vale'e ni tikan dainde, aseen tan izzat dee roti kamauna chahunde han*'. 'We they want to lead a normal life with dignity but the police is not letting us to do so'.

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Ibbetson and Rose commented:

The Sansis are much under the influence of their aged women and the traditions cherished by them are a great obstacle to the reclamation of the tribe. Women whose sons have been imprisoned, died in jail or executed are said to boast of the fact. Next in influence to these beldames are the hereditary *mukhtars* or leaders who correspond in some degree to the gypsy kings of the Scottish marches of a century ago. There are at least two families of these *mukhtars* and to one of them most of the headmen of the Sansi *gots* in Sialkot belong, but members of it are also found in Ferozepur and the neighboring native States. The *mukhtar* at Malla has or had a *than* or chapel at which weekly *sabhas* were held on Saturdays, Saturn being auspicious to burglars. These gatherings were attended by the most criminal of the neighboring Sansis to sacrifice goats to Devi, divide booty and plan fresh crimes. Here too gambling and drinking formed part of the regular rites. (1970: 366)

They further noted:

Whenever a dispute arises between Sansis, the parties call a gathering of their brotherhoods and the appointed chiefs of the brotherhood. They lay their case before this assembly and submit to the decision given by the chiefs. The man held to be at fault is punished with a *dand* (a fine imposed by the brotherhood), its amount being fixed by the chiefs. If the parties object to the decision and each still declares himself to be in the right, another custom, called *paun bhutti*, is observed. Each party gives a rupee to the chiefs who send for two divers. A bamboo is planted in a well and the divers are sent down into it. They dive into the water, and the man whose diver comes to the surface first is deemed to be false and the one whose diver comes up last, is considered to be true. Their belief is that water will not allow a false man to remain below its surface. This decision is final. (Ibid.)

According to Bedi there are some other methods prevalent among the Sansis to test the truthfulness of the claims of parties. Most popular among these are 'fire test' and 'oil test'.

In fire test a *phala*, the front edge of the plough which is made of iron is put into fire, when it becomes red hot then the accused is called to put hand on it, if there is no scar formed on the hand then, the accused is considered innocent and truthful.

In another test, which is oil test, the oil is boiled in a *karahi*, an open and large frying pan, and a coin is put into this pan. The accused is asked to pull out the coin from this boiling oil. It is believed that if the hand of accused is not burnt, then he or she is considered innocent. (Bedi 1979: 570)

There are many other such methods to test the genuineness of claims and counter claims of the parties but generally the decisions depend on the judgement of the *lambardars*.

The punishments inflicted upon offending parties generally take the shape of fines varying from Rs 5 to Rs 30, according to the seriousness of the offence. It is a significant fact that burglaries and thefts are not included under the heading of offences. To murder, assault and abduct one's neighbour's wife are offences but stealing and pilfering are legitimate and natural means of obtaining the necessities of life.

From the field reports it appears that now the sphere of these traditional institutions is shrinking. The level of education and the migration of some Sansis from the village to cities is changing the traditional structure of authority. Now only family or marriage-related cases are settled by the panchayats. There has been not a single case of marital maladjustment or divorce that moved the court of law. But property disputes or fights with others are not settled by the traditional panchayats. The educated ones among them, who reside in cities, also go to the courts. An old man lamented: '*Aj kal de parhe likhe munde hun bhaichare te bajurgan di pehlan vargi izat nahin karde*'. 'The new generation of educated boys do not respect the community and the elders as was done in earlier times.'

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

The Sansis, as a community, have a practical approach towards religion. In 1881 Muslim Sansis made up 11 per cent of the community, there were a few Sikhs and the rest were Hindus. In present-day Punjab, most Sansis now subscribe to Sikhism, except

the Rajasthani or Bagari Sansis who come as migrant labourers. But in neighbouring Haryana they are Hindus. In fact, they adopt the dominant religion of the area.

They follow their own religious practices as well and worship their ancestors. They worship Sans Mal and his two sons Baindu and Mahla and their 23 sons on all important occasions. These ancestors are believed to grant boons or withhold blessings. On the fulfillment of a wish, a ram is sacrificed and feast is organised for the community. They also worship many saints, *faqirs* and *devis* such as Malang Shah and Fatha Shaheed. Latter's shrine is located in Malla (Sialkot). They worship him before undertaking any venture. (Ibid.: 367).

Legend has it that he was a brave person and was mistakenly killed by his brother-in-law while fighting the enemy. He is worshipped as a *shahid*, a martyr. They also worship Nihalu and Gandu, two brothers of Othian Sohian (Sialkot). Hom and Nirotam are also venerated by them. They are believed to be the masters of magical and spiritual powers. They used to ride on walls and run like horses. Mai Lakhi is worshipped as the mother goddess. She remained unmarried and devoted her life to meditation in the forest. Her shrine is in the Tatli village of Gujranwala district (ibid.: 368). They also worship Gugga Pir, cook rice in honour of Jawalaji and make offerings to Kalka or Sheetala Mata on wish fulfillment (ibid.: 366).

Bhalad's descendants are the wizards of the Sansis and they wear a long lock of hair on one side of the head. This lock is never cut. Balad's descendants are employed to cast out evil spirits, and they are welcomed at weddings but do not appear to take any special part in them, though a fee of one rupee is paid to them, is their mere presence wards off evil spirits. (Ibid.: 364).

The overall religious beliefs of the Sansis represent a broad framework of folk religion in which all deities or religious practices may be incorporated easily. Those converted to Sikhism also practice their folk religion which, however, is against the tenets of Sikh religion.

INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

By adopting new occupations the Sansis have forged new relations with other communities. Those who adopted agriculture or are working as agricultural labourers have developed links with Jutts. Despite these changes, however, they have not opened up to the larger society as far as relations of marriage or kinship are

concerned. According to an elderly informant: ‘*Jamana badal gaya, kittle vi badal gaye, navain-navain lokan naal vah pain lag piya, sadde lokan ne vi navain tarike sikh laye*’. ‘The times have changed and so have the occupations, there is interaction with the new people and hence our people have also learnt new ways.’

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The impact of development, literacy and education is visible. Literacy rate's are still very low. But those who have got some education and have become conscious of welfare policies, especially reservation. They have organised themselves and are trying to get more rights.

They are leaving their traditional methods of medicine and are visiting the doctors. The traditional practices of magic and sorcery are becoming less frequent. The dress patterns of younger generation have also changed. They wear modern clothes and prefer to mix with people of other castes.

They have also started adopting new occupations, which range from small-time shopkeeping to agriculture and animal husbandry. There is no scope for their traditional occupation of hunting in Punjab due to the new laws and shrinking forest cover. So they have developed some of their old small-scale ventures like illicit distillation of liquor, into major occupations, as in Gurdaspur. The old petty crimes in certain areas have become more organised as in case of chain-snatching. Some are involved in peddling drugs.

Some of them have scooters/motorcycles and telephones for communication. They have electricity and drinking water in their houses too.

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Glossary

Punjabi–English Dictionary, Punjabi University, Patiala (1994) has been consulted for the English equivalents of Punjabi and other local/community-specific terms. Listed below are words with meanings that are of general nature; comments and verses in the text are not included.

To write the local Punjabi/Hindi terms in Roman English, a simple format has been chosen in place of the complicated phonetic signs that are not always easy to understand. There is lack of standardisation of terms and their pronunciation stemming from variations in the local dialects of Punjabi. In addition to this, each community has its own specific rendering of most terms. For instance, there are three terms, *lambardar*, *nambardar* and *lambardad*, products of variations of dialect, which mean the same thing. Similarly, *pardhan*, *pradhan*, *chaudhary* and *sarpanch* — all these terms stand for the village headman. These variations are present at various levels — regional, individual respondents, field investigators and report writers — and have been standardised only to a manageable extent, much variation still remains. The readers are requested to bear with this. Suffixing ‘s’ to vernacular terms makes these plural. In the glossary it has been put after a slash, for instance ‘*bhabhi/s*’ — *bhabhi* is sister-in-law and *bhabhis* refers to sisters-in-law. Similarly, *akhara* is an arena or wrestling pit and *akhara/s* are arena/s or wrestling pit/s.

<i>afeem</i>	opium
<i>akhara/s</i>	arena/s, wrestling pit/s
<i>akhri pani</i>	last water
<i>amb</i>	mango, <i>Magnifera indica</i>
<i>ambar</i>	resin
<i>amrit</i>	nectar
<i>amritdhari</i>	a baptised Sikh
<i>Anand Karaj</i>	Sikh marriage ceremony
<i>anganwadi</i>	neighbourhood day care centres run by the government in rural areas
<i>Ardas</i>	Sikh prayer
<i>arhi</i>	bier for cremation
<i>asthian</i>	remains of the cremated body

<i>Assu</i>	lunar month from mid-September to mid-October
<i>atta</i>	flour
<i>atta-dana</i>	flour and grain
<i>attha</i>	eighth, made in the form of 8
<i>aukhe kumm</i>	errands requiring hard labour, difficult jobs
<i>aut</i>	without progeny
<i>baan</i>	coarse thread
<i>babal</i>	father (endearment term in relation to daughter used in folklore)
<i>bagali</i>	small shoulder bag
<i>bahar vadhauna</i>	to take out after delivery
<i>baja</i>	harmonium
<i>bakhshish</i>	reward in cash/kind, tip, blessings
<i>bakra</i>	ram
<i>band-band</i>	joint-by-joint
<i>bandukchis</i>	musketeers
<i>banna</i>	bridegroom
<i>banni</i>	bride
<i>baoli</i>	small water reservoir
<i>bar</i>	door, gate
<i>barat</i>	marriage procession
<i>baratis</i>	members of a marriage procession
<i>basti</i>	settlement
<i>baur</i>	trap
<i>bazvar</i>	noose
<i>bazi pauna</i>	performing acrobatics
<i>bazi</i>	acrobatics
<i>bazurag</i>	elderly, senior, aged, ancestor
<i>been</i>	a musical instrument made of a gourd pipe
<i>Ber(i)</i>	jujube tree, <i>Zizyphus jujuba</i>
<i>begar</i>	labour without wages/remuneration
<i>behi roti</i>	stale bread
<i>besan</i>	gram flour
<i>bhabhi</i>	brother's wife (sister-in-law), <i>bharjai</i>
<i>bhagats</i>	disciples, followers
<i>bhai ji</i>	Sikh priest
<i>bhaji</i>	sweets in bulk given to relatives on marriage
<i>bhamirian</i>	rotating toy of wooden disc or made of paper
<i>bhanda mansana</i>	relatives and friends giving utensils to the bride
<i>bhandara</i>	feast open to all and sundry

<i>bhang</i>	hemp, <i>Cannabis indica</i>
<i>bhangra</i>	Punjabi men's folkdance
<i>bharjai</i>	brother's wife, <i>bhabhi</i>
<i>bhasha</i>	language
<i>bhata</i>	breakfast
<i>bhathi</i>	household distillery, fireplace
<i>bhavna</i>	feeling
<i>bhayias</i>	migrant labour from eastern UP and Bihar
<i>bhitti gayee</i>	got polluted
<i>bhog</i>	religious ceremony
<i>bhoot-paret</i>	evil spirits
<i>bhua</i>	father's sister
<i>bhujia</i>	briny
<i>bhukhad</i>	always hungry
<i>bhura/e</i>	blanket/s
<i>bidi</i>	tobacco rolled in a Tendu leaf for smoking
<i>billa</i>	wild cat
<i>billi da panja</i>	cat's paw
<i>billi di jer</i>	cat's placenta
<i>binnu (innu)</i>	cushioned loop for head to carry load
<i>birt</i>	payment of service in <i>jajmani</i> system, <i>laag</i>
<i>Bohar</i>	banyan tree, <i>Ficus bengalensis</i>
<i>boli</i>	language
<i>bootian</i>	floral pattern
<i>bore</i>	coloured stones
<i>botian</i>	female camels
<i>chacha</i>	father's younger brother
<i>chadar</i>	bed-sheet
<i>chadra</i>	male body wrap for legs
<i>chah</i>	tea
<i>chamar</i>	Ravidasia/Ramdasia, tanners' caste
<i>chapatti</i>	a thin flat piece of unleavened bread, baked on hot plate
<i>chapnian</i>	flat earthen disks
<i>charhava</i>	offerings
<i>chaudhary</i>	headman, leading man
<i>chauki</i>	police post
<i>chaul</i>	rice
<i>chaunka</i>	cooking place
<i>chaunki</i>	a small wooden plank for sitting
<i>chauntra</i>	platform

<i>chela</i>	shaman
<i>Chet</i>	lunar month from mid-March to mid-April
<i>chhabrian</i>	baskets for <i>chapattis</i>
<i>chhada</i>	bachelor
<i>chhadi</i>	left out
<i>chhaj</i>	winnowing tray
<i>chhal</i>	jump
<i>chhanna</i>	large sieve made of reeds; to sieve
<i>chhanra</i>	sieve made of reeds
<i>chhapar</i>	pond
<i>chhapari</i>	small pond
<i>chhatian khedna</i>	ceremony of 'playing sticks'
<i>chhatra</i>	lamb
<i>chhaya</i>	possession by evil spirit
<i>chhuhara</i>	dried date
<i>chhutad aurat</i>	divorced/separated women
<i>chik</i>	screen
<i>chimta</i>	long iron fork, a musical concussion instrument
<i>chiragh</i>	small lamp
<i>chohli</i>	lap
<i>chohta</i>	bull
<i>chola chhad gaye</i>	passed away
<i>choli</i>	short blouse
<i>chopaia</i>	four-legged animal
<i>chuhra</i>	scavenger, a Balmik
<i>chulah</i>	hearth
<i>chulah-chaunka</i>	kitchen, literally hearth and cooking place
<i>chuli</i>	handful
<i>chunni</i>	a light and long head cloth made of cotton for women
<i>churi</i>	unleavened bread, broken and mashed together with ghee and sugar
<i>dadi</i>	paternal grandmother, father's mother
<i>dadke</i>	members of the father's family, paternal family
<i>dah-saskar</i>	cremation ceremony
<i>dai</i>	midwife
<i>dalan</i>	hall, large room
<i>dalda</i>	vegetable oil used for cooking
<i>dalia</i>	porridge
<i>damkade</i>	disc on the spindle of a spinning wheel
<i>dand</i>	fine imposed by the brotherhood or panchayat

<i>dande marna</i>	to beat with a wooden stick or baton
<i>darani</i>	wife of the husband's younger brother
<i>dariyan</i>	cotton mattresses
<i>dasutan</i>	purification ceremony on the 10 th day
<i>daule</i>	biceps
<i>dehra</i>	small structure of mud or bricks in a (Bauria) house for ancestors
<i>deor/devar</i>	husband's younger brother (brother-in-law)
<i>dera</i>	camp, seminary
<i>desi</i>	local
<i>desi ghee</i>	butter oil, clarified butter
<i>desi daru</i>	country liquor, home-distilled
<i>devi</i>	goddess
<i>dhabla</i>	skirt
<i>dhaga</i>	thread
<i>dhaga-taveet</i>	amulet
<i>dhamark</i>	breaking a pitcher full of water en route to cremation
<i>dhande</i>	occupations
<i>dharmsthala</i>	sacred or religious place
<i>dhoh</i>	meeting summoned by the <i>tanda</i> panchayat
<i>dhol</i>	drum
<i>dholki</i>	small drum
<i>dhoona</i>	fire-place where cakes of cow dung are burnt with incense
<i>dhoop-batti</i>	incense
<i>dhoti</i>	wrap around legs for males
<i>diya/diya</i>	small earthen lamp
<i>dodas</i>	poppy husk
<i>doli</i>	bride's palanquin
<i>doobh</i>	runner grass
<i>dugdugi</i>	small two-sided drum with lashes for drubbing sides
<i>duhajoo</i>	widower, literally a second-timer
<i>elaich</i>	small cardamom
<i>faqir</i>	<i>sadhu</i> , mendicant, monk
<i>gachak</i>	sweetmeat made of sugar paste and sesame seeds
<i>gaddali/s</i>	implement/s
<i>gadhuian</i>	large needles
<i>gana</i>	a bracelet of multi-coloured yarn, <i>mauli</i>
<i>gand</i>	invitation letter

<i>gand pachauna</i>	to convey message of marriage to relatives
<i>Ganga-jal</i>	water from the sacred river Ganga
<i>garam</i>	hot
<i>garbi</i>	small pitcher-like metallic vessel
<i>gath</i>	invitation letter
<i>gathha</i>	amount deposited with <i>tanda</i> panchayat by the conflicting parties
<i>gati</i>	salvation
<i>gau</i>	cow
<i>gawar</i>	duffer, stupid
<i>ghaghara</i>	large and long skirt
<i>ghoda</i>	horse
<i>ghodi</i>	mare
<i>ghun</i>	wood-worm
<i>ghund chukai</i>	unveiling the bride
<i>ghunghrus</i>	tinkling bells
<i>giddar</i>	jackal
<i>giddar khane</i>	jackal eaters
<i>giddar singhi</i>	jackal's husk
<i>giddha</i>	Punjabi women's folkdance
<i>godri</i>	a quilt made out of cut pieces of cloth
<i>goh</i>	a large-sized lizard
<i>got/gotra</i>	clan
<i>gota-kinari</i>	edging lace
<i>grehasth</i>	family life
<i>guggal</i>	gum of an <i>Amyris comiphora</i> tree
<i>gulgule</i>	fried balls of sweetened flour
<i>gulukand</i>	necklace
<i>gur</i>	jaggery
<i>gurda</i>	kidney
<i>gurti</i>	first food given to the newly born
<i>hakeem</i>	physician practicing <i>Unani</i> (Greek) medicine
<i>halal</i>	to sacrifice an animal with a sharp-edged knife
<i>halwa</i>	pudding of wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter
<i>halwai</i>	one who makes sweets
<i>hara</i>	earthen hearth
<i>Harh</i>	lunar month from mid-June to mid-July
<i>havan-dhoop</i>	burning incense in a pit of sacred fire
<i>havan-kund</i>	pit of sacred fire
<i>hinnah/mehndi</i>	leaves of <i>Lawsonia inermis</i>

<i>humman dena</i>	rice or <i>halwa</i> used for <i>bhog</i>
<i>huqa</i>	large hubble-bubble
<i>huqa-pani chhekna</i>	to excommunicate
<i>huqi</i>	small hubble-bubble
<i>injadi</i>	a cloth 2.5 metres long, held on the one side by the groom and by his sisters on other side, before the departure of <i>barat</i>
<i>innu (binnu)</i>	cushioned loop for head to carry load
<i>jadian-butian</i>	herbs
<i>jadu-tona</i>	witchcraft, black magic
<i>jajman</i>	client of a Brahman or a bard
<i>jaktan</i>	jackets
<i>jana</i>	tribe
<i>Jand(i)</i>	a desert tree, <i>Prosopis specigera</i>
<i>jangli sur</i>	wild boar
<i>janj-ghar</i>	marriage place
<i>janjiri</i>	neck chain
<i>jarda</i>	powdered tobacco
<i>jathani</i>	wife of husband's elder brother
<i>jathera</i>	ancestor
<i>jati</i>	caste
<i>jatan</i>	uncombed, matted hair
<i>jau</i>	barley
<i>jetha</i>	eldest
<i>jhadu</i>	broom
<i>jhand</i>	tonsure ceremony
<i>jhapha</i>	branch or twig of a tree
<i>jheor</i>	a member of the water carrier caste
<i>jholi</i>	shoulder bag, spreading cloth in two hands to receive something
<i>jhuggi/s</i>	hut/s, <i>kulli/s</i>
<i>jjja</i>	sister's husband
<i>jogia rang</i>	ochre colour
<i>jot</i>	to light an earthen lamp at a sacred place
<i>jude</i>	small brooms
<i>julaha</i>	weaver
<i>juttian-marna</i>	beating with a shoe
<i>kabad</i>	scrap
<i>kabadiye</i>	scrap or junk vendors
<i>kabar</i>	grave
<i>kabayili</i>	tribal

<i>kabila</i>	tribe
<i>kabila sadhu</i>	tribe's shaman
<i>kacha</i>	raw, uncooked; not concrete
<i>kacha ghar</i>	mud house
<i>kachhu</i>	tortoise
<i>kachi lassi</i>	unboiled milk mixed with water
<i>kaduri</i>	bread and jaggery mashed in butter oil
<i>kahi</i>	a kind of grass, <i>Saccharum spontaneum</i>
<i>kaljogna</i>	evil spirits
<i>kamal (kambal)</i>	blanket
<i>kanderna</i>	hedgehog
<i>kanghi</i>	comb
<i>kangro</i>	crow
<i>kanis</i>	persons carrying the dead body for cremation
<i>kanian</i>	reeds
<i>kante-walian</i>	earrings
<i>kapah</i>	cotton
<i>kapal kirya</i>	ceremony of breaking the skull on cremation
<i>kaphan</i>	coffin cloth
<i>kapu</i>	a small sharp knife
<i>kara/kare</i>	metallic bangle/s
<i>karah</i>	pudding of wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter
<i>karah prasad</i>	pudding of wheat flour, sugar and <i>desi ghee</i> for offerings
<i>karahi</i>	an open large frying pan
<i>kararapan</i>	spicy, crisp
<i>kasturi</i>	deer musk
<i>katta</i>	calf of buffalo
<i>keelna</i>	transfix
<i>keerne</i>	wail and cry
<i>kesar</i>	saffron, <i>Crocus stivus</i>
<i>khabba</i>	runner grass, <i>doobh</i>
<i>khachar</i>	pony
<i>khadar</i>	coarse cotton cloth
<i>khadi/s</i>	handloom/s
<i>Khalsa</i>	a baptised Sikh
<i>khammani</i>	red-coloured thread of coarse cotton
<i>khand</i>	sugar
<i>khatt</i>	dowry items
<i>khed</i>	game

<i>khedna</i>	to play, as also when possessed
<i>kheer</i>	rice boiled in sweetened milk
<i>khes</i>	heavy sheet of coarse cotton
<i>khojis</i>	tracers
<i>kholna</i>	to open, to untie
<i>khori ghah</i>	a kind of grass burnt to get light
<i>khudo-khundi</i>	folk version of hockey; stick and ball
<i>kirat</i>	labour
<i>kirya karam</i>	death rites
<i>kode marna</i>	to whip
<i>kotla</i>	cloth piece twisted and twined into a lash
<i>kuari</i>	unmarried
<i>kudmai</i>	engagement
<i>kuji</i>	small earthen vessel with a neck
<i>kukad</i>	chicken
<i>kulli</i>	hut
<i>kundi</i>	hook; illicit (electric) connection
<i>kurta</i>	shirt
<i>kurti</i>	shirt worn by ladies
<i>laag</i>	payment of service in <i>jajmani</i> system
<i>laagi</i>	a person of menial caste (one who gets <i>laag</i>)
<i>ladoo</i>	fried droplets of gram-flour soaked in sugar syrup and rolled into balls
<i>lagauna</i>	to apply
<i>lain-den</i>	give and take
<i>lal</i>	red; son
<i>lambardar</i>	village headman
<i>langar</i>	community food
<i>langoti</i>	loincloth
<i>lassi</i>	butter milk
<i>lavan</i>	cf. <i>phere</i> , circumambulations around the <i>Guru Granth</i> for Sikh marriage
<i>makaan jana</i>	to visit the house of the dead for condolence
<i>makhane</i>	sweet drops
<i>makhaul</i>	joke
<i>mala</i>	garland
<i>malna</i>	to massage
<i>mama</i>	mother's brother, maternal uncle
<i>manauna</i>	to appease
<i>mandap</i>	place where marriage is solemnised
<i>mandi</i>	market

<i>mandir</i>	temple
<i>mangani</i>	engagement
<i>mangna</i>	to beg
<i>manje</i>	a short flattened broom
<i>mardana taqat</i>	masculinity, masculine power
<i>mari</i>	place (temple) of Gugga Pir
<i>marorewali</i>	twisted
<i>masar</i>	husband of mother's sister
<i>masoor</i>	a pulse, <i>Lens esculanta</i>
<i>massi</i>	mother's sister
<i>maşya</i>	moonless night
<i>math</i>	hermitage, <i>dera</i>
<i>matha tekna</i>	pay obeisance, to bow
<i>mathian</i>	small, crisp, fried bread
<i>mauli</i>	red thread of coarse cotton, <i>gana</i>
<i>maund</i>	measure of weight (2.5 <i>maunds</i> = 1 quintal)
<i>mayian</i>	restrictions on movements of the marrying person
<i>mela</i>	fair
<i>milni</i>	meeting ceremony
<i>mirchan-khane</i>	chilli-eaters
<i>mitha</i>	sweet
<i>mithaian</i>	sweets
<i>mithian</i>	sweetened
<i>mohalla</i>	ward
<i>moong</i>	a pulse, <i>Phaseolus mungo</i>
<i>moongfali</i>	groundnut, <i>Arachis hypogaea</i>
<i>moti</i>	pearl
<i>mukhi</i>	head, headman
<i>mukhia</i>	headman
<i>mukhtars</i>	hereditary leaders
<i>muklawā</i>	second homecoming (in-laws) after marriage
<i>mull</i>	price
<i>mundran</i>	large earrings
<i>munj</i>	reed fibre used for making ropes or matts
<i>murhe</i>	sitting stools made of reed
<i>nagina</i>	putting a person on the ground before death
<i>nai</i>	barber
<i>naik</i>	leader
<i>nakabzani</i>	entrance through a hole made in the wall
<i>namkaran</i>	naming ceremony

<i>nambardar</i>	village headman
<i>namkeen</i>	salty, briny
<i>nani</i>	mother's mother, maternal grandmother
<i>nanka mel</i>	relatives from mother's family
<i>nanke</i>	members of the mother's family, maternal family
<i>naswar</i>	snuff
<i>nath</i>	nose pin
<i>naumi</i>	ninth day of a month
<i>navratra (narate)</i>	nine days of fasting following new moon of <i>Chet</i> and <i>Assu</i>
<i>Neem</i>	margosa, <i>Azadirachta indica</i>
<i>neevin</i>	low
<i>neola</i>	mongoose
<i>niqah</i>	Muslim marriage ceremony
<i>nuhai</i>	bath
<i>orsakhia</i>	a member of <i>tanda</i> panchayat from outside <i>got/gotra</i>
<i>paan</i>	betel leaf folded with catechu, lime paste and areca
<i>padhra than</i>	flat place
<i>pag</i>	turban
<i>pahari</i>	of mountains, mountainous
<i>paise</i>	coins, money
<i>pakora</i>	a piece of vegetable, dipped in gram flour batter and fried in oil
<i>palla</i>	end portion of a cloth, stole or shirt; head scarf
<i>panda</i>	Hindu priest
<i>pani varna</i>	to circulate/wave water over the heads of newly weds
<i>panjiri</i>	wheat flour fried with butter oil and sweetened
<i>pardhan</i>	headman, a wise person
<i>parivar</i>	family
<i>pataal</i>	nether world, hell
<i>patari</i>	a cane box in which snakes are kept
<i>patase</i>	sugar bubbles
<i>Path</i>	recitation of a scripture
<i>pathian</i>	cowdung cakes
<i>pavittar</i>	sacred
<i>ped</i>	foot prints
<i>pede</i>	balls of wheat flour

<i>pehli lohri</i>	first Lohri after marriage/birth
<i>petu</i>	who eats too much
<i>phala</i>	a fire test
<i>phaniar</i>	cobra
<i>pharauna</i>	to hand over
<i>phere</i>	Hindu ceremony of marriage taking rounds around the sacred fire
<i>pheri</i>	round
<i>pheriwala</i>	hawker
<i>phull</i>	last remains, <i>asthian</i>
<i>phulian</i>	moistened and parched rice
<i>phulkari</i>	heavily embroidered sheet; a ceremonial wrap worn by ladies
<i>phull-chugne</i>	to collect the remains of the cremated body
<i>phuphar</i>	husband of father's sister
<i>phuphi</i>	father's sister, <i>bhua</i>
<i>pinjanian</i>	calves
<i>Pipal</i>	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>
<i>pipal-patian</i>	an ornament for the ears
<i>pita-purkhi</i>	traditional occupations
<i>pitran-da</i>	of/for ancestors
<i>pittar puja</i>	ancestor worship
<i>pooris</i>	fried wheat cakes
<i>potli</i>	small bag made of cloth
<i>praja</i>	public
<i>prant</i>	a flat metallic container used for kneading flour
<i>pucca</i>	a house made of bricks and cement
<i>puja</i>	worship
<i>punn</i>	virtuous action, charity
<i>purdah</i>	screen, veil
<i>Rabb</i>	God
<i>rani-haar</i>	large necklace
<i>ratian</i>	red and black seeds of <i>Abrus precatorius</i>
<i>raulla</i>	who eats too many chapattis or <i>rotian</i>
<i>raunaq</i>	hustle-bustle and happiness
<i>rehri</i>	cart
<i>reodi</i>	sugar or jaggery balls covered with sesame seeds
<i>rishi</i>	saint, sage
<i>rok</i>	booked, reserved
<i>rokna</i>	to book, to reserve; to stop
<i>roodi</i>	animal manure; heap of garbage

<i>rot</i>	large loaf of wheat flour
<i>roti</i>	small loaf of wheat flour, bread
<i>rozi-roti</i>	bread and butter
<i>sag</i>	mashed green leaves with spices (dish), raw green edible leaves
<i>sabha</i>	organisation, body of people
<i>sachian</i>	true daughters (martyrs)
<i>sahibzadian</i>	
<i>sadda</i>	invitation
<i>sadhhu</i>	mendicant
<i>saf</i>	mat
<i>saha</i>	hare
<i>salami</i>	to offer money (<i>shagan</i>)
<i>sale chor-uchakke</i>	bloody petty thieves
<i>sali</i>	wife's sister
<i>sakwar</i>	trousers worn by both men and women
<i>samadh</i>	tomb or shrine constructed over the ashes of a dead person
<i>samagari</i>	items for a ritual/ceremony
<i>samaj</i>	society
<i>sandah</i>	desert lizard
<i>sangat</i>	congregation
<i>sanna</i>	hemp, a kind of grass
<i>sapp da manka</i>	a button like thing made out of snake's venom
<i>sapp de dand</i>	fangs of a snake
<i>sappan da jora</i>	a pair of snakes
<i>sarpanch</i>	head of panchayat
<i>sarson</i>	mustard
<i>saskar</i>	cremation
<i>sath</i>	marriage place
<i>saugi</i>	dried grapes
<i>saukhe kumm</i>	small errands, odd jobs
<i>sava mahina</i>	a month and a quarter
<i>seer</i>	partnership
<i>seeri</i>	partner
<i>seerni</i>	sweetened water
<i>seh</i>	porcupine
<i>sehra</i>	a decorated wreath adorning the groom's head, chaplet
<i>sehra bandi</i>	turban tying, done by the sisters before <i>barat</i>
<i>sevian</i>	vermicelli

<i>shagan</i>	engagement ceremony; to offer money as gift; betrothal
<i>shahid</i>	martyr
<i>shan</i>	grace
<i>sharad</i>	ancestor worship
<i>sharbat</i>	sweetened water
<i>shikar</i>	game
<i>shilajeet</i>	rock secretion of medicinal value, potent drug
<i>shlokas</i>	verses
<i>sindoor</i>	vermilion
<i>sirkanda</i>	elephant grass
<i>sirkis</i>	huts
<i>sithanian</i>	lampoon; songs sung by women ridiculing the guests/ <i>baratis</i>
<i>siva</i>	place of cremation
<i>solvan</i>	sixteenth
<i>sooti</i>	of cotton
<i>sucha</i>	pure
<i>suche waal</i>	first lock of hair cut after birth
<i>suhaag raat</i>	first night after marriage
<i>suhagans</i>	women whose husbands are alive
<i>suian</i>	small needles
<i>sukh</i>	pledge
<i>sukh da bakra</i>	lamb offered for sacrifice upon the fulfillment of a wish
<i>sukh luhana</i>	to make offerings when a wish is fulfilled
<i>sukha</i>	grass, <i>Cannabis indica</i>
<i>sukh-shanti</i>	peace and prosperity
<i>sulfa</i>	mixture of tobacco and <i>Cannabis</i> smoked as intoxicant
<i>sur</i>	pig
<i>surkhi</i>	lipstick
<i>surma</i>	collyrium powder
<i>tanda</i>	camp or Banjara settlement, a large pack of bullocks, a caravan
<i>taragi</i>	a cotton cord worn around the loins
<i>tauri</i>	earthen cooking pot
<i>tel-chona</i>	to pour mustard oil to welcome the guest
<i>thali</i>	steel plate for taking food
<i>than</i>	chapel, sacred place
<i>thana</i>	police station

<i>tharah</i>	platform
<i>thath</i>	from cooked lamb meat the heart, liver, right kidney, neck and two hooves of the right side are taken out for offering
<i>thheka</i>	contract; liquor shop
<i>thheke te</i>	on contract
<i>thhuthhi/an</i>	kernel/s of coconut
<i>thuara</i>	incense of <i>desi ghee</i> poured over a burning cake of cowdung
<i>tika</i>	vermillion mark on the forehead
<i>til</i>	beauty spot
<i>til</i>	sesame seeds, <i>Sesamum indicum</i>
<i>titar</i>	partridge
<i>tokra</i>	basket
<i>tokrewala</i>	of the basket
<i>trishul</i>	trident, symbol of Shiva
<i>Tulsi</i>	basil, <i>Ocimum sanctum</i>
<i>uchi</i>	high
<i>unlag</i>	unused, untouched
<i>vadda</i>	big, large
<i>vadda karna</i>	celebrating the death of an old person
<i>vaddi</i>	long, large
<i>vadhai dena</i>	to congratulate
<i>vadhayan</i>	congratulations
<i>vaid</i>	physician practicing Ayurvedic medicine
<i>Vaisakh (Baisakh)</i>	lunar month from mid-April to mid-May
<i>vakil</i>	advocate
<i>vangan</i>	glass bangles
<i>varlap</i>	to cry
<i>vashna</i>	smell, fragrance
<i>vatna</i>	a mix of turmeric, gram flour and curd or oil
<i>vatta</i>	exchange
<i>vehra</i>	courtyard, ward, neighbourhood
<i>vel</i>	money given to the artist/performer as a token of appreciation
<i>vel vadhave</i>	add to the family (as progeny), like a creeper
<i>viah</i>	marriage
<i>vichola</i>	mediator
<i>vimukt jatis</i>	denotified tribes
<i>wari</i>	clothes, make-up items, jewelry
<i>zarda</i>	powdered tobacco

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