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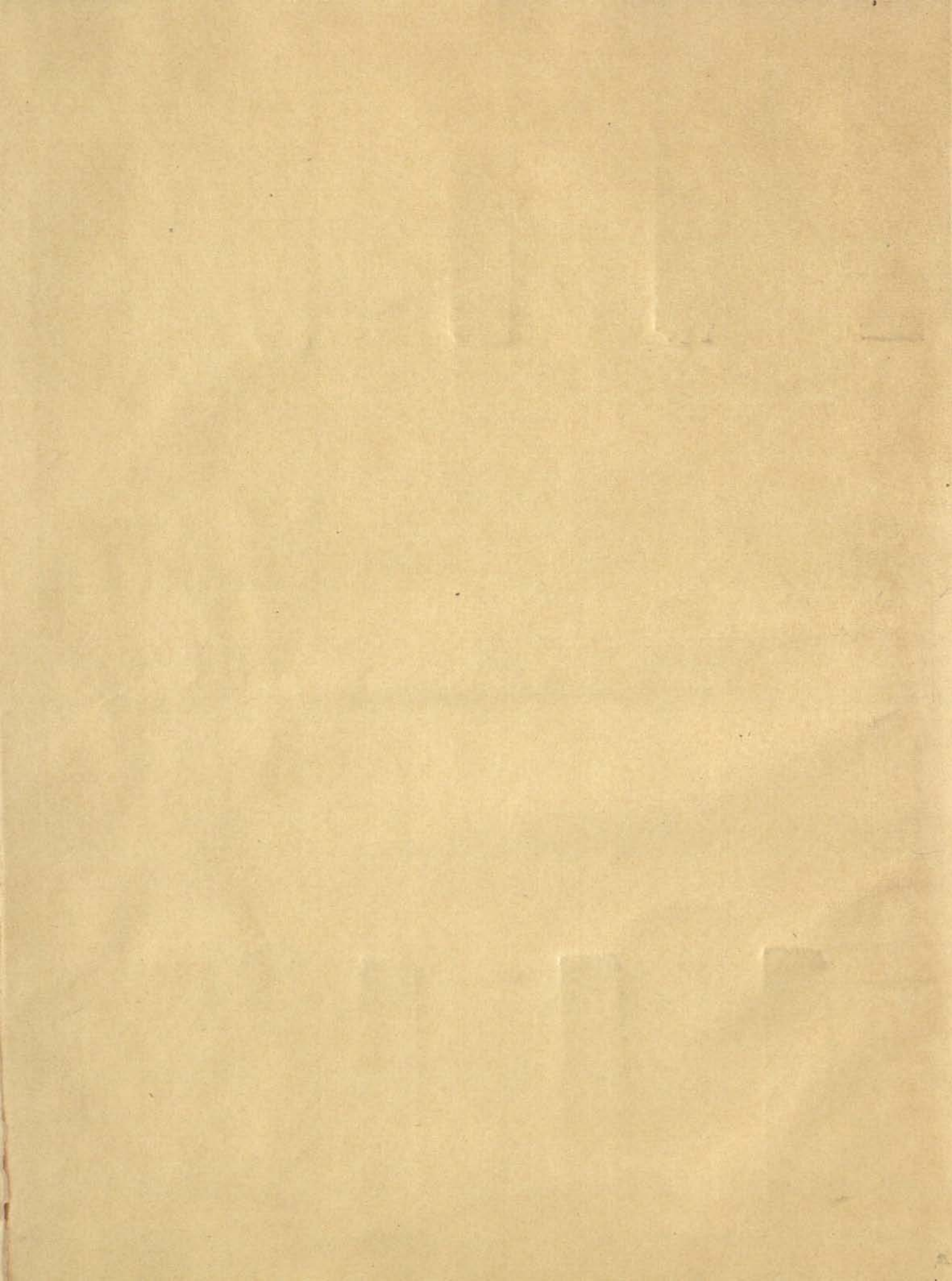
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M. S. University Archaeology & Ancient History Series No. 6

# THE ABHIRAS

## THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

By

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### FOREWORD

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Respectfully dedicated to  
Late Lamented  
*Rev. Fr. Henry Heras S. J.*  
Director  
Indian Historical Research Institute  
St. Xavier's College Bombay  
who initiated this work







## FOREWORD

I have very great pleasure in writing this foreword to this interesting study on "The Abhiras-their history and culture" which has been undertaken by Shri Suryavanshi of our Department of History and Archaeology.

This study was originally undertaken at the suggestion of the late Rev. Father Heras by Shri Suryavanshi and continued after he joined our Department of Archaeology.

From the historical point of view, it is a very interesting study. The origin of Abhiras is obscure, Some eminent historians are of the opinion that they are of foreign origin who came to the north-west of India and from there spread over many regions of India. The author of this book believes that they were an Indian tribe which migrated from one part of India to different parts of the country. In our ancient literature, we get extensive references to their movements at different periods in history and to different regions of the country. Wherever the Abhiras went, they took with them their culture and traditions. This study is a welcome addition to the scanty literature we have of different races and tribes which people this great sub-continent and who have made contribution to what may be called the complex culture and civilization of India. I congratulate Shri Suryavanshi and the Department of Archaeology for this important monograph.

*J. M. Mehta*

Vice-Chancellor  
M. S. University of Baroda





## PREFACE

It was in the summer of 1955 when, in a conversation with the late Rev. Fr. Heras S. J., the then Director of the Indian Historical Research Institute of Bombay, I first felt attracted to study the history and culture of the Abhiras. As I began studying the vast and varied literature through which is scattered the colourful and romantic history of the Abhira community, revealing a profound influence on almost every aspect of the mighty stream of Indian culture, I found that the subject was much more fascinating than I had imagined it to be. The present work has grown out of my researches carried on first at Bombay and later at the M. S. University of Baroda. The reader will see that I have arrived at conclusions substantially different from those held by certain other scholars with regard to the contributions of the Abhiras to the main current of Indian history and culture. The conclusions drawn here are based on literary, archaeological and sociological evidence.

I have received help and encouragements from many scholars in my researches and I take this opportunity to express my sense of gratitude to all of them. I am obliged to Dr. J. M. Mehta, The Vice Chancellor M. S. University Baroda who has kindly written a foreword to me. I am very grateful to Dr. Motichandra, who kindly went through the first draft of this work and made valuable criticisms and suggestions. I have also benefitted from the criticisms and suggestions offered by Professor B. Subbarao and Dr. L. B. Keny and I express my sincere thanks to them. During my stay at Bombay I received constant encouragement and inspiration from Dr. George M. Moraes, and I would like to express my thanks to him.

I have great pleasure in expressing my gratitude to the authorities of The Asiatic Society of Bombay for their kind co-operation during the period of my study. Finally I take this opportunity to thank the authorities of the M. S. University who readily accepted the proposal to publish this work.

17 Adhyapak Niwas,  
Baroda.

B. S. SURYAVANSHI



## CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword .....	v
Preface .....	vii
Contents .....	viii
List of Illustrations .....	ix
<b>Introduction</b> .....	x
Linguistic dialects of the Abhiras xiv, The sources .....	xv
<b>Chapter I—The Abhira migrations and settlements</b> .....	1
The Abhira migrations and settlements 1, Abhira settlements after the first century A.D. 5, The Abhiradesa 7, The continuity of the settlements 10.	
<b>Chapter II—Origin of the Abhiras</b> .....	15
Etymology of the terms Abhira Gopa and Ghosha 15, Antiquity of the term Abhira 16, Ghosha 18, The Abhiras and their Ghoshas 20, Gopa or Gopala 21, The terms Abhira, Gopa or Gopala and Ghosha in ancient Sanskrit literature 21, The Abhiras in traditions and literature 22, Shifting Foci 28.	
<b>Chapter III—Rise and Fall of the Abhiras</b> .....	29
Rise of the Abhiras 31, Domain of Rajan Isvarasena 34, Mahakshatrapa Isvara-datta 35, Imperial status of the Abhiras 38, War with Mularaja 40, War with Siddharaja Jayasimha 42, War with Kumarapala 44, War with the Chalukyas of Kuntala 45, Summary 51.	
<b>Chapter IV—Social Life and Culture</b> .....	53
Cowherds in ancient Indian literature 54, Robbery 58, Professions 59, Dress and Ornaments 60, The Cowherd women 60, Manners and Morals 62, Games 62, Water sports 65, Adventures of the forest life 66, Food and drink 67, Ceremonies festivals and worships 68, Birth-day ceremony 68, Magic rites and rituals 69, Social Life 69, Dances 70, Historical traditions 72, Rasas in Sangam literature 72, Later traditions of the rasa dance 74, Paintings and sculptures of the dances of the Abhiras 74, Music 75, Music of the cowherd women 76, Later traditions of Abhira music 76.	



<b>Chapter V—The people today</b> .. .. .	81
Divisions and surnames of the Ahirs 82, The Panchayats 86, Occupations 86, Marriage 87, Birth and death ceremonies 89, Religious belief 90, Tattooing 92, Folk songs of Ahirs 92, Lorik legends 93, Traditions 94.	
<b>Appendix I—Inscriptions of the Abhiras</b> .. .. .	97
Inscription of Rudrabhuti Abhira Saka era 102 97, Nasik Cave Inscription of Isvarasena year 9 97, Indore Plate of Svamidada Abhira-era ( ? ) 67 98, Abhira inscription of the time of Rudrasimha III ( ? ) 99, Nagarjunikonda Inscription of Vasushena Abhira regnal year 30 100, Indore Plate of Bhulunda Abhira era ( ? ) 107 103, Sirpur plate of Rudradasa year 117 104, Ghatiyala Inscription of Kakku Samvat 918 105.	
<b>Appendix II—Table showing the distribution of the Abhiras in ancient and modern India</b>	106
<b>Bibliography</b> .. .. .	110

### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
1. Abhira settlements c. 1st century B.C. ( Fig. 1 ) .. .. .	3
2. Abhira settlements c. 1st century A.D. ( Fig. 2 ) .. .. .	6
3. Abhira migrations and distribution of their dialects ( Fig. 3 ) .. .. .	13
4. Principal find spots of the inscriptions of Abhira era ( Kalachuri chedi ) ( Fig. 4 ) ..	33
5. Dandarasaka ( Bagh Fresco )—Plate I .. .. .	<i>facing</i> .. 75
6. Nagarjunikonda Inscription of Vasushena Abhira—Plate II .. .. .	<i>facing</i> .. 101



## INTRODUCTION

### I

In this work I have endeavoured to reconstruct the history and culture of the Abhira tribe ( known as Ahirs these days ), from the earliest time to the period when they disappeared as a political power from the map of India.

Before reviewing their history, it seems advisable to lay down the basic principles applied to reconstruct their origin and antiquity, material about which is so scanty. The Abhiras appear in the history of ancient India as a tribe, which migrated from one place to another, and finally settled in various regions. They developed a complexity in their culture due to the fusion of their tribal with the regional cultures and traditions, which are still living. Therefore the migration of the tribe, homogeneity and continuity of their traditions have been taken as a basis of the treatment of this subject.

The problem of migration as a matter of fact, is one of the most important features of the history of India. We have enough archaeological evidences to prove such movements. The history of India, based on literary and historical material, is one of the expansion of the vista of the country, which was colonised, physically and culturally by higher communities displacing the established tribals to the hilly regions and forests. A long tradition of such movements can be traced out from the pages of history.

In terms of time and space, the regional tribal cultures developed a complicated pattern. When political condition settled down and a full-fledged state system came into existence, this expansionist urge, resulted in the emergence of larger and the smaller states, culminating in the empires of Indian history. The Abhiras may be cited as an example of such a tribe, which after undergoing the process of migration established a kingdom in Western India. If the lower limit of the Aryan expansion be placed at about the beginning of the Christian era, when most of the Puranic material was incorporated in the Vayu and the Matsyapuranas, it was the time when we hear of the exciting movements of the Abhiras. The references of these movements we find in the Epics and the Puranas by way of different legends.

Near about the beginning of the Christian era, the settlements of the Abhiras were limited to the Punjab, Rajasthan and Sind as recorded by the Mahabharata.



In the early centuries of the Christian era, the Abhiras moved towards the south. It was the time when they consolidated themselves in their new homes, viz. Saurashtra, Gujarat, Malva and Khandesh, some groups of the Abhiras moved eastwards from Punjab and Rajasthan and finally settled in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa, while a good number of them settled on the land of *relative isolation* i.e. the region near about Chhattisgarh and so on. In their initial stages, the Abhiras took possession of their newly settled lands, the traditions of which are current in some of the districts of U.P. and Bihar.

The southward movements of the Abhiras as a matter of fact might be earlier than the 1st century A.D., when some of the legends about the Ayars were incorporated in the Sangam classics of Tamil literature.

The Abhiras, after being settled in their new homes, almost gave up their migratory character so much so, that the Ahirs, their descendents, are still inhabiting all those regions.

Reviewing the problem from the cultural point of view, it is worth noticing, that as a result of these movements, the centres of their activities went on shifting. The legendary references of the Mahabharata, so to say, the disappearance of Sarasvati, rape of the Vrishni women by the Abhiras and paying tribute to Yudhishthira, show that the centres of the accentuated activities of the Abhiras were in the East Punjab, Rajasthan and Sind. The region of South-West Rajasthan and eastern Sind was called Abhiradesa in the 1st century A.D. Later on, when they left these regions and occupied U.P., Gujarat, Malva, Konkan, Khandesh and Madhya Pradesh, their activities were transferred and the Jain works like the *Kalpasūtra* and *Nishithachūrṇi* have also mentioned the region near *Achalpur* and *Krishnaveṇā* river as Abhiradesa. Thus another Abhiradesa at once proves the transfer of the centre of Abhira activities and their dominance in the region near about Wardha, Ellichpur, Betul and Khandesh.

It is worth noticing, that in the rudiments of the Abhira culture, we find a peculiar blend of vertical and horizontal forces. Wherever they migrated, they carried with them their traditions, which in course of time got regional colours. The legends of the cowherd Krishna and his dances with the cowherdesses, mentioned in the Sangam classics may be taken as an example. The term Ayar has been used for the Abhiras in the ancient Tamil literature.



In Saurashtra, the Abhiras still call themselves as Ayars. The living tradition of the Abhira migrations survived with the Abhiras to-day. It is interesting to note that the Abhiras (including the Ghosis, and the Gollas of Mysore) still cherish the memory that Mathura, U.P. was their home. The homogeneity of traditions is more pronounced in the internal organization of the entire Ahir community of India. In Saurashtra, some Ahirs are called *Nandania*, the name came in to vogue after Nanda, the foster-father of Krishna. In Madhya Pradesh there are three divisions of Ahirs viz. *Nandbans*, *Gwalbans* and *Yaduvamsa*. These endogamous groups trace their antiquity to Mathura as their home. The *Kanaujia* and *Narbaria* Ahirs of Madhya Pradesh believe that Kanauj (U.P.) and Narwar (Gwalior) was their home. The members of these groups could even be traced in Khandesh. The Ahirs of Khandesh believe that they are the immigrants from the north. Some of the Khandesh Ahirs, being come out of the Gwalbans group of Ahirs are akin to the Ahirs of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The *Bilhauria* Ahirs of Khandesh trace their antiquity to Bilhaur, an old village with a huge mound in Kanpur district of U.P. The *Kanaujia* Ahirs are also found in Orissa. Another important group the *Jujhautia* Ahirs trace their antiquity to Jujhota, a village with an archaeological site in district Etah, U.P. The members of both these groups are inhabiting not only Orissa, but Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh also. The *Kosaria* Ahirs of Orissa, describe Kosala (Oudh, U.P.) as their ancient home. The *Ballabh* Ahirs of Bengal claim themselves as the descendents of *Ghamghosha*, who according to their belief sprang from the sweat of Krishna. The *Ujjainia* Ahirs of Bengal, claim Ujjain as their ancient home. Lastly, the Gollas of Mysore, also, cherish the same tradition that Mathura, U.P. was their ancient Home. The *Yadu Kula* or *Krishnaut Gollas* claim to be the descendents of Krishna. The *Krishnaut Gollas* are inhabiting Belgaum district also.

Thus, the present Ahirs of Belgaum, Mysore, Khandesh, Madhya Pradesh, Saurashtra, Malva, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal are unanimous in tracing their homeland as Mathura, U.P. and akin to each other in their basic structures.

All the *Yadu Kula* or *Yadav* Ahirs cherish the tradition that Krishna, the cow-herd-god was their ancestor. All these things prove the continuity of their traditions and migration from a common place.

Further, these popular traditions of Ahir migration, strikingly support the Mahabharata and Puranic data. A comparison between the Epic, Puranic and



popular traditions show that the Sabhaparva places the Abhiras on the banks of the river Sindhu (Indus) and Sarasvati (modern Ghaggar). The evidences of the Mastya Purana and the Markandeya Purana give a picture of further expansion of the Abhiras in Eastern Punjab, Rajasthan, Saurashtra and South India. Here the bardic and oral traditions of the Ahirs show their migration from Mathura to the above regions. A bardic tradition of the *Yadava* Ahirs of Lucknow district also shows, that their ancient home was somewhere on the banks of Indus river and they can trace their full geneology to their ancestors who were on the river Sindhu. The only difference between the popular and the Puranic tradition is that, the Ahirs show their migration from Mathura to distant regions, while the Puranas simply describe their settlements in distant lands. As the Puranas have not mentioned specifically the migration of the Abhiras, rather, their *ganas* have only been recorded, flourishing in the above mentioned regions. An explanation of this difference may be pointed out that the aim and purpose of the authors of the Puranas was not to mention the movements of the Abhiras; and they have simply recorded their settlements in different periods in the *bhuvanakosha*, geography of ancient India. It seems that sometimes the Abhiras of the Indus (Sindhu) region were forced to move towards east and some of them came to settle in Madhya Pradesh on the bank of the small mountainous river which is also called Sindh these days. The hilly area of this river Sindh, has some ancient sites, which are popularly ascribed to the Ahir rule. Even at present, the Ahirs are very strong there and very large in number.

For the rest of the groups of the Abhiras it may be suggested that the Abhiras after being moved to Mathura, some of them settle down in Mathura only, while one group took the route to south via Ujjain and Paithana and reached upto Khandesh gradually. The other groups of the Abhiras continued their march eastward and settled down in East-Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. A group of the Abhiras from Madhya Pradesh seems to have migrated to Orissa. The Abhiras who migrated to Madhya Pradesh settled down in Chhindwara, Betul, Yeotmal, Wardha and Chhattisgarh, *the areas of relative isolation*.

These various groups of the Abhiras, after being settled on distant lands got isolated with each other, and due to difference in their physical and cultural environments they developed a regional trend in their culture. These regional peculiarities brought complexities in features of the Abhiras. This variation in the features may be due to the difference in the geographical environments. It can be noticed



that the Ahir folk, settled on the fertile agricultural plains, have sharp delicate features, while those who are still living in forests in primitiveness like the Magadha Ahirs and Gollas of Mysore, have ugly features.

It is significant to note that the groups of the Abhiras, who were settled in the large alluvial Indo-Gangetic plains, could not keep up their distinct features and lost their individuality in that melting pot of cultures. In the other cases, the persons who got settled in the forested or semi-forested regions, could keep their identity which in course of time due to political and cultural reasons gave birth to the linguistic peculiarities in those regions.

### **Linguistic dialects of Abhiras**

These Abhira movements in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh gave birth to some new dialects, still current in those areas, and known after them. The Abhiras used to speak *Abhīrī*, a dialects of their own, as recorded by Bharata and Dandin, which got influenced by the local dialects in different regions.

Thus, we can notice several Ahir dialects prevalent in various regions of India. One can specifically mention the *Gaddi* dialect, current in the land yet called *Gadderan*, in the outskirts of the Chamba and Kangra hills. Another dialect worth mentioning in this series is *Gaudi*, current in some parts of Madhya Pradesh and the last but most important is *Ahirani* spoken in Khandesh. Amongst all the *Khandeshi* or *Ahirani* is biggest and has got a vital importance. *Khandeshi* or *Ahirani* has much affinity to village Marathi and more with Gujarati. This impact of *Ahirani* with Gujarati may indicate that the Ahirs ( Abhiras ) of Khandesh originally belonged to Gujarat.

To sum up, we find that the Abhiras though being of the same stock, migrated to different regions of India. Wherever they went, they carried some of their traditions to the place. Some of them settled down on Indo-Gangetic plains and lost their individuality, while the others, who settled in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh retained their identity. These groups adopted regional peculiarities and linguistic propensities. The modern Ahir folk of these areas therefore, bear a complexity in their culture, an impact of horizontal and vertical traits.

In the *areas of relative isolation*, the Abhiras took advantage of the physical features and exploited the political condition for their purpose. They carved out a kingdom for themselves, which proved to be an eye-sore to the Kadambas,



Chalukyas, Hoysalas, and the Yadavas. The Abhiras resisted hard to save their entity, but finally lapsed into decay, leaving their kingly glamour. The material traces of their past glory are buried in obscurity, yet their traditions are alive. In Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh numerous legends of Abhira rule are current amongst the village folk. These living folk-tales and stories about the ancient Abhira warriors coupled with the various Ahir dialects, apparently prove to the hazy day of the Abhiras.

## II

### The Sources

Before we take up a study of our subject, it is advisable to comment upon the nature of the sources and their utility for the problem.

The earliest authentic reference on the Abhiras can be seen in the Mahabhashya of Patanjali, wherein, they have been mentioned as merely a separate caste (*Jati*). Our main sources as a matter of fact are the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Vāyupurāṇa*, *Harivamśapurāṇa*, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Agni-purāṇa* and the *Padmapurāṇa*. Besides these puranic records some Sanskrit dramas like the *Mrichchhakatika*, *Prabodhachandrodaya* and the *Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa* have also referred to the Abhiras.

Needless to point out that owing to the scarcity of the authentic sources, the task of reconstructing the life and culture of the Abhiras becomes very difficult. The nature of most of our literary sources is legendary, it becomes impossible sometimes to reconstruct the history out of it. The dates of the compilation of these works are also controversial, therefore the information contained therein is bound to give rise to doubts. To solve this difficulty therefore, I have followed the dates of the compilation of the Mahabharata and the Puranas, generally accepted by the scholars. I accept the date of the compilation of the Sabhaparva geography as fixed by Dr. Motichandra<sup>1</sup> and the Puranic chronology as ascertained by Dr. R. C. Hazra. In dealing with the problem of the Abhira migrations, the conclusions have been drawn on the basis of the probable date of the compilation of the *bhuvanakośha* geography of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Markaṇḍeyapurāṇa*.

1. Motichandra, *Geographical and Economic studies in the Mahabharata; Upayana parva*, Lucknow, 1945, p. 24.



Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that since the Abhiras appear in the history of India in the 2nd century B.C. and by the 2nd century A.D., we find that they rose to the status of trust and responsibility of the Sakas in Gujarat. Immediately after the downfall of the Satavahanas, they carved out a kingdom in Khandesh. Therefore the period of their migration could only be placed between the 2nd century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. This was also the time when these *bhuvanakosha* chapters of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* are believed to have been compiled.

The fourth chapter is mostly based upon the *Harivamśa*, *Bhāgavata*, *Padma* and other puranic evidences. Therein, the life of the *Gopas* and *Ghoshas*, who have been identified with the Abhiras has been sketched.

The work depicts the complete life of the *Abhiras*, *Gopas* and *Ghoshas*. They were cowherds, and represent an example of a tribe which rose to the status of kingly dignity from primitiveness, and thus placed themselves amongst the ruling tribes of India.



## CHAPTER I

### THE ABHIRA MIGRATIONS AND SETTLEMENTS

References about the Abhira migrations and settlements are not many in ancient Indian literature. No record, what so ever, is available to give us an authentic information about them before the 3rd or 2nd century B.C. Not only the earlier literature, but Patañjali also is silent about the geographical position of the Abhiras. The Epics and the Puranas are the only sources, which throw some light over the problem.

The data contained in the above Puranas, does not tend to picturise the life of contemporary Hindu society or geography, therefore it is incidental and not connected as a whole. The sources specified above, contain a glimpse of the geography and ethnography of *Jambūkhanda* or *Bhāratavarsha*. Amongst the long list of the *gaṇas* (tribal republics) narrated in the sources, the authors have simply pointed out the broad divisions or directions of the regions, where those tribes were settled. No specific region has been given to locate them. The *Ābhira gaṇas* have also been mentioned amongst them. From an observation it appears that the whole information has been set in such a way, which indicates that the geographer had a faint idea of the geography of India.

It seems that the Abhiras in particular, moved from the west towards the east and south, shifting the main centres of their intensive activities from time to time. In the following pages it is proposed to reconstruct and mark out the various stages of the migrations and settlements of the Abhiras.

To come to the exact point we first come across a śloka of *Sabhāparva*<sup>1</sup> which is as follows:

गणानुत्सवसंकेतान्वयजयत्पुरुषर्षभः  
सिन्धुकूलाश्रिता ये च ग्रामणेया महाबलाः  
शूद्राभीर गणाश्चैव ये चाश्रित्य सरस्वतीम्  
वर्तयन्त च ये मत्स्यै<sup>2</sup> ये च पर्वतवासिनः

1. *Mbh. Sabhaparva.*, B.O.R.I., Poona, 1943, XXIX śloka 8-9, p. 152.

2. *Saha* is understood here, hence the word *Matsyair* should be translated as *matsyair saha*.



The above sloka seems to be very conspicuous. Here, the geographer describes the various settlements of the Abhiras; one on the bank of the river *Sarasvatī*, the other on the bank of the river *Sindhu*, the third in the *Matsya* region and the fourth in the mountainous region. This *Sindhu* is river *Indus* and *Sarasvatī* has been identified with modern *Ghaggar* which emerges from the lower spurs of the *Himalayas* and after passing through *Sirsa* and *Suratgarh* disappears in the desert of *Rajasthan*.<sup>1</sup> The whole dry bed of *Sarasvatī* has been explored. It starts from *Sirsa* onwards turning to the south-west to *Hanumangarh*. At one time the river *Sarasvatī* continued to join *Sindhu* to the south of the confluence of *Sutlej*,<sup>2</sup> but afterward it turned southward and running almost parallel with the *Sindh* and *Sutlej* had its outlet in the *Rann of Cutch*.

The habitation of the Abhiras on the banks of river *Indus* may be located to the south of *Bahawalpur State*, where, the *Śūdras* were settled in the time of *Alexander*.

The Abhira settlement of *Sarasvatī* may be located with some certainty, as the *Mahabharata* gives us some more details in *Śalyaparva*. It has been mentioned that the river *Sarasvatī* disappeared at *Vinaśana* due to hatred toward the *Śūdrāhiras*.<sup>3</sup> This clearly suggests that the Abhiras were settled round about *Vinaśana*, which has been located in the Upper *Rajasthan* by *Dr. V. S. Agrawal*.<sup>4</sup> This settlement may specifically be located round about *Sirsa*. The third settlement was in the *Matsya* region.

Here the Abhiras have been kept in contiguity with the *Matsyas*, who were inhabiting the regions near about *Alwar* and *Jaipur*. This group of the Abhiras may better be located near about the same areas upto *Mathura, U.P.*

The last Abhira settlement of this series is very obscure. Here the author ceases to mention even a faintest direction of the particular mountainous region. It can be suggested that river *Sarasvatī* would have been the stronghold of the Abhiras.

The next stage of the Abhira settlements has also been recorded by the later geographer of the *Mahabharata*. In the *Bhīshmaparva* of the *Mahabharata*,

1. HANNA RYDH, *Rang Mahal*, Acta Archaeologic Lundensia series, Lund, 1959, p. 23.

2. *Ibid.* p. 24.

3. *Mbh.* IX., 37, 2119.

4. AGRAWAL V. S., *Bharata ki mauika ekta*, Allahabad, 2011 V.E., p. 36.



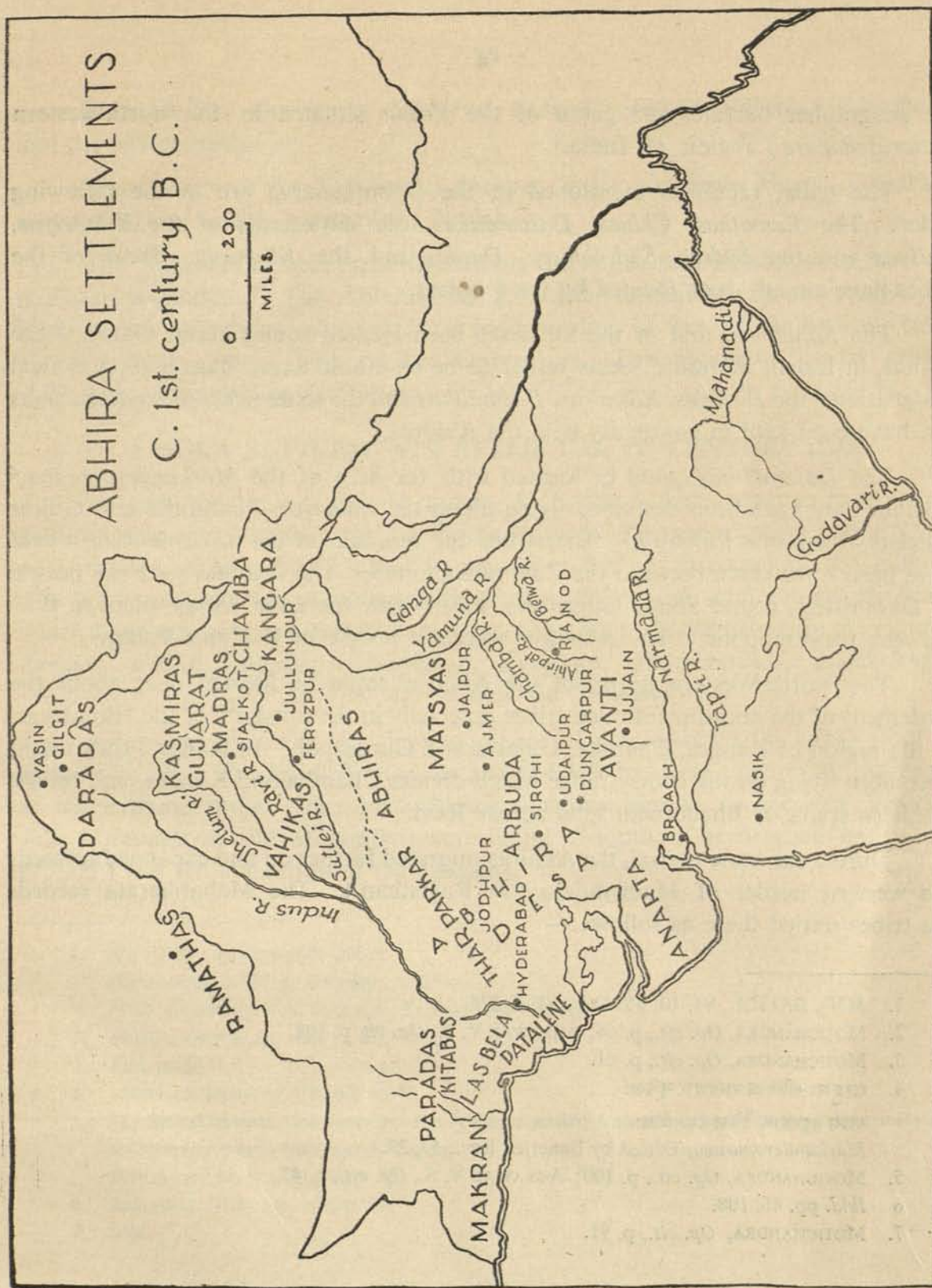


Fig. 1



the geographer narrates the *gaṇas* of the *Vrātas* situated in the north-western ( *uttarāśchāpare* ) region of India.<sup>1</sup>

The tribal republics mentioned in the *Bhishmaparva* are in the following order: The *Ramaṭhas*, *Chīnas*, *Daśamālikas*, the settlements of the *Kshatriyas*, *Vaiśyas* and the *Śūdras*, *Śūdrābhīras*, *Dardas* and the *Kāsmīras*. Some of the tribes have already been located by the scholars.

The *Ramaṭhas*, first of the lot, have been located round about Gazani,<sup>2</sup> the *Chīnas*, in Indian literature seems rather to be an ethnic term, than, a geographical designation,<sup>3</sup> the *Dardas*, *Kāsmīras*, *Daśmālikas* and the settlements of the *Kshatriyas* etc. have been kept in contiguity with the *Abhiras*.

The *Daśamālikas* could be located with the help of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*,<sup>4</sup> wherein they have been described living along the *Kaikeyas*, ( *Sargotha* and *Gujrat* districts, Northern Punjab ).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the republic of the *Daśamālikas*, would have been somewhere between the *Ravi* and *Chinab*. The *Dardas* were the people of *Daradistan*, round about *Gilgit* and *Yasin*<sup>6</sup> and the river *Indus* used to flow between their republic. The *Kāsmīras* were the people of *Kashmir Valley*.<sup>7</sup>

The North-Western group of the *Abhiras* could be located near about the settlement of the above mentioned tribes especially in the outskirts of the *Himalayas*, in the region of *Kangra*, *Chamba*, *Gujarat* and *Gurdaspur*. In *Kangra*, they might have been living on the snowy range which divides *Chamba* and *Kangra*, and on the southern spurs of *Bhadarwah* hills across *Ravi*.

During the same period, the *Abhiras* migrated further on and expanded towards the western border of *Madhyadesa* ( in *Rajasthan* ). The *Mahabharata* records the tribes settled there as follows:—

1. *Mbh.*, B.O.R.I., VI, 10, 65; *Cal.*, VI, 9, 375.
2. MOTICHANDRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 66; AGRAWAL V. S., *Op. cit.*, p. 108.
3. MOTICHANDRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.
4. शतद्रुजाः कलिगाश्च पारदाहार भूषिकाः  
माठरा बहुभद्राश्च कैकेया दशमालिकः  
*Markandeyapurana*, Edited by Banerjea Rev., 57, 37.
5. MOTICHANDRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 100; AGRAWAL V. S., *Op. cit.*, p. 47.
6. *Ibid.* pp. 46, 108.
7. MOTICHANDRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 91.



The *Mallas*, *Sudeshṇas*, *Prāhūtas*, *Māhishkarshikas*, *Vāhikas*, *Vāṭadhānas*, and the *Kālatoyakas*.<sup>1</sup>

The country of the *Vāhikas* lay between Indus and Sutlej rivers. *Vāhika* as a matter of fact was the name of the Punjab.<sup>2</sup>

The *Vāṭadhānas* have been located in the southern Punjab, lower Sind and southern Rajasthan.<sup>3</sup> The *Abhiras*, being settled immediately in the neighbourhood of the *Vāṭadhānas* seem to have been residing in western Rajasthan, round about Jodhpur, Sirohi, Udaipur and Dungarpur. This region in the 1st century A.D. formed the part of *Abhīradeśa*.

### ABHIRA SETTLEMENTS AFTER THE 1st CENTURY A.D.

Towards the close of the 1st century A.D., the *Abhiras* seem to have moved southward in the *dakṣiṇāpatha* via Paithan route. The geographers of the *Mahā-purāṇas* have shown their interest in recording the advancement of the *Abhiras*. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* presents before us a list of the tribes settled in *dakṣiṇāpatha* which have not been mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.<sup>4</sup> These tribes are the *Pāṇḍyas*, *Keralas*, *Cholas*, *Sailushas*, *Mushikas*, *Kumāras*, *Vanavāsakas*, *Mahārāshṭras*, *Mahishikas*, *Kaliṅgas*, *Ābhīras*, *Aṭvyas* and the *Śabaras*.<sup>5</sup>

As evident from the list, the geographer has enumerated the tribes from the extreme south. The *Pāṇḍyas*, *Keralas* and the *Cholas*, were apparently the people of the extreme south. The *Vanavāsakas* were the people of modern Vanvāsi.<sup>6</sup> The *Mahārāshṭras* and *Mahishikas* were living in southern Hyderabad and Orissa (Utkal) was the habitation of the *Kaliṅgas*.<sup>7</sup>

1. महाः सुदेश्णाः प्राहूतास्तथा माहिष कार्षिकाः  
वाहिका वाटधानाश्च आभीराः कालतोयकाः  
*Mbh.*, Bhishmaparva, B.O.R.I., Poona, 1943, X, 45.
2. MOTICHANDRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.
3. *Ibid.* p. 32.
4. *Markandeyapurana*, Ch. 64, 45-47.
5. The *Brihatsamhita* also describes the *Abhiras* settled with the *Sabaras* in the 6th century A.D.  
आभीराञ्छबेरान् सपल्लवान् महान् मत्स्यकुरुञ्छकार्णाप  
*Brihatsamhita. Op. cit.*, V, p. 38.
6. AGRAWAL V.S., *Op. cit.*, p. 51.
7. *Ibid.*



# ABHIRA SETTLEMENTS

C. 1st.Cen. A.D.

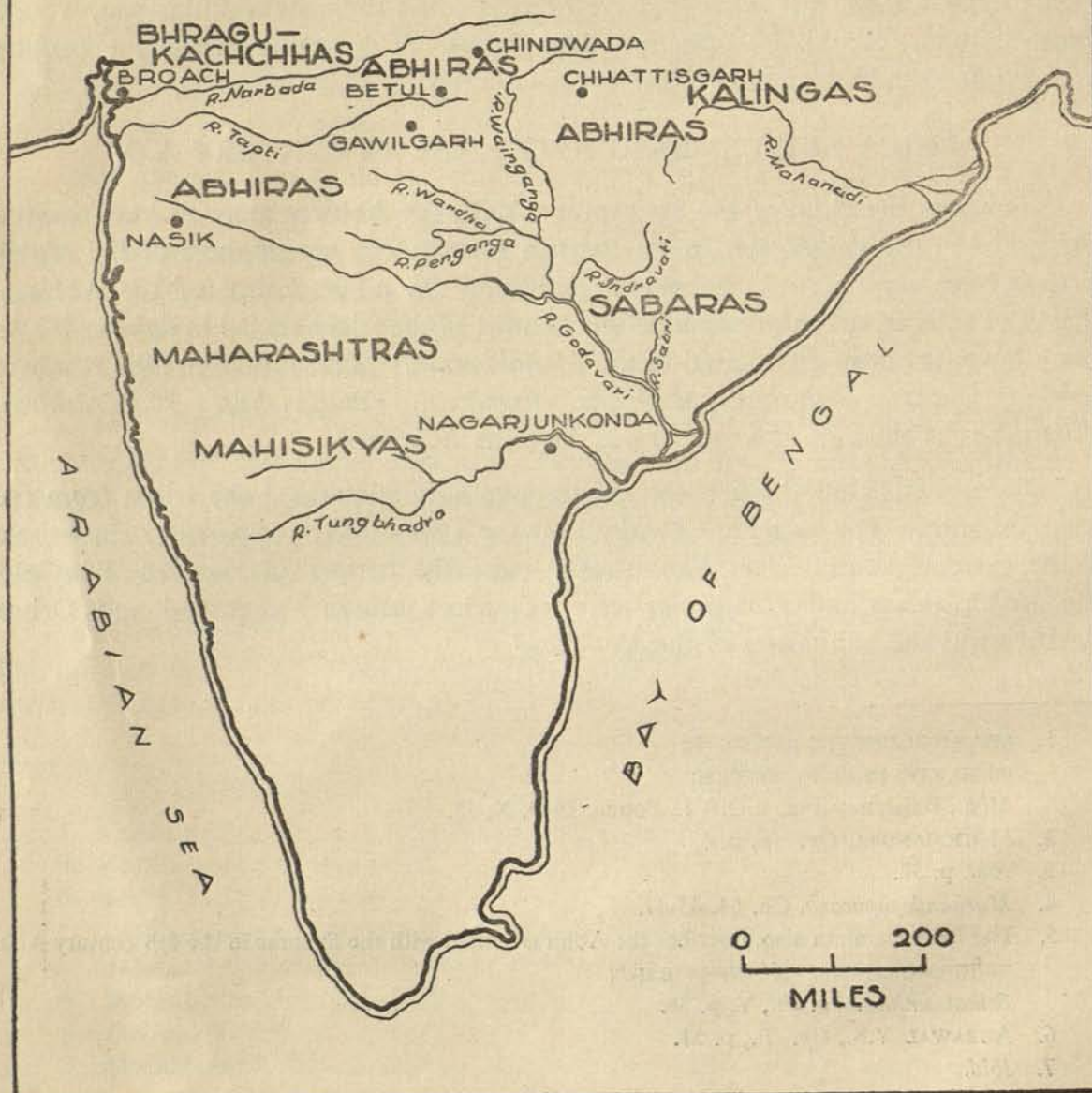


Fig. 2



The Abhira settlements being close to the Kalingas, lay round about Chhattisgarh, which finds support from the numerous legends of Ahir rule in this area. The Ahirs are still dominant<sup>1</sup> there.

The geographer of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* has recorded another settlement of the Abhiras with the *Bhrigukachchhas*, *Koṅkans* and the *Śabaras*<sup>2</sup> along with the river *Veṇa* (modern Vainganga<sup>3</sup>). The Abhiras mentioned here may be located near about Nasik and Khandesh.

The expansion of the Abhiras in Gujarat has not been recorded in the Puranas. It is evident from the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana and the inscription of Abhira-General Rudrabhūti that they swept over Gujarat some time before the 1st century A.D. The Nasik Cave Inscription of Iśvarasena Abhira also testifies to the Abhira stronghold in Khandesh at least in the 3rd century A.D. From an analysis of the above, it appears that the Abhiras spread in Maharashtra in the early centuries of the Christian Era.

### The Abhiradesa

Sometimes about the 1st century B.C., the Abhiras got settled in the south-western Rajasthan and north-eastern Sind. In the beginning of the christian era, this part of the country came to be called as Ābhiradeśa. The antiquity of Ābhiradeśa cannot be taken back, before the 1st century A.D., when it has been recorded by Ptolemy.

The Greek geographer Ptolemy has given the topography of the Ābhiradeśa as follows:—

“And further all the country along the rest of the course of the Indus is called by the general name of Indo-Skythia. Of this, the insular portion formed by

- 
1. VERRIER ELWIN, *Folk songs of Chhattisgarh*, Bombay, 1946;
  2. महेन्द्रमलयाद्रौ च दर्दुरे च वसन्ति ये  
कर्कोट कवने ये च मृगुकच्छाः सर्कोकलाः  
सन्वाश्चैव तथाभीरा वेण्यास्तीरं निवासिनः  
*Markandeyapurana*, *Op. cit.*, 58, 22.
  3. *Veṇā*, or *Krishnaveṇā* has been identified by B.C. Law with Krishna river.  
Law B.C., *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, Paris, 1954, p. 168.  
V. S. Agrawal identifies *Veṇā* with Vainganga a tributary of Godavari.  
AGRAWAL, *Op. cit.*, pp. 96, 100.



the bifurcation of the river towards its mouth is Patalene and the region above this is Aberia and the region about the mouths of the Indus and Gulf of Kanthi is Syrastrène."<sup>1</sup>

The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea locates the country of Aberia adjacent to Saurashtra. Its location has been described as follows:—

“To the Gulf of Barake succeeds that of Barygaza and the main land of Ariake, a district which forms the frontier of the Kingdom of Mombaros and of all India. The interior part of it which borders on Skythia is called Aberia, and its sea-board Saurastrene”<sup>2</sup>

The topographical notes of Ptolemy and the Periplus, are very helpful in ascertaining the location of Ābhiradeśa. Ptolemy indicates that the south-western boundary of Aberia extended to the north of Indus delta, which is identical with Thar Parkar and Hyderabad district of Sind. It touched the boundaries of Saurashtra.

The writer of the Periplus, has also taken pains to record the correct location of Aberia. His Gulf of Barake is the Gulf of Cambay and Barygaza is Broach, which he lays down in the mainland of Ariake identical with Gujarat (Ānarta). The location of Aberia as given by Ptolemy agrees with the Periplus, and we can safely conclude that the country from the north of Indus delta and Rann of Cutch was Aberia and its southern boundary touched with Saurashtra, covering south-western Rajasthan.

Though the *Ramayana* knows no country like Ābhīra, yet the region specified above, has been called as the land of wild Abhiras. The name of this region as given in the *Ramayana*, was *Drumakulya*, subsequently called *Marukāntāra*, when Rama discharged his burning arrow aiming towards the Abhira-land.<sup>3</sup> The region of

1. MC CRINDLE J. W., *Ancient India as described by Ptolemy*, Bombay, 1885, p. 136.
2. MC CRINDLE, “ANONYMI (ARRIANI UT FERTUR) PERIPLUS MARIS ERYTHRAEI” Translated from the text as given in the *Geography Graeci Minores*, edited by C. Muller, Paris, 1855, *Ind. Ant.* VIII, p. 140; Schoff W. H., *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, 1912, London, pp. 39, 175.
3. उत्तरेणावकाशोऽस्ति कश्चित् पुण्यतरो मम  
द्रुमकुल्य इति ख्यातो लोके ख्यातो यथा भवान्  
उग्र दर्शन कर्माणो बहवस्तत्र दस्यवः  
आमीर प्रमुखाः पापाः पिबन्ति सलिलं मम



Marukantara has been identified with Thar Parkar and Marwar, which is directly identical with the Aberia of Ptolemy and Periplus.

It is interesting, that the Puranic geography is identical with the Greek-geographers, in locating the country of Ābhīras (Aberia). The Vishnupurana strikingly confirms the statements of Ptolemy and the Periplus in locating the Ābhīradeśa, conterminous to Saurashtra and furnishes further details of its boundary adjoining to Arbuda and Malava, on Pariyātra mountain, which has been identified with the Aravali range.<sup>1</sup> Varāhamihira further supports the evidences of Vishnupurana in locating the Ābhīradeśa adjacent to Ānarta, Arbuda, Pushkara and Saurashtra.<sup>2</sup> The Bhagavatapurana also locates it adjacent to Sauvira (Sind) Ānarta (Gujarat) and Avanti in another śloka.<sup>3</sup> The evidences of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are attested by the *Prabodhachandrodaya*, wherein, Ābhīradeśa has been located adjacent to Malava<sup>4</sup> near the sea.

In the light of the evidences cited above, we are in a position to ascertain the country of the Abhiras. It was the region near the Arabian sea, *paśchimapārśva-*

तैर्न तत्स्पर्शनम् पापम् सहेयं पाप कर्मभिः  
अमोघः क्रियाताम् राम अयं तत्र शरोत्तमः  
तस्य तद्वचनम् श्रुत्वा सागरस्य महात्मनः  
मुमोच तं शरं दीप्तं परम सागर दर्शनात्  
तेनतन्मरुकान्तारम् पृथिव्यां किल विश्रुतम्

*The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki with the commentary of (Tilaka) of Rama, edited by V. L. Shastri. Pansikar, Bombay, 1909, Yuddhakaṇḍa, XXII, 30-36.*

1. तथापरान्ताः सौराष्ट्राः शूराभीरास्तथाबुदाः  
मालुका मालवाश्चैव पारियात्र निवासिनः  
*Viṣṇupurāṇa* II, 3, 16-17.

2. आनर्ताबुद पुष्कर सौराष्ट्राभीर शूद्र रैवतकाः  
नष्टा यस्मिन् देशे सरस्वती पश्चिमो देशः

*Brihatsamhita Op. cit., XVI, 31,*

3. मरुधन्वमतिक्रम्य सौवीराभीरयोः परान्  
*Bhagavatapurana, I, 10. 35.;*

सौराष्ट्रावन्त्याभीराश्च शूद्रा अबुद मालवाः

*Ibid. XII, I, 38.*

4. पाषण्ड दिगम्बरकापालिकादयस्तु पामरबहुलेषु  
पाञ्चाल मालवाभीरानर्त सागरनूपेषु निगूढं सञ्चरन्ति

*Prabodhachandrodaya of Krishnamisrayati, Edited by K. S. Sastri, Trivendrum Sans. Series CXXII, 1936, p. 152.*



*vartijanapada*, as pointed out by *Taruṇavāchaspati*, the commentator of the *Kāvya-darśa* of *Dandin*.<sup>1</sup> The frontier districts of the Abhiradeśa were the regions of Thar parkar and Hyderabad Sind (to the north of Indus delta) and south-west Rajasthan comprising the districts of Marwar, Ajmer, Mewar, Pushkar and whole southern Rajasthan upto Malava and Saurashtra.

The Bhuvanakosha chapters of other Puranas are stereo-typed and seem to have been bodily copied out from the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, with some variations. The *Vāyupurāṇa*, *Vāmanapurāṇa*, *Padmapurāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* more or less, repeat the same; while the *Garuḍapurāṇa*, *Līṅga-purāṇa*, *Varāhapurāṇa*, *Nāradiyapurāṇa* and *Skandapurāṇa* have not mentioned the settlements of the Abhiras.

## II

### The Continuity of the Settlements

Thus the Abhiras expanded throughout India possibly by the end of the second century of the Christian Era. They continued their habitation in the above regions as evident from the later works. The Calcutta edition of *Harivamsa* portrays the habitation of the north-western group of the Abhiras with the Madras (*madrābhira*).<sup>2</sup> The *Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta* also records the Abhira republics in contiguity with the Madras (*madrakābhiras*).<sup>3</sup> Here the evidence of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription strikingly corroborates with the *Harivamsa*. *Varāhamihira* in *Brihatsamhita* has also recorded the continuity of this group of the Ābhiras as late as the 6th century A.D.<sup>4</sup> The descendents of

1. *Taruṇavachaspati*, the commentator of the *Kāvya-darśa* of *Dandin* while explaining the Ābhira dialect places the country of the Abhiras as follows:—

आभीरादि देशेनाम आभीरप्रायः पश्चिम समुद्र पार्श्ववर्ति जनपदः

Dr. S. N. Ghoshal understands that the land of the Abhiras might have been extended upto the Rann of Cutch which is attested by *Hridayaṅgama*.

आभीरो नाम पश्चिमाणव तीरे वर्तमानो देशविशेषः

Vide. Ghosal S. N., *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

2. *Mbh. Harivamsa*. Bhavishyaparva, Cal., 1839, Ch. 236, 12837.
3. FLEET, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, p. 8.
4. कुम्भेऽन्तर्गिरिजान्सपश्चिमजनान्भारोद्वाहां तस्करान्  
आभीरान्दरदाऽयं सिंह पुरकान् हन्यात्तथा बर्बरान्  
*Brihatsamhita of Varahamihira*, Edited by Kern, Calcutta, 1865, śloka 42;  
The *Brihatsamhita* has been dated by Kern to A.D. 505 *Op. cit.*, p. 2.



this group of the Abhīras are still inhabiting the same region. They are called Gaddis<sup>1</sup> now and reside exclusively on the snowy range which divides Kangra and Chamba. They are semi-pastoral and semi-agricultural people and akin to *Mathurābāsi Ahirs* in their features. They are land-lords in that area and widely diffused caste.<sup>2</sup> A tradition of the region maintains that the original home of the Gaddi-Ahirs was on the head waters of the river Ravi in the Chamba territory to the north of Dholadhar or outer Himalayas. The country behind the range is called *Gadderān* or the land of the Gaddis ( Ahirs ). They inhabit the land from Rihlu to Bengahal Taluqa. This area is also called Brahmaur Wazarat.<sup>3</sup> The antiquity of the Gaddi-Ahirs of Kangra and Chamba is attested by the fact that the dialect current there is called Gaddi. The existence of specific territorial-castes e.g. Gaddi-Brahmanas, Gaddi-Rajputs and Gaddi-Khatti in Kangra and Chamba is akin to the Ahir-Brahmana, Ahir-Sutar and the like of Maharashtra and attests clearly their hoary antiquity, which has now dwindled in obscurity.<sup>4</sup>

The continuity of Abhira settlements of the Sindhu and the Sarasvatī cannot be traced today. The absence of these settlements in the Puranic records shows that the Abhiras abandoned these places sometimes before the compilation of the Puranas. The Abhiras after being migrated from these regions moved towards east and south-east and settled in U.P. and Madhya Pradesh. Some of them got settled possibly on the bank of the hilly river which is called *Sindhu* today. This *Sindhu* emerges from the spurs of the Vindhya, 10 miles to the north of Sironj and passing through the whole hilly track, falls into the river Yamuna near Jalaun. The Ahirs ( *Abhiras* ) occupy a prominent status there. The Ahir legends found throughout the ravines of this Sindhu throw light on the unrecorded history of the Abhiras. The famous balled *Alhakhandā* even in its modern form, though projected to reveal the glorious feats of the heroes Alha and Udala, yet could not refrain to acknowledge the turbulence of the people of *Sindhu* and Betwa who offered them many ferocious battles. The whole bed of the river Sindhu has thus stored numerous legends of strong Ahir-rule over the area. A tributary of the river *Sindhu* is called *Ahirpat* or *Airavati*, which meets *Sindhu* to the 15 miles south-

1. Abhiras ( Ahirs ) are also called Gaddis in Punjab and U. P. *Punjab Gazetteers*, Vol. XA, ( Kangra Distt. ), p. 79.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

3. VOGEL J., *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Pt. I, Calcutta, 1911, p. 3.

4. *Punjab Gazetteer, Chamba State*, XXII A, p. 60.



east of Samthar. This tributary is very famous in the ballads of Ahirs. The region from Sironj to Ranod and from Parvati river to Betwa has been ascribed by local traditions to the Ahir rule. Another tradition of Ahir rule in the area centres round Jharkhand or Bajrangagarh situated to the six miles south of Guna, midway between Agra and Ujjain.

It is important to note that the Abhiras, who once inhabited the Abhiradesa (eastern Sind, south-western Rajasthan) also abandoned the place, possibly sometimes between the 3rd and the 5th centuries A.D. and moved towards the south. They seem to have occupied the region to the south of Avanti upto Nasik. The *Brihatsamhita*, calls this region also as Abhiradesa.<sup>1</sup>

The Jain works describe the location of this Abhiradesa near *Achalpur* (Modern Elluchpur,<sup>2</sup> Amraoti district) between the rivers *Krishṇā* and *Veṇā* (modern *Krishṇā* and *Vaingaṅgā* rivers). This region was under the Ābhiras of Khandesh.

The *Śaktisaṅgamtantra*<sup>3</sup> also records the location of Abhiradesa, which may be identified with Khandesh and Nasik.

Further migration of the Abhiras has not been recorded in the literature. It is possible to surmise that some of the Abhiras got settled in the interior districts of Uttar Pradesh, while the others continued their migration towards Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. A tradition of such movement may be reconstructed from the

1. बर्बरकिरातखण्डकृत्यादाभीर चञ्चुका  
*Brihatsamhita*, XIV, 18; V, 38.

2. According to *Brihatkathakośa*, *Tera* (*Tagara*) was a beautiful city in this country. *Brihatkathakośa* 138, 39 f; 56.52; *Achalapura* was situated on the bank of the rivers *Kanha Benna*, and *Bambhaddīva* was an island between them, where 500 monks are said to have joined the Jain order of ascetics. *Tagara* has been identified with *Tera* a village in Osmanabad district on the bank of the river *Tirna* 12 miles north-east of Osmanabad.

अयलपुराणिकलंतेकलियसुयआणुओगिए  
धीरेवंभदीवेगसीहे बायगपय मुत्तमपते

*Srimannandisūtram*, with commentary of Malayagiri, Bombay, 1917, 32, p. 50;

नश्कण्डविन्नदीवे पंचसया निवसंति  
*Sri Pinda Nirukti* with the commentary of Malayagiri, Bombay, 1918, 503; *Vavaharasutra*, Bhavnagar, 1926, III, 4, 339; *Uttāradhyāyanasūtra*, with commentary of Santisuri, Bombay, 1916, 2, p. 25; Law B. C. *Historical Geography*, *Op. cit.*, p. 303; Agrawal V. S., *Op. cit.*, pp. 96, 100.

3. *Saktisamgamtantra*, Sundari Khanda, Vol. III, 7, 35, p. 68.



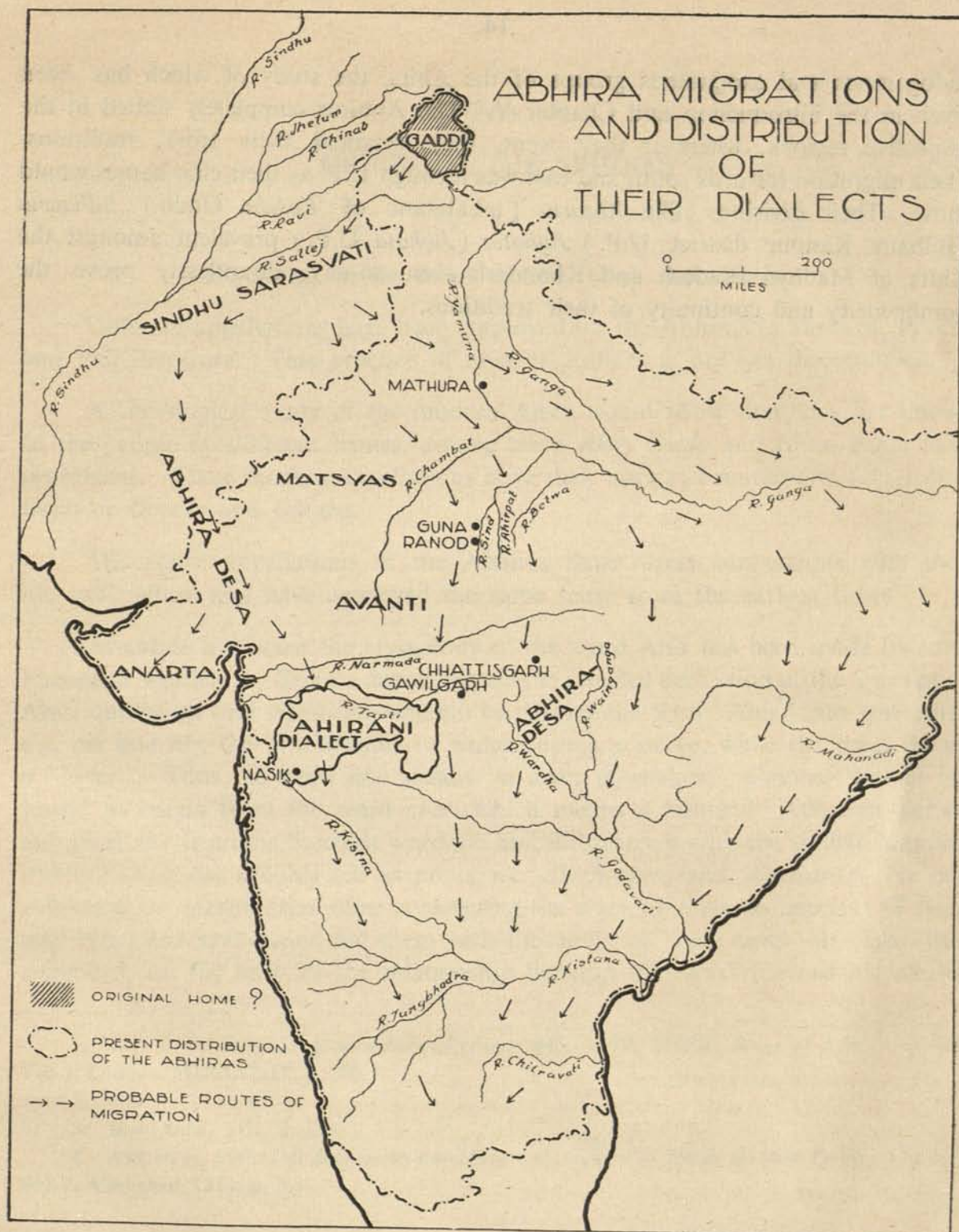
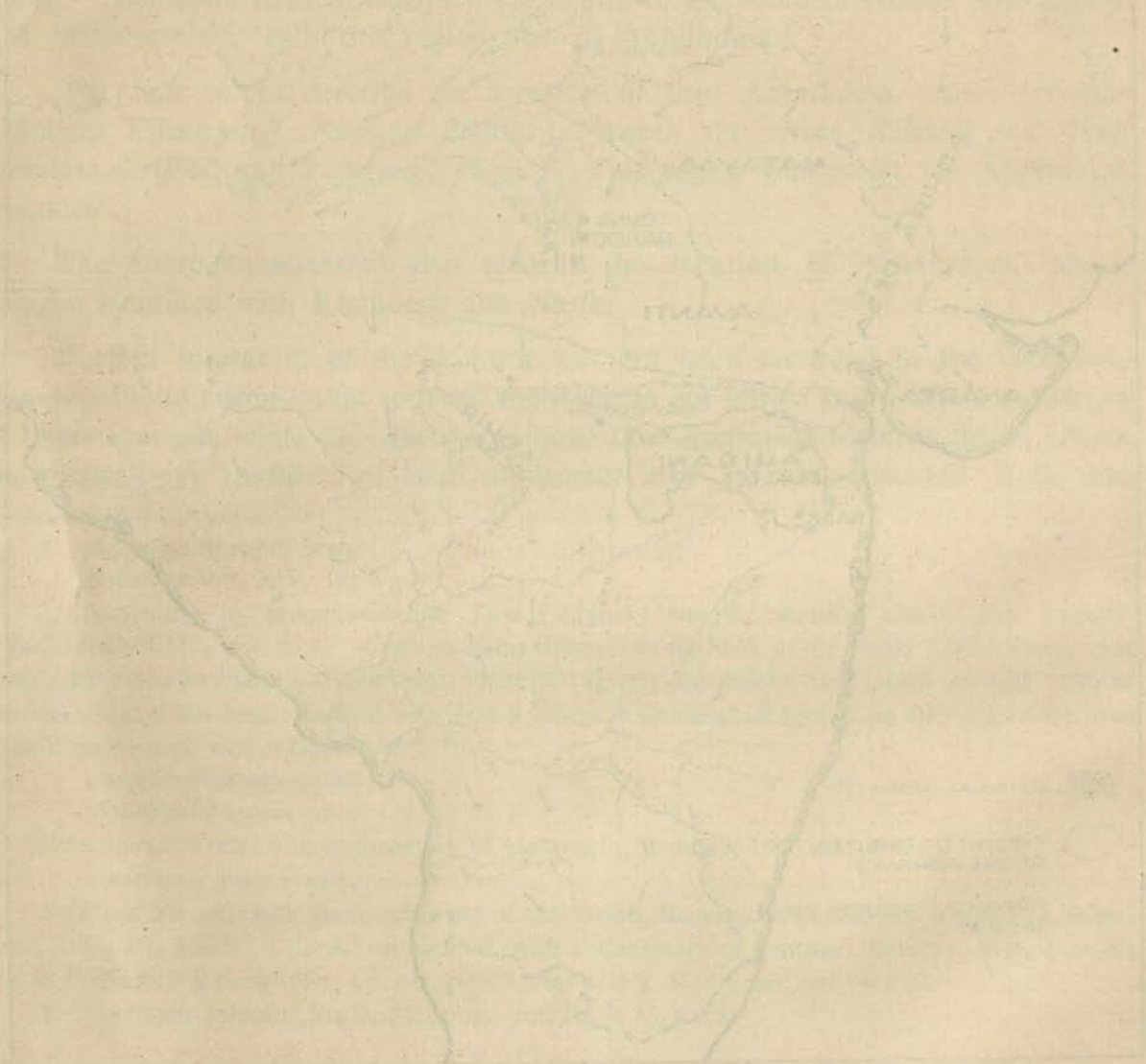


Fig. 3



endogamous and exogamous groups of the Ahirs, the study of which has been given in the introduction and Chapter V. The Abhiras completely settled in the respective regions; wherever they went, they retained their tribal traditions. Their migration towards south and east was through U.P. as their clan names would show. Their divisions like *Kosaria* (inhabitant of *Kośala*, Oudh) *Bilhauria* (Bilhaur Kanpur district U.P.) *Jujhotia* (*Jujhota* U.P.) prevalent amongst the Ahirs of Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh even to-day, doubtlessly prove the homogeneity and continuity of their traditions.





## CHAPTER II

### ORIGIN OF THE ABHIRAS

#### I

#### Etymology of the terms Abhira, Gopa and Ghosha

Different appellations have been employed for the Abhiras in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali literature. This practice of ancient authors is not yet discontinued.

A sociological study of the modern Ahirs would show that they are known to the people by different names, among them *Ahir*, *Gvala* and *Ghosi* being most prominent. These modern appellations have their ancient counterparts viz. *Ābhira*, *Gopa* or *Gopāla* and *Ghosha*.

The above appellations of the Abhiras have direct connections with their life and culture and have conveyed the same sense from the earliest times.

Attempts to discuss the etymology of the word *Ahir* has been made by some European scholars.<sup>1</sup> Beams, depending on the fanciful derivation of the appellation *Ahir*, quotes on oral tradition<sup>2</sup> wherein he divides the term 'Ahir' into two parts, e.g. *ahi* and *hīr*, the first syllable of which means a snake, while the other means a 'lover'. Thus the word *ahir* means 'a lover of snakes.' Colonel Walker has traced its origin from the word *aheri* which means a hunter.<sup>3</sup> Atkinson derives the word *ahir* from the Sanskrit word *ahi* and illustrates it with the similar sounding words having the syllable *ahi* as prefix viz. *Ahichchhtra* and *Aheśvara*.<sup>4</sup> He corroborated his presumption after considering the story of *Hira*, an ancestor of Ahirs who cherished snakes and fed them with the milk of his cows. It has been suggested, on the basis of the relationship between the Sanskrit word *ahi* of *Ahir*

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1. LAW B. C., *Tribes in Ancient India*, Poona, 1943, p. 79; ELLIOT, *Races of N.W.P. of India*, Vol. I, London, MDCCCLIX, p. 305.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Bom. Gaz.*, VIII, p. 134.

4. ATKINSON, *Statistical description and Historical Account of North Western Provinces of India*, Vol. I, Allahabad, 1874, p. 268.



and the word *nāga*, that the Ahirs and the Nagas of Gujarat probably belonged to a common<sup>1</sup> lineage.

According to a legend current in Uttar Pradesh, the children of the Rajput slave and a Vaisya girl, who were living in a forest, used to propitiate snakes with the milk obtained from their herds, therefore they were called *ahihera*, and from this word, the appellation Ahir came into existence.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say that none of the above derivations have any historical basis, therefore they may safely be relegated to the realm of fantasy. As a matter of fact, the appellation Ahir is also pretty old. In an epigraph of the Yadava ruler Singhana II, 1215 A.D. one Jaitungadeva, a ruler of Konkan, has been styled as an Ahira.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the appellation Ahira, was prevalent at least in Maharashtra in the beginning of the 13th century A.D.

#### Antiquity of the term Abhiras

The term Abhira has ethnic significance in the ancient history of India. It cannot however, be said in the present stage of our knowledge when this appellation actually came into existence. The Epics and the Puranas are silent about its etymology. A modern author Taranath Tarkavachaspti, compiler of the Sanskrit dictionary Vachaspatyam derived the literal meaning of the term after dividing it into two—*Abhi* + *ira* meaning fearless people,<sup>4</sup> which is again a fanciful derivation.

Prof. Raychaudhary suggests a Dravidian origin of the appellation Abhira.<sup>5</sup> V. Kanakasabhi Pillai derives it from the Tamil word *Ayir*, which also means 'a cow'. He equates the Ayars with the Abhiras.<sup>6</sup> Prof. L. D. Barnett discusses the problem of the Ayars further, and observes that the Ayars were the prototype

1. *Bom. Gaz.*, Vol. IX, Part I, p. 264, f.n. 5.

2. Based upon personal survey of Ahirs.

3. *Epigra Car*, Sb. 276, 99, 48.

4. *Vachaspatyam*, compiled by Taranath Tarkavachispati, Vol. I, Cal., 1873, p. 758.

गोपेसंकीर्णजातिभेदे सहिअल्पसीतिहेतोरप्यधिकं विभेतीतितस्य तथा त्वम्

अभीरयतिगा आभिमुखी कृत्य गोष्ठनयति

अभि + ईर + णिच् + अच् = अभीरः गोपः

*Sabdakalpadrum*, Vol. I, Cal., Saka 1808, p. 78.

5. RAYCHAUDHARY H. C., *Early History of Vaishnavite Sect.*, Cal., 1920, p. 91.

6. V. KANAKASABHAI PILLAI, *Tamil 1800 years ago*, Madras 1904, p. 57.



of the Abhiras, who inhabited the Tamil States of the Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras in the earliest times.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Sunitkumar Chatterji is doubtful whether the letter 'a' in Abhira has the same import as the Dravidian 'a' in Ayar<sup>2</sup> and Dr. G. V. Tagore supports him.<sup>3</sup> In the early Tamil works the letter 'a' means 'a cow'. In *Kuralventa* of the *Tirukural*, written about the 1st and 2nd century B.C., there is a phrase *ayayan kunram*, which means, 'the produce of a cow.' In the famous Tamil poem *Manimekhalai*, there is a character named Aputra, who has been described as 'the son of a cow'.<sup>4</sup> In the *Silappadikaram* a Tamil classic of about 150 A.D., the terms *Ayar* and *ayarpadi* means 'a cowherd' and the house of a cowherd respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The traditions of the Ayars recorded in the Sangam classics, seem to be the prototype of the traditions of the Abhira-gopas mentioned in the *Harivamsa* and the *Bhagavatapurana*, which are much later works than the Sangam literature. According to a tradition quoted by the Rev. Heras from Sangam classics, the Ayars came to the South with the Pandyas.<sup>6</sup> This shows that probably the Ayars of the Sangam classics were not originally the residents of South India, but were the immigrants from the north. The legends of the cowherd Krishna, and his romances in the forest life, recorded in the Sangam classics, suggest that these traditions were possibly brought to the south by the Ayars, which, in course of time, not only arrested the attention of the poets of Sangam-age but enthused their imagination. The age of the Sangam literature has been taken to the 1st century

1. *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, 596.

2. & 3. DR. S. K. CHATTERJI and DR. G. V. TAGORE have expressed their opinions in a letter to Dr. Buddhaprakash; *J.B.R.S.XL.*, pp. 258-259.

4. The story of Aputra has been given in the *Manimekhalai* thus:—

There was a Brahmana at Varanasi well-versed in the Vedas with his wife Sali. Having fallen from her conduct, she wished to get rid of her sin by bathing in the sea at Kumari, which was prohibited to her in this condition. She gave birth to a child in course of her journey, but left the child weeping in a garden and went her way. Hearing the weeping of the child, a cow came there and started licking the child and gave him milk. Thus the cow kept the child for seven days. A Brahman who was going his way heard the weeping of the child. Thinking that it could not be the child of a cow he delivered the child to his wife. The youth after getting education was called Aputra or 'a cow's son'.

*Manimekhalai in its Historical setting*, Aiyangar, S. K., London, 1928, pp. 143-45.

5. *The Silappadikaram*, Translated by Dikshitar V.R.R., Bombay, 1939, pp. 229, 231-234.

6. *Kalitogai*, 104, vide Rev. Heras S. J., *Studies in the Proto Indo Medeterranean Culture*, Vol. I, Bombay, 1953, p. 119.



of the Christian Era. Therefore, the appellation Ayar is at least as old as the Abhira, if not more. As the Abhiras were a people of non-Aryan stock the possibilities of Ayar, as the original appellation of the Abhiras, becomes more probable. It is interesting that the old appellation Ayar has not completely disappeared from the Ahirs in the north; they cherish the memory that they were called Ayars<sup>1</sup> formerly. There are all possibilities to accept the view that Ayar was the original appellation of the Abhira tribe before they came in contact with the Aryans. It is possible to believe that the name *Abhira* is a Sanskrit term for the Dravidian *Ayar*. Those Abhiras who could not come in contact with the Aryans, due to their migration to the south, retained their original appellation. But originally they would have been the same people.

### Ghosha

Ghosha has its modern equivalent as ghosi. Etymologically, the term ghosha, being derived from the Sanskrit root *ghush*, meaning 'to shout', is an indicative of the<sup>2</sup> profession of a herdsman, as he shouts while herding the cattle.

The Mahabhashya of Patañjali refers to the Ghoshas at several places. In his sutra number 2, 4, 10 Patañjali questions to himself, *kaḥ punarāryanivāsaḥ* and answers that they are the *grāma*, *ghosha*, *nagara* and *samvāha*.<sup>3</sup> Here, each term denotes the sense of a settlement viz. *grāma*, means a village and *nagara* means a city. The contiguity of grama and ghosha referred to, in the above sutra, clearly suggests that the *ghoshas* were a settlement of some people like a *grāma*.

In sutra No. 7, 3, 14 of the Mahabhashya, the entity of *ghosha* as a distinct settlement near the villages of Aryans is apparent.<sup>4</sup> A question arises whether

1. Based on personal enquiry in the Bombay Session of the All India Yadav Conference.

2. घोषन्ति गावोऽत्र घोषः

*Nāmaliṅgānuśaṣan of Amarasimha*, with the two commentaries Amarakosodghatana of Kshira-svamin and Tikasarvasva of Vandyaghatiya sarvananda, Edited by T. Ganpati Sastri, Part I, 2nd Khanda, Trivendrum Sanskrit Series XLIII, 1915, p. 43; Hermann Grassmann *Worterbuch Zum Rig Veda*, Leipzig, 1936, p. 427; A grammatical Dictionary of Sanskrit ( Vedic I, Phonetics, by Surya Kanta Sastri Vyakarnatirtha, Delhi, 1953, p. 96.

3. Keilhorn, *The Mahabhashya of Patanjali*, 2.4.10, Vol. I, Bombay, 1892, p. 485; Vasudeva Sastri Abhyankara, *The Vyakarana Mahabhashya*, Poona, 1956, II, p. 465: Dr. V. S. Agrawal opines that Ghosha was a small village of Ahirs. AGRAWAL V. S., *Panini Kalina Bharata*, Benares, 2012, p. 79.

4. *Mahabhashya*, *Op. cit.* III, p. 320; Abhyankar, *Op. cit.* VI. p. 179.



they formed a part of the Aryan settlement as explained by Patañjali. The *Mahabhashya* no doubt represents *ghosha* as a unit of Aryan settlement with *grāma*, *nagara* and *samvāha*, but it is possible to argue that the cowherds who were the residents of these *ghoshas*, were non-Aryans. If the *ghoshas* were non-Aryan settlements, how were they included in the *samghas* of the Aryans? Katyayana, as a matter of fact, advocates the cause of the *ghoshas* to be taken in the *samgha*.<sup>1</sup> Probably, by the time of Katyayana, the *ghoshas* were outside the pale of Aryan society, later on being professional milkmen, the cowherds seem to have been allowed to establish near the villages of the Aryans.

In another example, Patañjali represents the *ghoshas* as a habitation of professional milkmen. In the *sutra* No. 3, 2, 110. Patañjali gives an illustration which means 'let us go to the *ghosha* and we will take milk there'.<sup>2</sup>

The *Markandeyapurana* contains a tradition when these cowherds were roaming about from one place to another in search of new pastures.<sup>3</sup> These moving cowherd, settlements were also called *ghoshas* which carried their pots and pans on bullock carts.

Another tradition of the *Markandeyapurana* reveals the later stage of these *ghoshas*, when they were settled in the vicinity of a village surrounded by lofty ramparts, though their entity was separate.<sup>4</sup>

The tradition recorded by the *Vayupurana* does not describe the *ghoshas* as a nomadic settlement but a separate unit in a village.<sup>5</sup> The same conclusion

1. संघादिषु घोषग्रहणम्, संघादिषु घोषग्रहणं कर्तव्यम्; असति तु घोषग्रहणेऽन्नादयरत्नः संज्ञादयोऽपि तत्र इति समानाद् यथा संख्यं स्यात्।  
घोषे च प्रत्ययो न स्यात्

*Mahabhashya*, Vol. II, 4, 3, 127, p. 319; Vasudeva Sastri Abhyankar, IV, p. 253; *Kasika Vivarana Panjika*, Vol. I, p. 1013.

2. अगमाम घोषान् अपाम पयः.....गमिष्यामो घोषान् पास्यामः पयः

*Mahabhashya*, Vol. II, 3, 2, 110, pp. 117-118; Vasudeva Sastri Abhyankar, *Op. cit.*, III, p. 245.

3. *Markandeyapurana*, edited by Banerjea, Calcutta, 49, 50; Pargiter, *Markandeyapurana*, Calcutta, 1904, pp. 241-242; Agrawal V. S., *Panini kalina bharata*, *Op. cit.* p. 147.

4. PARGITER, *Markandeyapurana*, 44, p. 241.

5. आश्रमानथ ग्रामांश्च घोषांश्चनगराणि च;

पुराणि घोषान् ग्रामांश्च पत्तनानि च सर्व्वशः

*Vayupurana*, Ch. 33, 10; 32, 40.



can be drawn from the Ayodhyākāṇḍa of the Ramayana.<sup>1</sup>

The lexicographer Amarasimha equates the term *ghosha* with *Ābhīrapalli*.<sup>2</sup> The commentator Kshirasvami explains the suffix *palli* to mean 'a village' or 'a dwelling place'.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore the term *ghosha* means a village of the cowherds. It has no ethnic significance and does not carry the sense of a tribe at least in early literature.

### The Abhiras and their Ghoshas

There is however a definite relationship between the terms *ghosha* and *Abhira*. It should be noted that the *Mahābhāshya* indirectly reflects upon the profession of the *Abhiras*, to denote the *dvandva* compound. In the same context, he has used some phrases viz. *gobalivardam*, which means 'cows and bulls', and *gāva utkālitapunsakā vāhaya cha vikrayāya cha*, means that 'the cattle are driven out purchased and sold'. These phrases, indirectly point to the profession of the *Abhiras*. Throughout the whole Sanskrit and Prakrit literature, the *Abhiras* have only been portrayed as professional cowherds from the earliest times. Our suggestion finds support from the sutra No. 2, 4, 10, 5 wherein, the *Chañḍālas* have been referred to as living beyond the four units of the Aryan settlements. Here, the phrase *mritapāśchavasanti*, has been employed to reflect upon the profession of the *Chañḍālas*. The *Chañḍālas* used to remove the corpse of the animals and tan their skins. As the phrase *mritapāśchavasanti* indicates the settlement of the *chandalas* on the cremation ground as well as their profession, similarly the phrase, *gobalivardam* and others may be taken to reflect indirectly upon the profession of the *Abhiras*.

1. रजकास्तुवायांश्च ग्रामघोषमहत्तराः

*The Ramayana of Valmiki with the Commentary* (Tilak) of Rama, Bombay, 1909, Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Ch. 83, 15; *The Valmiki Ramayana*, Ganpatkrishnaji edition, Bombay, 1781, Saka, Ch. 83, 15, p. 161. The North Western recension of Valmiki Ramayana has different reading in which the term *ghosha* does not appear at all. The sloka is as follows:—

रजकास्तुवायाश्च सूत मागधवन्दिनः

*The Ramayana of Valmiki Ayodhyakanda*, critically edited by Pt. Ramlabhaya, Amritsar, 1928, Ch. 94, 15, p. 365.

2. घोष आभीरपल्लीस्यात्पक्वणः शबरालयः

*Amarakosha*, *Op. cit.*, 1894, p. 63.

3. घोष आभीरपल्लीस्यात् पाल्यते पल्लीगृहालीकुटी ग्राम

*Nāmalingānuśāsan of Amarasimha*, *op cit.*



The *Natyasastra* of Bharata describes the language spoken in the *ghoshas* (*ghoshasthān* i.e. *ābhīrapalli*) as *Ābhīrī* or *Śabarī*.<sup>1</sup> It is known that *Ābhīrī* was the language of the Abhiras. The use of *Ābhīrī* further proves that the *ghoshas* were the settlements of the Abhiras.

### Gopa or Gopala

The appellation *Gopa* or *Gopala* is professional and gives an idea of a milkman. This term as we have seen has its modern derivation as *Guala*.

It is worth noticing that the epigraphs of the Hoysalas, Kalachuris, Chalukyas of Kuntala and the Yadavas of Devagiri, have used the term *Guala* for the *Ābhīra* rulers of Konkan and Khandesh.<sup>2</sup> It would appear therefore, that like Ahir, the appellation *Guala* was also prevalent in the 13th Century A.D. at least in Maharashtra. The term is strictly professional, as such it does not possess any ethnic significance. The Abhiras were cowherds by profession, and though they acquired kingly dignity, yet the fact that they were a professional milkmen tribe remained in the memory of the people. That is why the term *Guala* has so freely been employed by the panegyrist of the Hoysalas, Kalachuris, Chalukyas and the Yadavas.

### The terms Abhira, Ghosha, and Gopa or Gopala in ancient Sanskrit literature

After discussing the history of the above terms we pass on to investigate their use in the sources, especially the Epics and the Puranas. In the Epics and the Puranas, the terms *Gopa*, *Gopala*, and *Ghoshā* have been employed in their respective sense as relating to the Abhiras. The *Mahabharata* and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* use the terms *Gopala* and *Ābhīras*.<sup>3</sup> The Abhiras have further been described as low born Gopas in the *Bhagavatapurana* in connection with the above.<sup>4</sup>

1. गवाश्वाजा विक्रौष्टादिवोषस्थान निवासिनाम्  
आभीरोक्तिःशाबरी वा द्राविडी द्रविडादिषु

*Natyasastra of Bharata*, Edited by Pandit Kedarnath, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, 1943, 17, 55, p. 275.

2. See Chapter III.

3. आभीरामन्त्रयामासुः समेत्याशुमर्दिशिनः

*Mahabharata*, Maushalaparva, Ch. 7, 221, 223; 16, 8, 45, B.O.R.I.;

आभीरामन्त्रयामासुस्समेत्यात्यंतदुर्मदाः

*Viṣṇupurana*, V, 38, 14, 49.

4. *Bhagavatapurana*, I, 15, 20.



Not only the writers of the Epics and the Puranas but even the secular writers have also used the terms *Gopala*, *Ghosha* and the *Abhiras* for the same people. Budhasvamin, in his *Brihatkathāślokaśamgraha* refers to the story of an Abhira, who lived in *ghosha* wherein *Abhira* and *Gopa* both the terms have been used to the same people.<sup>1</sup>

Another evidence to identify the Gopals and Abhiras can be furnished from the Brahmapurana. The Brahmapurana specially uses the terms *Gopali* and *Ghoshakanyā* while referring to the mother of Kālayavana, the famous enemy of Krishna.<sup>2</sup> At another place in the Brahmapurana, the Gopals have been described as living in the *ghoshas*.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up we find that the terms *Ābhira*, *Ghoshā*, *Gopa* or *Gopala* are identical and have the same import from the earliest time. The term *Ābhira* is an ethnic name of the tribe while the *Ghoshā* denotes their settlement. The reason of giving such a name to the residence of the Abhiras seems to be that the Abhiras being cowherds cried aloud while herding their cattle. Thus these noisy spots of the village came to be called '*Ghoshā*'. As tending cows was their profession, hence the appellation *Gopala* or *Gopa*, is purely professional and has no ethnic significance.

## II

### The Abhiras in Tradition and Literature

The origin of the Abhiras is steeped in obscurity. Though we often come across references about them in ancient Indian literature, hardly any of them throw light on their origin. The *Mahābhāṣya* of Patanjali simply mentions them as a tribe distinct from the Śūdras, but no information about their origin is available from it.

The *Mahabharata*, represents them living with the predatory forest tribes, already specified in the 1st Chapter. It is evident from the *Bhuvanakośha* chapters of the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* that these forest tribes were organised in the form of the *gaṇas* of the mercenaries and free-looters, hostile to Aryans. In some

1. *Brihatkathaslokaśamgraha* of Budhasvamin, Edited by Lacote, Chapter XX, Paris, MDCCCXVIII, śloka 235-56.

2. *Brahmapurana*, Ch. XIII, śloka 48-50.

3. *Ibid.* Ch. 103, 14.



later references however they have also been connected with the fourfold order of the society.

An interesting legend in this connection may be cited from the *Mahābhārata* wherein it is recorded that the *Dravīḍas*, *Ābhīras*, *Puṇḍras* and the *Śabaras* became *Śūdras* (*vrishalas*) due to neglect of their *Kshatriya* duties assigned to them.<sup>1</sup> The context of this tradition is the legend of *Paraśurāma*, according to which, the tribes mentioned above, took refuge in the forests and hills due to fear of being killed. An analogy may be suggested here, that the aim of the author of the *Mahabharata* was to give a status of the degraded *Kshatriyas*, to the *Abhiras* to provide some place in four-fold order of the *Aryanas*. This legend however hardly deserves any serious consideration, hence the *Abhiras* cannot be regarded to be of *Kshatriya* caste. No authentic geneology can be produced to prove that the *Abhiras* originated from the *Kshatriyas*.

According to *Manu* the *Abhiras* were born of a *Ambashṭha* woman and *Brahmana* father.<sup>2</sup> The *Abhiras*, according to this statement should be taken as degraded *Brahmanas*, rather than the degraded *Kshatriyas*, as the society of *Manu* was patriarchal. It is possible to suggest that the above theories were incorporated in the texts when they acquired considerable political status. But the *Abhiras*, could not attain high status in the society, inspite of their capacity to bear arms and command the services of the *Kshatriya* caste.<sup>3</sup> *Hemachandra* opines that the *Abhiras*, being cowherds (*gavādyupajīvī*) were a section of the *Vaiśyas* (*vaiśya-bhedena*),<sup>4</sup> the analogy seemsto take its birth from the four-fold classification of *Manu*, who assigns cultivation and cattle-breeding to the *Vaiśyas*. It should be noticed that the tending of cows was regarded as the profession of a herdsman in the time of *Hemachandra*, hence the opinion of *Hemachandra* remains as his view only, while the society could not recognise their status of a *Vaiśya*. However a section of the *Ahirs* of *Purenia* district of *Bihar* believes that they were the *Vaiśyas* of *Brindaban* and trading in milk and butter. The persistence of the traditional belief of the people got impetus from the unusual institutions of the *Abhiras* which

1. *Mbh. Āśvamedādhikaparva*, Ch. XXIX, 830-832.

2. *Manavadharmasastra with commentary of Govindaraja*, Edited by V. N. Mandlik, Bombay, 1886, Vol. II, 1288.

3. *Kamasutra of Vatsyayana*, Benares Edition, p. 294.

4. *Abhidhanachintamani of Hemachandra*, Edited by Boehtlink and Riew S.T., Petersburg, 1847, p. 522.



were looked down upon by the people. The lax morality of the women and their predatory instinct may be cited as an example of the same. The *Smritichandrika* of *Devanabhata*, a treatise on Hindu Law, assigned from 1200 A.D. to 1225 by Dr. P. V. Kane records that the *Ābhīrapadas* were always placed outside the *varṇas* and the *āśramas*.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that the Abhiras were not included in the *varṇāśramadharma* even in the 13th Century A.D.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of *Bharata*, records that *Śabari* and *Ābhīri* were spoken in the *Ghoshas*, the settlements of the *Ābhīras*.<sup>2</sup> This use of *Śabari* and *Ābhīri* dialects may indicate a close association of the Sabaras and the Abhiras, rather a class as a whole.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* describes the Abhiras as a fierce looking wild-race<sup>3</sup> called *dasyu*, a term generally attributed to the non-Aryan primitive tribes of India in ancient literature. The *Ramayana* goes to describe them as untouchables and it is a sin to touch them ( *tairnatatsparśanampāpam* ).

The *Vedavyasasmṛiti*, maintains that *Nāpitas*, *Gopas*, *Kiratas*, *Kayasthas* and the *Mālākaras* are *śūdras* though their professions are different.<sup>4</sup> Similar statement has been made by the *Brahmavaivartapurana*, wherein the *Gopas* have been described as *varṇasaṅkaras*.<sup>5</sup> The term *varṇasaṅkara* certainly means ' a man of the low or impure origin.' *Somadeva* in his *Kathāsaritsāgara*, describes the *Gopa* as a man of low origin.<sup>6</sup> The *Bṛihannāradiyapurāṇa* further testifies that the Abhiras were not entitled to worship the gods. The *Bṛihannāradiyapurāṇa* records that " by saluting a *linga* worshipped by an Abhira, one goes to hell. . . . . even though one be versed in the Vedas or knows the meanings of all the *śāstras*." The high class people have been warned by *Bṛihannāradiyapurāṇa* that " one who salutes a *linga* or ( an image of ) *Vishnu* worshipped by an Abhira meets with des-

1. *Smritichandrika* of *Devanabhata*, Translated by J. R. Gharpure, Vyavahara Khanda, Bombay, 1948, Pt. I, p. 52.

2. *Natyasastra* of *Bharata*, op. cit.

3. *The Ramayana* of *Valmiki*, XXII, 30-36.

4. *Vedavyasasmṛiti*, I, 10-11; Kane P. V., *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Pt. I, p. 76.

5. *Brahmavaivartapurana*, Brahmakhanda, Ch. X, 17.

6. TAWNEY C. H., Ed. by PENZER, *The Ocean of story*, V, London, MCMXXVI, p. 149.



truction.”<sup>1</sup> This extreme contemptuous view of the *Brihannārادیapurāṇa* represents the opinion of the most conservative section of the society. If we accept the dates established by Dr. R. C. Hazara for the compilation of this work (circa 7th Century A.D. to 15th Century),<sup>2</sup> then it would appear that during this period the Abhiras lost their glory due to the onslaughts of the south Indian powers. This problem as has been dealt with thoroughly in the third chapter of this work, would show that in most cases the wholesale political destruction of the Abhiras were brought by the *Chālukyas*, *kadambas* and the *Yadavas* etc. on the initiation of the Brahmins. Therefore this attitude of the *Brihannārادیapurāṇa* is not surprising.

It is evident from the above data that the Abhiras had no connection with the Aryan blood. Being forest-dwellers they were living in the mountain fastness hence their identity seems to have remained obscure for a long time that is why possibly they have not been mentioned in the records earlier than the 2nd Century B.C. In course of their migration they came in conflict with the Aryans. As these forest tribes were organised in the form of a *gaṇa* or a republic of the mercenaries, they started their inroads upon the Aryans. They were nomadic herdsmen living in the forest, hence they had no connection with the Aryan *varṇas*.

Evidently the Aryans considered them as *Śūdras* who were outside the pale of the Aryan society. Due to their considerable importance they were regarded better than the ordinary *Śūdras*. *Kaśika*, a commentator of *Mahabhashya* describes them as *mahāśūdras*.<sup>3</sup>

#### Are Abhiras Foreigners ?

Some scholars have branded the Abhiras as foreign hordes upon Indian soil which seems to have been based upon the Puranic evidences. The Puranas have used the term *mlechchhas* to the Abhiras.<sup>4</sup> The term *mlechchha* has been taken by Dr. Bhandarkar in respect of the Abhiras, to mean ‘a foreigner’<sup>5</sup> he opines that the Abhiras were foreign hordes who made incursions into India. V. A. Smith,

1. *Brihannārادیapurana*, Edited by Panchanan Tarkaratna, Vangavasi Press, Calcutta, Second Edition, 14, 63; 14, 566-67; Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas*, Vol. I, Cal. Sanskrit College Series, 1928, p. 324: *Narادیapurana* of Bombay edition does not contain this sloka.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-40.

3. *Kaśika Vivaranapanjika*, Edited by S. C. Chakravarty, Bengal, 1913, Vol. I, p. 809.

4. *Matsyapurana*, 50; 70; *Vishnupurana*, V, 38, 13; *Mbh. Mausalaparva*, 7, 222.

5. BHANDARKAR D. R. ‘Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population’, *Ind. Ant.*, XL, p. 16.



A. B. Keith and W. W. Tarn are in agreement with Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, but assign different periods of their entry into India.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar is sustainable on the correct interpretation of the terms *mlechchha*. The term *mlechchha* means, a 'foreigner', 'non-Aryan', 'unbeliever of Hindu rituals', and 'non-Sanskrit speaking man'.<sup>2</sup> In the *Śatapatha Brahmana*, this term has been used in the sense of 'non-Aryan—one who does not speak Sanskrit and an unbeliever of Hindu ritual'.<sup>3</sup> This term has not rigidly been used in the Sanskrit literature in the sense of a foreigner especially in the Epics and the Puranas. In its modern sense it is used for a person not conforming the traditional Hindu rites and customs. This striking continuity of the traditional concept of the term *mlechchha*, from the *Satapatha Brahmana* to the modern age, leads us to suggest that the term *mlechchha* may better be taken in the traditional sense and not as a foreigner, especially in the Epics and the Puranas, which are the depository of ancient Indian lores.

The Abhiras were a non-Sanskrit speaking tribe as mentioned by Dandin,<sup>4</sup> addicted to predatory habits. They were hostile to the Aryans and lately taken into Vaishnavism.<sup>5</sup> This may suggest that they were not conforming to the usual Hindu rites, hence the term *mlechchha* seems to have been used for the Abhiras. The passage of the Matsyapurana, revealing the *mlechchha* origin of the Ābhīras, gives an appropriate sense in the light of the above interpretation<sup>6</sup> but not

1. SMITH V. A., *Early History of India*, Oxford, 1924, p. 200; Keith, A. B., *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Oxford, 1928, pp. 33-34; TARN W. W., *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, London, 1928, p. 172.

2. MONIER WILLIAMS, *A Sanskrit English Dic.*, Oxford, 1899, p. 837.

3. WEBER, *The Satapatha Brahmana*, Berlin. 1855, p. 325.

4. *Kavyadarsa of Dandin*, Edited by Rangacharya Reddi, Shastri B.O.R.I., Poona, 1938, sloka 36, p. 35; Keith, *Op. cit* p. 32; Ghosal S. N. 'Dr. Jacobi's Introduction to the Bhavisatta Kaha', *Journal Orient. Insti., M. S. University, Baroda*, V., p. 30.

5. किरात हूणान्ध्रपुलिन्द पुलकसा  
आभीर कङ्का यवनाः खसादयः  
येऽन्ये च पापा यदुपाश्रयाश्रयाः  
शुध्यन्ति तस्मै प्रभविष्णवेनमः

*Bhagavatapurana*, II, 4, 18.

6. तेभ्योऽपरेऽपि ये त्वन्ये ह्यत्पत्स्यन्ते नृपाः पुनः  
क्षत्राः पारशवाः शूद्रास्तथाऽन्ये ये बहिःक्षराः  
आन्ध्राःशकाः पुलिन्दाश्च चूलिका यवनस्तथा  
कैवर्ताभीरश्चरा ये चान्ये म्लेच्छ संभवाः

Continued on P. 27



'a foreigner'. The *Mahabhasya of Patanjali* also does not support the theory of foreign migration of the Abhiras.

The evidences of Buddhist, Jain or Greek sources do not give the slightest indication of any Abhira-migration into India in any period of Indian History. All the sources unanimously portray their well-settled life in the country with Indian aboriginals, directing their activities to pastoral pursuits. The theory of foreign migration, however, seems to have been based on mere speculation.

The period of the migration of the Abhiras has been suggested by A. B. Keith to be before 150 B.C.<sup>1</sup> while W. W. Tarn places it just after Alexander's death.<sup>2</sup> In order to ascertain the possibility of the Abhiras migration, it is advisable to analyse the events took place in the above period. The historians of Alexander clearly inform us that Alexander appointed Satraps all over his empire which was divided between his generals immediately after his death. In such a political upheaval when there was a great rising in the country against the foreign yoke, the migration of foreign tribes should be difficult, if not impossible. The possibility of this migration was still less in the time of the strong Mauryan rule. The death of Asoka was followed by the establishment of the Indo-Greek power in Western Punjab, the North Western Frontier Provinces and Sindh. It is in the 2nd Century B.C., that Patañjali speaks about the Abhiras settled in India as a caste (*jāti*). It is remarkable to note that if the Abhiras were not very well-known to the people in the second Century B.C., Patañjali would have not selected them as an example to illustrate a '*dvanda*' compound, which proves their long establishment in India.

The Ethnographical Survey of Bombay identifies the Abhiras with the tribes settled on the N.W.F. of India on the basis of the similarity of certain common traits. The theory is too far-fetched to ascertain their origin.<sup>3</sup> William Hunter's

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Pargiter translates it as follows:—

'Moreover, there will be other kings besides then, who shall arise, Kshtriya, Parasavas, Sudras and others who will be foreigners; Andhras, Sakas, Pulindas, Chulikas and Yavanas, Kaivartas, Abhiras and Sabaras and others who will be of Mlechchha origin'.

*Matsyapurana*, Steam Press, Bombay, 50, slokas 75-76; Pargiter, *The Puranic Text of the Dynasties of Kali Age*, Oxford, 1913, pp. 2-3, 65.

1. Cf. f.n. no. 1. page no. 26.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ethnographical Survey of Bombay*, Bombay, 1903, p. 6.



opinion that the Abhiras were Scythians has been based upon the custom of a widow marrying the brother of her deceased husband,<sup>1</sup> prevalent amongst the Ahirs today. He understands that the custom indicates their Scythian origin. This view of Shri Hunter seems to be doubtful as according to Manu, the custom of widow-marriage was already known in India. This custom is prevalent among many castes *e.g.* Pasis, Jats and Meher even today. Hence, it cannot exclusively be a Scythian custom and therefore, the theory of the foreign origin of the Abhiras is speculative and there is no evidence to prove it.

### Shifting Foci

With the establishment of the Magadhan Empire in Eastern India and Eastern Punjab, these primitive tribes took shelter in the Rajasthan which became a centre of their accentuated activities after the decline of the Mauryan Empire. The Malavas and the Yaudheyas may be cited as an example. From this period we get definite information about the Abhiras.

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1. *Ibid.* p. 3.



### CHAPTER III

#### RISE AND FALL OF THE ABHIRAS

The unrecorded history of the Abhiras could partly be surmised from the stray references in the Epics and the Puranas. Like many other predatory tribes of the Punjab, they must have led a turbulent life fighting for money besides grazing their cattle. Earlier than the Epics and the Puranas there are no written records of the valourous deeds of the Abhiras. There is no doubt, that in the early centuries of the Christian era, the Abhiras, discarding their tribal culture, rather primitive economy, formed a kingdom which however did not last for long.

The Mahabharata gives glimpses of the constant fight between the primitive savagery and the Aryan colonies. The legend of the disappearance of Sarasvati at Vinasana, due to the hatred towards the Sudrabhiras<sup>1</sup> points to the above. The reason of this perpetual hatred has not clearly been defined in the Mahabharata; possibly, it would have been a result of the expansion of the Abhiras, however, it is difficult to be certain when it actually happened. Their participation in the Mahabharata war, being placed in the eyes of *Drona's suparnavyuha*<sup>2</sup> from the side of the *Kauravas*, clearly attests their mercenary character.

All brahmanical sources are agreed upon the point, that the Abhiras were an independent people and organized like a *gaṇa* (republic) of mercenaries.<sup>3</sup> According to Dr. V. S. Agrawal, they had some kind of constitution, like the other *vrātyas*,<sup>4</sup> to carry out their activities. The Ramayana of Vālmīki, postulates them as the stalwart-doyen of the wrong-doers.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, some characteristics of the tribal republics of the Abhiras can be had from the sporadic references in the Epics and the Puranas. It appears however, that they used to assemble to decide the important issues in their dire need, and the decisions were taken by the members on the floor. The *Bhāgavata*-

1. *Mbh.* IX, 37, 2119.

2. *Ibid.*, VII, 20, 6; VII, 20, 798.

3. *Ibid.*, VI, 10, 46; *sabhaparva*, XXIX, 8; *Markandeyapurana*, 49, 50.

4. AGRAWAL V. S., *Paninikalina Bharata*, Benares, 2012 V.E., p. 431.

5. *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, *op. cit.*



*purāna* explicitly states the occasion, when a meeting of such a nature was summoned to determine the question of averting the impending danger, in the cowpens of vraja.<sup>1</sup> We come across another reference of such a meeting when Arjuna was passing through the *Pañchanada* country, with the women and wealth of the *Vrishnis* after the death of Sri Krishna. The Abhiras met to decide the question of an attack upon Arjuna.<sup>2</sup> The proceedings of these meetings are not known. However, the meeting in the cowpens of Vraja indicates that the floor was dominated by the old and influential members of the tribe,<sup>3</sup> as it happens in the caste *panchayats* of today.

The tribal chiefs of the Abhira confederacy seem to have been the most influential and powerful members of the tribe. The *Bhāgavatapurāna* mentions Nanda, as the head of the Gopas and all the cows were his property. According to the *Harivamsa*, the tribal matters were also discussed in the meeting.<sup>4</sup> The other tribal persons of the Gopa confederacy known from the Puranas were Upananda and Sunanda.<sup>5</sup>

The period of these primitive republics of the Abhiras is difficult to ascertain due to lack of contemporary evidences. The history of the Abhiras before the second century B.C., as a matter of fact, is vague. Dr. Bhandarkar, however, on the slender evidences of *Mrichchhakatika* of Sudraka and *Pratijñāyugandharāyana* of Bhasa, has endeavoured<sup>6</sup> to prove that King Chandapadyota of Avanti was an Abhira. His argument that Aryaka, the grandson of Prodyota and nephew of King Palaka, a character in the *Mrichchhakatika*, was an Abhira cannot conclusively prove Pradyota to be an Abhira. The Puranic<sup>7</sup> references also about the accession of Pradyota, on the very site of the Kshatriyas, do not seem to cohere with the evidences of *Mrichchhakatika*. The primitive free-booter Abhiras how-

1. *Bhagavatapurana*, X, 11, 21.

2. *Vishnupurana*, V, 38, 18; *Mbh.* XVI, 7, 223, 8270.

3. *Bhagavatapurana*, *op. cit.*, *Harivamsa*, Vishnuparva, Ch. 9, pp 6-9.

4. *Ibid.*, slokas 1-4.

5. *Bhagavatapurana*, X, 11, 21-22; *Padmapurana*, Patalakhanda, II, 72, 6.

6. BHANDARKAR D. R., 'Note on Ancient History of India', *Indian Culture*, I, pp. 15-16; *Mrichchhakatika* of Sudraka, Edited by K. P. Parab, Bombay, 1900, Act. IV, p. 112; Ryder, *The Little Clay Cart*, Cmb., 1905, p. 100; *Pratijñāyugandharayana* of Bhasa, Edited by Ganapatisastri, Trivendrum, 1912, p. 24.

7. PARGITER, *Puranic Text of the Dynasties of Kali Age*, pp. 18, 68.



ever cannot be equated with the highly civilized Pradyotas of the sixth century B.C. Therefore, the theory of Bhandarkar is untenable.

The Abhiras, being mercenary people came in close contact with the Sakas. References to Saka overlordship over the country of the Abhiras, can be seen in Ptolemy's geography. In the 1st century B.C. Abhiradesa formed one of the provinces of Indo-Scythia. From the fact that the Sakas stepped in to the shoes of the Greeks, W.W. Tarn suggests that Demetrius I, the son of Euthydemus, the King of Bactria was the first to conquer the country of the Abhiras.<sup>1</sup> A. K. Narain refutes W.W. Tarn and suggests that the tradition of the great conquests of Demetrius in India rests entirely on slender threads of evidence.<sup>2</sup> The conquest of Abhiradesa may however be accredited to the Sakas, rather than the Greeks in the 1st century B.C. What part the Abhiras played in the conquest of their country is difficult to recall. It is borne out from the Junagadh Inscription of Rudradaman I however, that the Sakas continued their occupation of Abhiradesa and Gujarat in the 1st century A.D.<sup>3</sup>

A record of *Rudrabhuti*, the commander-in-chief of Saka Satrap Rudrasimha III, dated 191 A.D. indicates<sup>4</sup> that the Abhiras were patronised by the Sakas, and held responsible positions under them. It mentions that Bapaka, the father of Rudrabhuti was a commander-in-chief of the Saka army. The generalship passed from father to son is an interesting example of Indian History.

It appears that due to the patronage of the Sakas, the Abhiras gave up their mercenary character and became regular soldiers in the Saka army, which provided them ample opportunity for training in the state crafts.

### Rise of the Abhiras

Tradition of the earliest kingdoms of the Abhiras, has been preserved by *Vātsyāyana*, the author of *Kāmasūtra*, in the circa first century B.C.<sup>5</sup> Mention

1. TARN W. W., *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Camb., 1951, p. 142.
2. NARAIN A. K., *The Indo-Greeks*, Oxford, 1957, p. 44.
3. RAYCHAUDHARY H. C., *Pol. Hist. of Ancient India*, Cal., 1938, p. 371; Filliozat J., *Pol. Hist. of India*, Cal., 1957, p. 198.
4. *Indian Ant.*, X, p. 157-8; *Epig. Ind.*, XVI, p. 236.
5. *The Kamasutra of Vatsyayana*, Benares, 1912, p. 287; CHAKALADAR H. C., *Social Life in Ancient India*, Cal., 1929, p. 33.



is made of an Abhira king of Kotta. This Kotta, can be indentified with the Kota-Bundi of Rajasthan, on the basis of the traditions of Ahir rule current there.<sup>1</sup>

This rise of the Abhiras was not limited to Gujarat only, but Maharashtra also was not free from their activities. It is reasonable to hold that in the hey-day of the Andhra Empire, the Abhiras were occupying responsible positions specially in Khandesh. *Vishnupurana* have specifically mentioned the Abhiras as the servants of the Andhras.<sup>2</sup>

Politically, South India after the last Satavahana emperor Pulumavi IV, witnessed mighty upheavals and the government of the Andhras gave place to anarchy.

As a result of the dismemberment of the Satavahana empire the local feudatories rose up in arms and proclaimed their independence.<sup>3</sup> The Abhiras, who were truculent from the beginning of their history, utilised this god sent opportunity and plotted out to found a kingdom in the 3rd century A.D.

Isvarasena an Abhira Chief, known from an inscription in Cave X at Nasik dated 250 A.D. was the founder of this kngdom.<sup>4</sup> Sivadatta, the father of Rajan Isvarasena, bears no title in the epigraph, which indicates that he was not a king.

The sovereignty of the Abhiras was established firmly with the inauguration of *Abhira-era* which scholars have unanimously accredited to Isvarasena.<sup>5</sup> Later on, when the Traikutakas, Kalachuris and early Chalukyas ruled over the above regions, it came to be called as *Kalachuri-chedi era*.<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 4)

1. The commentator of the Kamasutra, however, locates Kotta in Gujarat, *Ibid.*, p. 294.

2. *Vishnupurana*, IV, 24, 51. Generally, the puranas have *āvabhṛitya*, in the texts which has been commented by Sridharaswami as the Abhiras belonging to the city of *āvabhṛitya*. But Pargiter takes *Adhrabhṛitya* as the correct reading of the text.

3. SIRCAR, D. C., *The successors of the Satavahanas*, Cal., 1939, p. 3.

4. *Epigr. Ind.*, VIII, 88-89; *Mirashi Corpus Inscr. Indicarum.*, Vol. IV, pt. I, Ootacamond, 1955, p. xxxiii.

5. RAPSON, *Catalogue of the coins of the Andhra Dynasty*, London, 1908, cl., xii, *Mirashi*. V.V., *Op cit.* xxxiv.

6. MIRASHI, V. V. 'Were the Maharajas of Khandesh the Feudatories of the Guptas', *I.H.Q.*, XXIII, p. 158; *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. IV, pt. I, pp. I to XXX; *Epigr. Indica*, XXIII, p. 48.



# PRINCIPAL FINDSPOTS OF THE INSCRIPTIONS OF ABHIRA-ERA (Kalachuri Chedi)

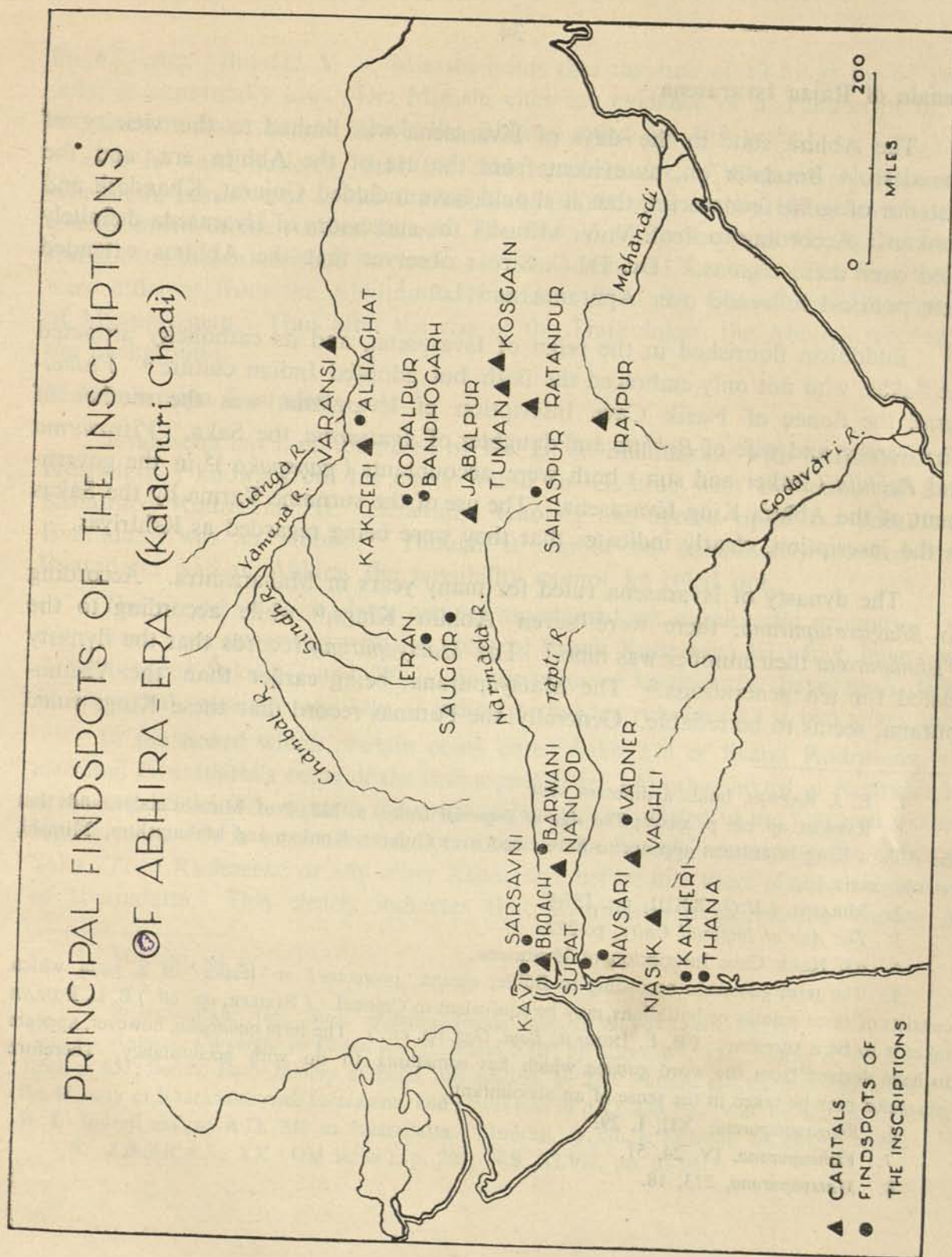


Fig. 4



### Domain of Rajan Isvarasena

The Abhira state in the days of Isvarasena was limited to the vicinity of Khandesh.<sup>1</sup> But later on, as evident from the use of the Abhira era, and the existence of some feudatories, that it should have included Gujarat, Khandesh and Konkan. According to Prof. V. V. Mirashi, the successors of Isvarasena definitely ruled over these regions.<sup>2</sup> Dr. D. C. Sircar observes that the Abhiras extended their political influence over Aparanta and Lata.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism flourished in the reign of Isvarasena, and its catholicity attracted the Sakas, who not only embraced the faith but adopted Indian culture.<sup>4</sup> *Vishnudattā*, the donee of Nasik Cave Inscription of Isvarasena, was the mother of *Visvavarma*, and wife of *Rebhila* and daughter of *Agnivarma*, the Saka. *Viśvavarma* and *Rebhila* (father and son) both were accountants (*gaṇapaka*)<sup>5</sup> in the government of the Abhira King Isvarasena. The use of the surname Varma by the Śakas in the inscription, clearly indicates that they were being regarded as Kshatriyas.

The dynasty of Isvarasena ruled for many years in Maharashtra. According to *Bhagavatapurana*, there were seven Abhira Kings,<sup>6</sup> while according to the *Vishnupurana* their number was nine.<sup>7</sup> The *Matsyapurana* records that the dynasty lasted for ten generations.<sup>8</sup> The *Matsyapurana*, being earlier than the *Vishnupurana*, seems to be reliable. Generally, the Puranas record that these Kings ruled

1. E. J. RAPSON, holds a different view.

RAPSON, *op. cit.* p. xxxiv; *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 222; Prof. Mirashi understands that the Abhira King Isvarasena appears to have ruled over Gujarat, Konkan and Maharashtra, Mirashi, *op. cit.*, xxxiv.

2. MIRASHI, *I.H.Q.*; XXIII, pp. 157-8.

3. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 222.

4. c.f. Nasik Cave Inscription of Isvarasena.

5. The term *gaṇapaka* according to Bühler means 'protector' or 'leader' of a *gaṇa* which consists of three *gulmas* or battalions, may be equivalent to Colonel. (BUHLER, *op. cit.*) B. L. INDRAJI takes it to be a surname. (B. L. INDRAJI, *Bom. Gaz. op. cit.*) The term *gaṇapaka*, however, appears to have derived from the word *gaṇana* which has something to do with accountancy. Therefore *gaṇapaka* may be taken in the sense of an accountant.

6. *Bhagavatapurana*, XII, 1, 29.

7. *Vishnupurana*, IV, 24, 51.

8. *Matsyapurana*, 273, 18.



for 67 years. But Dr. V. V. Mirashi holds that the rule of 10 kings for 67 years only, is abnormally low. Dr. Mirashi cites the evidence of a manuscript of the Vayupurana according to which the Abhiras ruled for 167 years.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth-noticing, that the Abhira territories of Gujarat, Konkan and Khandesh, passed over to the Traikutakas in A.D. 415, exactly 167 years after the establishment of the Abhira State.<sup>2</sup> The *Traikutakas* rose up in 415 A.D., under Indradatta, and established themselves in Khandesh and Konkan. The *Traikutakas* were different from the Abhiras as is evident from the Chandravalli Inscription of Mayursarman. Thus after the rise of the Traikutakas, the Abhiras receded in the background.

### **Mahakshatrapa Isvaradatta**

Isvarasena has been identified by Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar with Mahakshatrapa Isvaradatta,<sup>3</sup> known from his coins found in Gujarat with the coins of Śaka Kshatrapa Rudrasena III. Generally, scholars are agreed upon the point that Isvaradatta was an Abhira.<sup>4</sup> Though it cannot be conclusively proved that Isvaradatta was an Abhira, the possibility cannot be ruled out.

The period of Isvaradatta can be ascertained on numismatic grounds. His coins have been unearthed with the coins of Svami Rudrasena III which have been dated between Śaka 273 and 301.<sup>5</sup> As the coins of Isvaradatta, have been dated in his regnal years one and two, it indicates that his rule lasted for two years only.

In the hoard which contain coins dated Saka 273 of Svami Rudrasena, we also find Isvaradatta's coins of the first regnal year. Another hoard of Rudrasena's coins dated Saka 301, contain the coins of Isvaradatta, dated in the first and second regnal years. It is important to note that in the hoards containing the coins of Saka 272 of Rudrasena or any other Kshatrapa, before him there is not a single coin of Isvaradatta. This clearly indicates that Isvaradatta acquired the throne of

1. MIRASHI, *op. cit.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. BHANDARKAR, *Arch. Surv. of India Annual Report*, 1913-14, pp. 230-231.

4. RAPSON, *Catalogue of Coins*, *op. cit.*, Plate XIII, pp. c.xxxiii-V, 124; Indrajī B. L., J.R.A.S., 1890, p. 657; Smith, *Early History of India*, 3rd edition, p. 226. Rapson refutes with Bhandarkar on the identity of Isvaradatta with Isvarasena, and places him in A.D. 236. (Rapson, *op. cit.*, pp. c.xxxv-vi) B. L. Indrajī assigns A.D. 249 to Isvaradatta. (Indrajī, *op. cit.*); Mirashi, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiii.

5. J.B.B.R.A.S., XX (Old series), p. 201; N.S. XLVII, pp. 95-96.



Gujarat in the year Śaka 273. Since he could rule for two years only it is possible that he was dethroned by someone in Saka 274. The history of the Abhiras being obscure, the details of this possible event is difficult to recapture.

As Išvaradatta never ruled earlier than 350 A.D. therefore he had nothing to do with the war of succession which broke out in A.D. 293, between Varhran III and Narseh for the throne of Sakasthan.

In this war, the Sakas were the supporters of Varhran III. The Paikuli Inscription gives an account of this war. But when Narseh was victorious, the Śakas and the Abhiras congratulated him on his accession.<sup>1</sup> In the list of the princes who came to congratulate, Varhran III one *Abhiran-Sāh* has also been mentioned which proves that the Abhiras were ruling as governors under the Śakas in Gujarat. After this war, the Śaka satraps of India proclaimed their independence. The reference of *Abhiran Sāh* or 'the King of the Abhiras' indicates that the Abhiras also utilised this god-sent opportunity to establish themselves as a ruling race especially over Kathiavad.

#### Imperial status of the Abhiras

We have no definite information about the imperial status of the Abhiras. However, the wide use of the Abhira-Era through out Khandesh, Konkan, Gujarat and Saurashtra indicates that in the beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era, the Abhiras enjoyed a considerable imperial dignity. A recent discovery of an Abhira inscription from Nagarjunakonda indicates that Rajña Vasushena was a paramount sovereign of his times. On the basis of the internal evidences, the inscription may be assigned to the middle of the fourth century A.D. It records the consecration of a wooden image of *Ashṭabhujasvāmi* by *Mahāgrāmika Mahātalavara*, *Mahādaṇḍanāyaka* Śivasevana of *Kauśikagotra*, Yonarajas of Sañjayapura, Rudradaman Śaka of Avanti and Vishṇu-Rudra-Sivalananda Satakarni of Vanavāsi. It is worth noticing that none of the above princes has any title except Sivasevana who has been styled as *Mahādaṇḍanāyaka* and *Mahāgrāmika* which are evidently his official designation while Vasushena has been styled as *rajña* which is an indicative of his superiority over the above princes. It is not unlikely to understand therefore that Vasushena was the overlord of Śivasevana, Yonarajas, Rudradaman and Vishnu Rudra Sivalananda Satakarni.

1. ERNST HERZFELD, *Paikuli Monuments and Inscriptions of the Early History of the Sassanian Empire*, Vol. I, 1924, pp. 35-44.



It is possible to suggest the identifications of the above feudatories with some certainty except in few cases. Taking for example Śivasevana, we see that he seems to be an Officer, evidently of Vasushena Abhira. Since his title *Mahātalavara* akin more to the Ikshvaku princes if not exclusively, it is very probable to understand that he was a scion of the Ikshvakus. As the inscription has been discovered at Nagarjunakonda at Ikshvaku level, the probability of Sivasevana being an Ikshvaku prince cannot be ruled out. The Sañjayapura of Yonarajas may be the same as Sanjayanti referred to in the Mahabharata in connection with the conquest of Sahadeva.

Since the word *Yonarājabhiḥ* is plural, hence it seems that the word has been used for more than two princes of the same line. Rudradaman of Avanti seems to be the Rudradaman II who was the father of Rudrasena III and ruled at Avanti between A.D. 327-348. The last prince Viṣṇu Rudra Śivalananda Śatakarni had his capital at Vanavasi (modern Vanavasi) and was a scion of the Imperial Satavahanas as his name suggests.

Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. V. V. Mirashi has pointed out the names of some other feudatories of the Abhiras<sup>1</sup> who have been placed more or less in the same period. These feudatories were the Maharajas Svamidasa, Bhulunda and Rudradasa, known from their grants. They are recorded to have ruled in Khandesh in the years 67, 107 and 117 of the *Abhira-era* which may be rendered to the year 316, 356 and 366 of the Christian era.

The questions of the identifications of these Maharajas with the feudatories of the Abhiras is controversial. Dr. D. C. Sircar argues that the dates recorded in the land-grants of these Maharajas should better be referred to the Gupta era, and therefore the Maharajas Svamidasa, Bhulunda and Rudradasa<sup>2</sup> were possibly the feudatories of Chandragupta II or Kumaragupta I.

The earliest date of the Gupta era known to us is 82 G.E. of the Eran Stone Inscription of Samudragupta. As the Gupta era never spread to Khandesh, evidently the dates of the land-grants in question cannot be taken to have been recorded in the Gupta era. The only era which was used in the 4th century A.D. there was the Abhira era. Paleographically also, these grants should be assigned to the 4th century A.D., therefore, the years 67, 107 and 117 of the grants should

1. MIRASHI, *Corpus Inscr. op. cit.*, XXXV; 'Age of the Bagh Caves', *I.H.Q.*, p. 81.

2. SIRCAR, D. C., *The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 222-223.



be referred to the Abhira era. The suzerainty of the Guptas as a matter of fact was never recognised officially in Khandesh, thus there is no possibility of the Gupta over-lordship in that region. It is worth noticing that the above mentioned dates cannot be taken to the Gupta-era as the empire of the Guptas did not extend to the Deccan. Therefore the above Maharajas were the feudatories of the Abhiras.

The other feudatories of the Abhiras *Īśvarata* and *Mahādaṇḍanāyak Śaka Śrīdharavarman* are known to us from their inscriptions discovered at Chhota Udaipur and Kanakhera near Sanchi. *Īśvarata* was ruling in Central Gujarat and *Śaka Śrīdharavarman* was evidently the chief of the region near about Sanchi. As both the chiefs have used the Abhira-era therefore the possibilities of their being the vassals of the Abhiras cannot be ruled out. We can also rely to some extent on the numerous unwritten legends of strong Ahir-rule spread in Khandesh and other regions about the imperial status of the Abhiras. It is however evident from the epigraphs that the Abhiras ruled over Konkan also.

#### Events of the reign of the Abhiras

The Abhiras witnessed their hard days sometimes in the fourth century A.D. This was the time when the Abhira kingdom started facing the inroads of the contemporary powers. The Chandravalli Inscription records that Mayurasarman of the Kadamba dynasty carried out his extensive conquests upto Vindhya range and defeated the Abhiras also successfully.<sup>1</sup> We are apt to think that this invasion would have checked the rising power of the Abhiras but no permanent results are known to us.

During the same period we hear of the famous invasion of the Gupta monarch Samudragupta. The Abhiras have been mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar as a republican tribe with the *Madrakas*. If we agree that the names of the republican tribes mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription have been recorded in the geographical order, than the Abhiras mentioned there in cannot be identified with the Abhira sovereigns of Khandesh. It can also be pointed out here that both the Abhira kings *viz.* *Isvarasena* and *Vasushena* of Khandesh known to us so far have been called as *rajna* and it is difficult to believe that the Khandesh Abhiras were republican at all. It seems Samudragupta in his *dakṣiṇāpatha* conquest

1. Chandravalli Inscription has been assigned to 345 A.D. by DR. G. M. MORAES. Dr. Moraes G. M., *The Kadamba Kula*, Bombay, 1931, p. 16. cf. *Arch. Surv. of Mysore*, 1929, p. 60; *Epi. Car.* VII, Introduction, p. 9.



never fought with the Abhira power of Khandesh. Therefore the Abhiras who paid tributes to Samudragupta were not the monarchical Abhiras of Khandesh about whom we have enough epigraphical evidences. The republican Abhiras who have been stated to be living in contiguity with the *Madrakas* are located in the region near about Kangra and Chamba hills in the first Chapter. Possibly this group of the Abhiras paid tributes to Samudragupta.

### War with Pulakesin I

About the end of the 6th century A.D., the country of the Abhiras witnessed the invasion of the Chalukyan Emperor Pulakesin I, who established his away as far as Badami in Kaladgi.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that, amongst the defeated people, in course of the invasion of Pulakesin, the name of the Abhiras does not appear, but J. F. Fleet observes, that Pulakesin I, actually directed the course of his victory and conquered Nasik, the seat of the Abhiras.

What happened to the Abhiras in this invasion we do not know. It can be, taken for granted that the Abhiras became independent again when the storm had passed over.

### Dark Period

The history of the Abhiras between the 6th and 8th century A.D. is obscure. During this period the Deccan witnessed the growth of the powerful empire of the Vākātakas. It is possible that the Abhiras who had lost their importance due to the rise of the Traikutakas, receded further to the background, and managed to keep themselves aloof.

### Downfall of the Abhiras ( C 861-1341 A.D. )

In this period, the Abhiras passed through very critical times. They appear to have acquired considerable importance which seems to have incensed all the important powers viz. the Chalukyas of Anhilpatana, the Chalukyas of Kuntala, the Hoysalas, the Kalachuris and the Yadavas of Dvaravatipura to launch their campaigns against them. These powers formed a confederacy and trumped up charges to subdue the impregnable and truculent Abhiras.

1. *Ibid.* 90; FLEET J. F., 'Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions', *Ind. Ant.* VII, p. 247; Prof. Nilkant K. A. Sastri fixes the date of Pulakesin as 543 A.D. *A History of South India*, Madras, 1955, p. 107.



The Abhiras were spread over two States—Saurashtra and Khandesh; both the States being independent. Towards the middle of the eleventh century A.D., the rival Kshatriya powers, surrounded the Abhira States and plotted their way to uproot them. In this period of 500 years, one after the other, almost all the Deccan powers fought against them. The Abhiras fought singlehanded and could not be overpowered immediately. They resisted for 500 years and faced the tumultuous attacks but in the end succumbed to their fate.

To enter into the detailed history of their downfall, we find that the Ghatiyala Inscription of Kakkuka 918 V.E. ( A.D. 861 ) brings the Abhiras again to the stage of ancient Indian politics. The inscription records the destruction of a village named Rohinsakupa ( identified by Dr. Bhandarkar with Ghatiyala, 20 miles N.W. of Jodhpur ).<sup>1</sup>

The village became unsafe for residence. Kakkuka, the Pratihara, destroyed the Abhiras and constructed a market place, houses and streets. Kakkuka requested the Brahmans and the Vaisyas to occupy the village as their residence and promised them means of livelihood and safety.

### AFFAIRS OF THE ABHIRA-CHUDASAMA KINGS OF GUJRAT

#### War with Mularaja c. 900-99 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the 10th century A.D., the Abhiras faced the invasion of the Chaulukyan king Mularaja of Anhilwara. The Abhiras were rivals of the noble Kshatriyas. Hemachandra in his *Dvyāśrayakāvya* mentions Graharipu, as a mighty Abhira—Chudasama king of Saurashtra.<sup>3</sup> He has been described as an oppressor, a turbulent arrogant man addicted to wine and women.<sup>4</sup> His queen, according to Hemachandra was *vidushi*, a learned and virtuous woman.

Graharipu has been described as the lord of Sindhu (*Sindhupatin*).<sup>5</sup> The kingdom of Graharipu comprised of the whole region of Saurashtra, where he

1. *Ep. Ind.* IX, p. 279.

2. Date according to H. C. RAY, *Dynastic Hist. of N. India*.

3. *Dvyāśrayakāvya of Hemachandra*, Ed. by KATHAVATE, Bom., 1915, p. 1, 2. The Chudasamā kings are described as Abhiras by Merutungacharya.

4. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 179-186.

5. *Ibid.*, I, 2. 84, p. 187, *Ibid.* v, 64, p. 175; v. 109, p. 206-7.



reigned like the god Vishnu and around his kingdom was the roaring sea.<sup>1</sup> His capital has been described as Mahishmati<sup>2</sup> and his residence as *Vamanasthali* (modern Vanthali 8 miles from Junagadh).

### Causes of War

Hemachandra mentions that Mularaja, the Chaulukyan king, a devout worshipper of Somanath, was instructed by the Lord to destroy Grahariṇi as the latter was oppressing his worshippers. By force of arms he conquered the Raivataka and adopted the ways of a *mlechchha* (*mlechchhāchāra*). He used to undertake hunting excursions in *Prabhasatīrtha*, the sacred place of the Saivites.<sup>3</sup> Hemachandra represents him as beef-eater.<sup>4</sup> Grahariṇi was always alert to face any danger.

• On the tenth day of the bright fortnight of *Āshāḍha*, Mularaja started his expedition with great fanfare accompanied by the chanting of the mantras by the Brahmanas.

### Marching towards the Battle-field.

King Grahariṇi sent a messenger to Mularaja who was encamping at the bank of Jambumali river to enquire why his army had come there. Here the statement of the messenger that 'whether he had been invited by the Brahmanas who had made false complaints about their sufferings' is important. Mularaja replied that he could not be friendly with Grahariṇi, who annoyed the Brahmanas and obstructed the pilgrims.<sup>5</sup>

Grahariṇi made ready the Mewasi, Bhillas, Lakha, the King of Kachchh and others. He was joined by his sons and his friend; the king of Sindhu was on the sea shore with a huge army.

### Battle of Jambumali river

The opposing forces met on the Jambumali river, the border, of Sorath<sup>6</sup> The Abhiras, offered sacrifices to the goddess Durga and the goddess of Death to win the battle and marched for the battle field. Mularaja was assisted by the

1. *Ibid.*, v. 65, p. 174.

2. *Ibid.*, v. 65., p. 174.

3. *Ibid.*, 1, 2, v. 86, p. 189.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

6. The river Jambumali has been identified with the river Bhogawati or Bhogo which passes through the village Jambu to the east of Vadhvan, *Ind. Ant.*, xii, 192.



Maharaja of Kasideśa and the princes to the north of Arbuda. The *Paramararaja Srimala* also fought well. The Abhiras were assisted by *mlechchhas*, who according to the commentator, came from Tukhara, numbering one lakh.<sup>1</sup> Mularaja made Graharipu a prisoner, but Lakha the King of Kachchh rushed upon the latter who speared him to death.<sup>2</sup> The Jadeja raja was also trampled to death. The Chudasamas got defeated and Mularaja won the battle.

A review of the events cited above seems to be necessary here. It can not be doubted that Mularaja was oppressor and the reasons advanced by Hemachandra to fight with Graharipu are fake. The fact remains that Mularaja could not tolerate the Abhira power and wanted to crush them.

It is almost impossible to believe that the Abhira king being a Hindu, took to beef-eating. This was the creation of the Brahmanas, who wanted to destroy them. Dr. A. K. Majumdar's view that the Abhiras of medieval times were beef-eaters seems to be doubtful.<sup>3</sup> Further, the maltreatment of the dead body of Lakha by Mularaja was essentially a reprehensible act.

As a result of this victory, the country of the Abhira was occupied by the Chalukyas, and the portion of Somnath Patan was annexed to the Chaulukyan territory. However, though the Abhiras were defeated their power was not completely broken down.

After this war, we do not hear of the Abhira till we come to the reign of Siddharaja Jayasimha, son of Karnadeva, and great grand-son of Mularaja I, who according to Ray, reigned c. 1094-1144 A.D. Jayasimha was a great warrior and conqueror. The provenance of his inscriptions unearthed from Kotah, Banswara, Gwalior, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Cutch, Ujjain shows that his dominion must have extended over large portions of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, besides Gujarat and Kathiawad and Cutch.

#### War with Siddharaja Jayasimha

The earliest war of Siddharaja was against the Abhira ruler of Saurashtra.<sup>4</sup> It seems that the Abhiras had again regained their power. Therefore, Siddharaja

1. According to the commentary of Abhyatilaka Gani on the *Dvyaryakavya* the Mlechchhas came from Turushka. *Dvyasryakavya*, op. cit., V. 5, 49.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 5, 102-103.

3. MAJUMDAR A. K., *The Chaulukyas of Gujarat*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1956, p. 429.

4. *Bombay Gaz.*, Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 170.



Jayasimha was forced to launch a campaign against the Abhira ruler Navaghana. Merutunga describes him as *Abhirarāṇaka*. According to the Dohad stone inscription of Siddharaja he threw into prison, the lords of Saurashtra, Malava, and Sindhu.<sup>1</sup> King Navaghana, alias Khangar has been mentioned as a ruler of Saurashtra, in the same inscription.

### Causes of the War

According to bardic traditions, Khangar wanted to marry a beautiful damsel named Rāṇakdevi who was the daughter of a potter of Mejavadi, a village about nine miles north of Junagarh. In this venture, he found Siddharaja as a rival. But Khangar managed to get her, and Siddharaja, enraged by this, declared war on him.<sup>2</sup>

According to the *Prabandhachintāmaṇi*, Siddharaja went in person to subdue Navaghana.<sup>3</sup> Jinaprabha Suri in the *Tirthakalpa* says that Jayasimha killed Khangar and appointed Sajjana the viceroy of Saurashtra which is corroborated by Merutunga. A Girnar inscription dated V.S. 1176 (A.D. 1120)<sup>4</sup> attests the subjugation of the Abhira country.

According to Prabhachandra, Siddharaja sent Kirtipala, the brother of Kumarpala, against King Navaghana, but Kirtipala was defeated and later was joined by the minister Udayana, and together they (Kirtipala and Udayana) defeated Navaghana, though Udayana died in the battle. But later on Prabhachandra says that Siddharaja killed Khangara. However, the efforts of Siddharaja could not bring any successful result as we are told that he could not enjoy the country as too many of Khangar's men were still there.

Merutungacharya gives a detailed account of the campaign. According to that, Navaghana defeated the army of Siddharaja eleven times.<sup>5</sup> In the twelfth encounter Siddharaja played a trick. Khangar had ramparts erected around Vardhamana and certain other cities. Merutunga informs us that Siddharaja won

1. *Ind. Ant.*, Vol. II, pp. 158-60.

2. *Bom. Gaz.* I, Pt. I, pp. 176-77.

3. *Prabandhachintāmaṇi*, Edited by MUNI JINAVIJAYA, Singhi Jain Jyñāpitha Bengal, 1953, pt. I, p. 95.

4. MAJMUDAR, *The Chalukyas of Gujrat*, *op. cit.* pp. 69, 442; *Indraji Bom. Gaz.*, I, pp. 176-77.

5. *Prabandhachintāmaṇi*, Edited by SASTRI, D. K., Bombay, 1932, p. 104.



several relatives of the Abhira King Khangar to his side.<sup>1</sup> It was the battle of Devalavara which brought success to Siddharaja. The valour of Khangar and the high-handedness of Jayasimha cannot be refuted. After his death Mahādāṇḍanāyaka Sajjana was appointed to look after the affairs of Saurashtra by Jaysimha.<sup>2</sup>

### War with Kumarapala

Though the Abhiras were defeated by the Chaulukyas, yet they maintained their force and were a constant headache to the Chalukyas of Anhilpatan. Their existence as potential enemy of the Chaulukyas was realised by Kumarapala (c. 1144 A.D.). Merutungacharya refers to one of his wars with Samvara, also known as Samusara, the Abhira chief of Saurashtra. B. L. Indrajī suggested that the king of Saurashtra was probably some Gohilvad Mehar Chief,<sup>3</sup> but Majumdar suggests that he was an Abhira.<sup>4</sup> The tradition finds support from the Prachi Inscription of Kumarapala in which he refers to a war with the Abhiras in Saurashtra. The expedition, we are told, was led by Udayana, the minister of Kumarapala. In the struggle that followed, Udayana was defeated, and the Chaulukyan forces were beaten back. Bhagwan Lal Indrajī thinks that this event must have taken place about 1149 A.D.<sup>5</sup> *Kumarapalacharita* mentions that Samvara was in the end defeated and his son was placed on the throne.<sup>6</sup> From the Prachi stone inscription of Kumarapala, we learn that there was some trouble with the Abhiras in Saurashtra, and Kumarapala appointed Gumadeva to control the Abhiras who were afraid of Gumadeva's sword.<sup>7</sup>

The Sundha Hill inscription tells us that one Ahladana, the Chahamana of Naddula, helped the Gurjara king in suppressing the disturbances in the mountainous part of Saurashtra (*girau Saurashtre*).<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is evident, that the victory over the Abhiras was obtained with the help of the Chahamanas. It seems the

1. *Ibid.* p. 64; *Prabandhachintamani*, Edited by JINA VIJAYA, Calcutta, Pt. I, 1940, Translated by Acharya Hajari Prasad Dvivedi, pp. 76-78.

2. *Prabandhachintamani*, Edited by DURGASHANKER, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

3. *Bom. Gaz.*, I, I, 186.

4. MAJUMDAR, A. K., *op. cit.*, p. 116.

5. *Bom. Gaz.*, Pt. I, p. 186.

6. *Kumarapalacharita of Jayasimha Suri*, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, pp. 581-82; *Kathiavad Gaz.*, p. 609.

7. DISHALKAR D. B., 'Prachi Inscription of Kumarapala' *Poona Orientalist*, I, No. 4, p. 38.

8. 'Sundha Hill Inscription of Chachigadeva', *Ep. Ind.*, IX, 72.



Abhiras of Saurashtra who succumbed to the confederacy of the rival powers headed the Chaulukyas of Anhilapatan and completely disappeared as a political power.

The question remains unsolved, when did Kumarapala launch a campaign against the Abhiras of Saurashtra? It is worth noticing that Kumarapala lived from V.E. 1200 to 1229 *i.e.* from A.D. 1143 to 1172.<sup>1</sup> The Kiradu inscription of Kumarapala of V.E. 1209, A.D. 1162, does not mention war with Saurashtra.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the victory of the Abhiras may be placed sometime between A.D. 1163 and 1172, before the death of Kumarapala.

### AFFAIRS OF THE ABHIRAS OF KHANDESH AND KONKAN

#### War with the Chalukyas of Kuntala

Towards the middle of the eleventh century A.D., when the Chaulukyas of Anhilapatan were busy in uprooting the Abhiras of Gujarat, the Abhiras of Khandedesh confronted the powerful monarch Trailokyamalla, the Chalukyan Emperor of Kuntala. The Nagai inscription of Emperor Trailokyamalla dated 1058 A.D. refers to the defeat of the Abhiras at the hands of *Dandanātha Trinetra*, the commander in-chief of the Chalukyan army.<sup>3</sup> This must have served as a check to the Abhiras who had become a secondary power in the Deccan.

But the Abhiras became independent again, as an inscription discovered at the village Kullu Mathda, dated 1068 A.D. issued by the Chalukyan Emperor Trailokyamalla Ahavamalla Deva, records that the Abhira King was stopped within his boundary and made to pay the tributes.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, due to the non-payment of taxes it was the second Chalukyan campaign against them.

The Abhiras remained vassals of the Chalukyas of Kuntala, as is evident from an inscription of Tribhuvanamalla Vikramaditya VI, Saka Era 1006 (A.D. 1084).<sup>5</sup>

Another inscription discovered in Shikarpur Taluq dated 1114 A.D. issued by the Chalukyan King Vikramanika of Kuntala maintains that Chalukyas were the overlords of the Ābhiras.<sup>6</sup>

1. MAJUMDAR, *op. cit.* pp. 202-3.

2. DISALKAR, *op. cit.* Vol. I, No. 2, p. 49.

3. *Hyderabad Arch. Series No. 8*, p. 21; *Mysore Arch. Surv. Report*, 1915-16, p. 47.

4. *Ep. Car.*, VII, Pt. I, No. 136, p. 101.

5. *Ep. Ind.*, XV, p. 104.

6. *Ep. Car.*, VII, pt. I, Shikarpur, No. 137.



The Chalukyas of Kuntala ruled the country of the Abhiras upto 1129 A.D. An inscription dated 1128 A.D. describes the Chalukyan emperor Tribhuvanamalla as the overlord of the Gaulas (Abhiras).<sup>1</sup>

Another inscription in the Kedareśvara temple dated 1129 A.D. records the presentation of elephants and horses by hostile Gaula (Abhira) King to Emperor Vikramadityadeva of Kuntala.<sup>2</sup>

In the year 1128 A.D., the Hoysalas, who were the feudatories under the Chalukyas of Kuntala, became independent under the King Vishnuvardhana Hoysala.<sup>3</sup> King Vishnuvardhana launched a successful expedition to conquer the neighbouring rulers and their feudatory chiefs. Naturally, the Abhiras could not escape. This conquest is known from an inscription discovered in Belur Taluq 1136 A.D. according to which Vishnuvardhana defeated the Gaulas in terrible wars.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the Abhiras became feudatory of the Hoysalas.

The Abhiras did not remain the feudatories of the Hoysalas for a long time. An inscription dated 1145 A.D. of Narasimha Deva, the Master of Uddare of Ganga-vamsa, a feudatory of Chalukya Jagadekamalla Deva of Kuntala, describes the emperor Jagadekamalla, an ornament to the face of Abhira country.<sup>5</sup> It indicates that the Abhiras became a vassal of the Chalukyas again.

But the rising power of the Hoysala probably could not tolerate the Abhiras. According to an inscription issued by Narsimhadeva I, Hoysala, in the year 1173 A.D. from Dorasamudra, the Hoysala Emperor has been, described as 'the moon to the lotus eyes of the Guala women.'<sup>6</sup>

The victory of the Hoysalas over the Abhiras is confirmed by an inscription dated 1174 A.D. discovered in Hassan Taluq.<sup>7</sup> The Hoysala King Ballala II, successor of Narasimha I, subjugated the Abhiras. The fact that the Abhiras were completely defeated by the Hoysala Ballala II is further attested by another

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1. *Ibid.*, XI, Devanagare, 90.
  2. *Ibid.*, VII, Shikarpur, 100.
  3. DARRET, *The Hoysalas*, Oxford, p. 61.
  4. *Epi. Car.*, V, pt. I, Belur, No. 17.
  5. *Ibid.*, VIII, pt. II, Sorab, 138.
  6. *Ibid.*, V, pt. I, Belur, 114.
  7. *Ibid.*, Hassan, 58.



inscription dated 1174 A.D. discovered in a village Channarayapattana in the same taluq.<sup>1</sup>

An inscription of Tribhuvanamalla, the Chalukya of Kuntala, dated 1178 A.D. again boasts of terrifying the Gaula King.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the Chalukyan Emperor might have commenced his inroads on the Abhiras again.

It is certain, however, that Tribhuvanamalla, could not subdue the Abhiras permanently, as we find that an inscription of the Kalachuri King Sankama-deva of Kalayanapura dated 1179 A.D. records that the Abhiras ( Gaulas ) sent elephants to the Kalachuri King.<sup>3</sup> This indicates that the Abhiras tried to maintain their independent status and establish friendly relations with other powers.

The hostility with the Hoysalas could not last long. As the Hoysalas were an important power of the Deccan, therefore, in the same year 1179 A.D. Ballala II, the Hoysala Emperor, again commenced inroads on the territories of the truculent Abhiras. An inscription of the Hoysala Emperor Ballala II, discovered in Nagamangala Taluq, proclaims of his terrifying the Abhiras,<sup>4</sup> but the Abhiras could not be subdued permanently.

In the year 1181 A.D., the Kalachuris, who already enjoyed the overlordship of the Abhiras seem to have seized the opportunity to oppress them again. In an inscription, Emperor Apratimalla of Kalanjarpur, has been described as 'an enraged lion to the lusty elephant Gaula'.<sup>5</sup>

The Abhiras however though they were oppressed by the Kalachuris and the Hoysalas were not to be subdued so easily, and yet maintained their independent status. It is evident, from an inscription of Ballala II, dated 1184 A.D. inscribed in Malleśvara temple, that 'Gaula racked with pain'.<sup>6</sup>

The Abhiras, in the end seem to have accepted the overlordship of the Hoysalas. In an inscription dated 1190 A.D., emperor Ballala II has been described as a 'thunderbolt to the rock of the Abhira King'.<sup>7</sup> Their constant

1. *Ibid.*, Channarayapattana, 146.

2. *Ibid.*, VIII, Pt. II, Sorab, 325.

3. *Ibid.*, VII, Pt. I, Sikarpur, 96.

4. *Ibid.*, IV, pt. II, Nagmangala, 15.

5. *Ibid.*, VII, pt. I, Shikarpur, 119.

6. *Ibid.*, V, pt. I, Channarayapattana, 254.

7. *Ibid.*, 179, p. 463.



tussle with the Hoysalas reduced them to servitude, as Hoysala Vira Ballala again claims himself as an oppressor of Gaula<sup>1</sup> in an inscription of 1193.

It appears that after their perpetual conflicts single handed, with the Chalukyas, Hoysalas and the Kalachuris, the Abhiras were reduced to servitude and started working under other kings. According to from an epigraph dated 1215 A.D. Jaitugi, an Abhira, was an official (*Potara Nayaka*) under the Yadava ruler Simhana of Dvaravatipur. In this epigraph Jaita has been described 'as a dweller at (Simhana's) feet'. It has been described that when Jaitunga was in residence at Hiriya Balligave, 'protecting Jiddulige and other districts of the south.....', he gave for the god Kotinatha, which according, to the Puranas was the original *liṅga* and thus a holy *tirtha*, his own village of chikkasakuna.' The Abhira ruler Jaitugi Deva has been described as a philanthropic learned man of the place, and the celebrated *āśraya* of the original *liṅga* of Kritayuga.

It is worth noticing, that the Hoysalas were still a potential enemy of the Abhiras. This rivalry lasted even in the reign of Hoysala emperor Narasimha II, and on the occasion of his accession, the Abhiras sent their envoy. An inscription dated 1220 A.D. clearly reveals that the envoy of Gaula King trembled with fear on account of their enmity with the Hoysalas and admired their superior military power.<sup>3</sup>

In the thirteenth century however the Yadavas in their own turn carried on a ding-dong battle with the Abhiras. According to the Amba Inscription, the great general Kholeśvara is said to have routed the Abhiras in 1228 A.D.<sup>4</sup> Kholeśvara was a *Maudgala Brahmana* and the commander-in-chief of Simhana. The inscription describes Kholeśvara, as 'an axe in cutting off the remnants of the race of the heroic Abhira kings'. Thus he was an instrument in effecting the defeat of the Abhiras, in Simhana's expedition to Gujarat.<sup>5</sup> But most probably these restless people were not completely subdued, for, an inscription again mentions an expedition against them.

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1. *Ibid.*, VII, Shikarpur, 105.

2. *Ibid.*, VIII, Sorab, 276, p. 48.

3. *Ep. Car.*, VII, Channagiri, 72.

4. 'Amba Inscription', *Arch. Surv. of Western India*, III, pp. 86-87.

5. FLEET, *Dynasties of the Kanarese District*, Bombay, 1882 p. 242, *Bom. Gaz.* II, Pt. II, p. 240.



The Amba Inscription No. 2 describes that Simhana defeated the Abhira king, the lord of Bhambhagiri who has been named as Lakshmideva (*bhambhā-girivarābhīra simharājalakshmīdeva kula vana dahana dāvānala*).<sup>1</sup>

In the year 1235 however, the Abhiras were again reduced to servitude by the Hoysalas. The inscription of Vira Narasimha, dated 1235 A.D. boasts that the Gaula King became just like a servant to the Hoysala Emperor Narsimha II.<sup>2</sup> The Purushottampuri Plates of Ramchandra dated 1232 Saka-era describes Simhana as the ancestor of Ramchandra Yadava,<sup>3</sup> and confirms the victory of Simhana upon the Lord of Bhambhagiri (Hemadri mentions that his name was Lakshmidhara).<sup>4</sup> G. H. Khare identifies Bhambhagiri with Bhambhari in the Ahmednagar district of *Raja chi Bham* near Yeotmal in Berar.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Mirashi objects to the identification due to the absence of any fort near the site, as the name Bhambhagiri suggests to be a fortified place. He opines that as Lakshmideva belonged to the Abhira dynasty, therefore he would have been ruling probably somewhere near the district of Khandesh, where the Ahirs (Abhiras) are in large numbers. Dr. Mirashi identifies Bhambhagiri with an old ruined town called Bhamer four miles south of Nizampur in the Pimpalner Taluqa of the west Khandesh district. The town of Bhamer lies at the foot of a great fortified hill having many ruined gates, towers and some old caves locally known as 'Raja's house.'<sup>6</sup> This shows that Simhana exterminated the Abhiras totally.

In A.D. 1255, we find that the Abhiras were defeated and crushed again by another Yadava king, Kanhadeva who has been described as a 'Lord of *Dvaravatipura* (*Dvārāvatīpura-varādhiśvara*)'. King Kanhadeva has been described as *Śrī Khanhadeva* a 'wild fire to the forest of the Abhīras'.<sup>7</sup> It indicates firstly that the king Kanhadeva continued the traditional policy of ousting the Ābhīras and secondly that the Abhiras far from being exterminated or completely subdued,

1. G. H. KHARE, *Sources of the Medieval History of the Deccan* (in Marathi) Vol. I, pp. 60, 64. Hemadri mentions his name as Lakshmidhara.

2. *Ep. Car.*, III, pt. I, p. 18; IV, pt. II, pp. 20-21.

3. MIRASHI, 'Purushottampuri Plates of Ramachandra Saka Era' 1232; *Ep. Ind.*, XXV, pp. 209, 220.

4. *Ep. Ind.*, XXV, p. 203.

5. KHARE, *Opcit.* p. 60.

6. *Ep. Ind.*, XXV, p. 203.

7. *Ep. Car.*, VIII, Sb. 136, p. 18; text, p. 39.



were still striving hard to survive and resist inspite of the repeated attacks of the contemporary powers.

The Yadavas were the ferocious enemies of the Abhiras, and after twenty one years, war broke out between them again. An incomplete inscription, which may be assigned to the times of the Yadava king Ramdeva dated A.D. 1276, calls him "the sole great fire in burning the forest of trees and bamboo groves, the terrible marauder king of the Abhiras named Gambhira" (*Gambhīrābhīra prachandapeṇḍāra nikhila kula kāntāra vamsāvalidahana*).<sup>1</sup>

Inspite of the murderous campaigns of the Yadava King Ramadeva, the Abhiras maintained their strength and seem to have violated the territories of the Yadavas again. Consequently king Mahadeva Yadava, known from his inscription dated 1280 A.D., launched a successful campaign against the mighty Abhiras and made them run in the forests.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident from the Tasgaon Plates that the Yadava ruler Krishna also won a victory over the Abhiras, who have been described in the inscription as Gopalas. This Chief of the Abhiras was a ruler of Konkan and a feudatory of the Yadava king. Dr. V. V. Mirashi suggests that the description of the plates evidently intended to convey the victory over the Abhira ruler of Konkan.<sup>3</sup>

Inspite of these wars, the Abhiras contrived to remain independent, which appears to have abetted the Hoysala emperor Vira Ballala III, to overpower them. A copper plate inscription dated 1292 A.D. of the Hoysala King in the Phalahara matha describes him as the lord of the country of the Gaulas.<sup>4</sup>

The Abhiras could not repel the Hoysalas and became their vassals. An inscription, issued in the year 1303 A.D. discovered in Hole Narsipur Taluq describes the Hoysalas emperor Ballala III as the terrifier of the Gaulas.<sup>5</sup>

The beginning of the 14th century A.D. brought disaster upon the Abhira power. One after the other, the Hoysalas and the Kalachuri Kings defeated the

1. *Arch. Surv., Mysore*, 1929, p. 143.

2. *Ep. Car.*, XI, Devanagere Taluq, 59.

3. *KHARE, op. cit.*, III, 18, p. 14; Mirashi, *op. cit.* p. 204.

4. *Ep. Car.*, VI, CM, 108.

5. *Arch. Surv. Report, Mysore*, 1912-13, p. 40.



shattered Abhiras. It is evident from an inscription of Vira Ballala Devarasa, dated 1320 A.D. inscribed in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of Rameśvara temple that this emperor gave a crushing defeat to the Abhiras.<sup>1</sup> In the inscription he has been described as a 'fever through the fight to Gaula'. Another inscription of the same ruler dated 1331 A.D. discovered in the Gubbi Taluq also confirms the defeat of the Abhiras.<sup>2</sup>

It is remarkable to mention that inspite of repeated murderous campaigns, the Abhiras of Khandesh could not be uprooted, as we hear from an inscription dated 1340 A.D. about the Hoysala Vira Ballaladeva to be a terrifier of the Gaula.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the Abhiras seem to have fought their decisive battle with the *Kalachurya* King Vishnuvardhana Vira Ballaladeva. In an inscription dated 1341 A.D. of *Poysala pratāpa chakravartī Viṣṇuvarḍhana* [vīra Ballāladeva] discovered at Kalya, the King claims himself as the terrifier of Gaula.<sup>4</sup> This is known to be the last inscription describing the defeat of Abhiras after this they were never heard of again, perhaps they disappeared as a ruling race.

### Summary

Thus we see how the Abhiras, a hilly-tribe of the Indian aboriginals, rose to political prominence in the second century B.C., and after a chequered political career relapsed into oblivion in the 14th century A.D. From the very beginning of their history, they were great warriors as their resistance to the Deccan Indian powers shows. Throughout the long period of their rise and fall, the Abhiras, raided Deccan and proved their capacity to bear arms against the great powers of the age. Their disastrous campaigns started in the 10th century A.D. and ended in the middle of the 14th century till they were completely crushed down. In the face of the joint opposition, however, they finally disappeared from the map of India as a ruling race. It seems that some of the Abhiras took refuge in the forests and reverted to their former stage. The *Amuktamalyadā*, a work by emperor Krishnadevaraya, describes them as a typical wild tribe.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Ep. Car.*, VII, sh. 69.

2. *Ibid.*, XII, Gubbi, 30.

3. *Ibid.*, IX, Bangalore, 111.

4. *Ibid.*, IX, Ma, 19.

5. 'Amuktamalyada, S. Krishnasvami Aiyangar Commemorative Volume, p. 401.



As centuries rolled on, the Abhiras seem to have settled down as ordinary people and took services under the contemporary monarchs. One *Sali-nayaka* of Gaula gotra evidently an Abhira, in a copper plate inscription belonging to the reign of Vijayanagara ruler Maharayaraya dated 1669 A.D., has been described as favoured by *sāsana* for the office of Amara Nayaka Yareyakatta in the Hoysala country.<sup>1</sup> The inscription deals with the grant of a village Anehalli to Ramaiya, son of Chennaiya and grand-son of Yaddanapludi Peraneya Timmaiya of the Bharadvaja gotra. The land was given to Ramaiya together with the facility of taking water from the Hagalavadi tank for one Khandyga of rice land. This inscription indicates that this Abhira official was of some importance and was occupying a responsible post under the Vijayanagar Emperors.

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1. *Ep. Car.* XII, Ck. 38.



## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIAL LIFE AND CULTURE

Glimpses of the Abhira life and culture can be obtained from Sanskrit and Pali literature. The material, however, is too scanty to reconstruct their modes of existence and social structure.

In the course of this chapter, the life and customs of the Abhiras have been reconstructed. The Abhiras are well known in tradition, as being a pastoral community with a way of life depicted, in Indian literature, specially Harivamsa and Bhagavata Puranas. Since the Abhiras are synonymous with the terms Gopa and Ghosha, it is proposed to give a brief description of their pastoral life and their festivities.

If the Ramayana is to be believed, it could be assumed that they were fierce-looking (*ugradaršana*) wild people termed as *dasyus*.<sup>1</sup>

Roving from one place to another, in search of new pastures, with their utensils, families and cattle, was the life of the Abhiras in their primitive stage. When the land became dreary and no fodder was left for cattle, they migrated to new pastures. The old men, women and children used to board the waggon and the young men protected them armed with bows<sup>2</sup> and arrows from highway robberies.

Before settling at a particular place, the permission of the king was necessary.<sup>3</sup> After obtaining that they were asked to pay annual taxes.<sup>4</sup> These taxes were paid in kind, possibly jars full of milk and butter.

The Abhira hutments, were made of dry grass and brushwood to protect

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1. The Ramayana of Valmiki, *op. cit.*

2. *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, 49, 50; Pargiter, *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, Cal. 1904, XLIX, 50, p. 242; *Harivamśa*, LXIII, 'sloka 8-11', Translated by M. N. Datta, Cal. 1897, p. 268; *Bhagavatapurana*, X, 11, 21-29; Agrawal V. S. *Panini Kalina Bharata*, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

3. *Harivamsa*, *op. cit.*, LXXXV, Sloka 65-66, p. 368.

4. *Ibid.*, CXXXI, 27-30, p. 343; LXXVII, 85, p. 328; *Vishnupurana*, V, 5, Sloka, 6.



themselves from rains,<sup>1</sup> therefore were highly inflammable. The *Harivamśa* records an event, when fire broke out in the cow-pans of Vraja.<sup>2</sup>

The cowherd settlements were protected on all sides with thorny creepers, trees and ditches<sup>3</sup> for safety against wild beasts. The stakes were tied round with ropes. The hutments were provided with a place for burning fire.<sup>4</sup> Before settling on a new place, the trees were cut down and the branches of such trees were used for preparing hutments.<sup>5</sup> The hutments of the cowherds were laid out in accordance with the age old pattern. A passage was thrown open between the two huts with a drainage system, evidently primitive, for the waste water to flow.<sup>6</sup> Temporary hutments were erected by means of handy building material carried on carts from one place to another.<sup>7</sup> The walls of the hutments were fastened with wooden bolts.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to note that the hutments of the cowherds have changed little from the earliest times to this day. In *Puratanaprabandhasamgraha*, Buddhaśvamin, and the author of *Brihatkathasloka samgraha* (c. 7th Century A.D.) describe the Abhira hutments.<sup>9</sup> They were made of bamboo and reeds (*traṇa-graha*), while the doors were decorated with flowering creepers. Cattle were kept in large cattle-pens called *goshṭha*.<sup>10</sup>

### Cowherds in Ancient Indian Literature

Herdsmen (Gopalas), formed an important aspect of the society. Some of these cowherds were in the services of the Aryans.<sup>11</sup> Cattle were supplied with

1. *Harivamśa*, LXIV, 23, p. 272.
2. *Ibid.*, op. cit., LXIII, 10-11, 268.
3. *Ibid.*, LXIV, 6-8, 23, pp. 272-2.
4. *Ibid.*, 27, p. 272.
5. *Ibid.*, 30, p. 272.
6. *Bhagavatapurana*, X, 7, 25-7; Sanyal, IV, 39.
7. *Harivamśa*, op. cit., LXIV, 17, pp. 271-2.
8. *Ibid.* LXIII, 10-11, p. 268.
9. *Brihatkathasloka Samgraha of Buddhaśvamin*, XX, Slokas 236-240; *Puratanaprabandhasamgraha*, Edited by Jinavijayamuni, Singhi Jain Series, Calcutta, 1936, Vol. II, p. 82.
10. *Avśyaka Nirukti of Bhadrabahu*, Edited by Manikyasekhara Surat, 1939, 47; *Avśyakachurni*, Jinadasagani, Ratlam, 1928, p. 280 f; *Vedic Index.*, I, 233.
11. *Maitriyaśāṁhitā*, Edited by Sripadamodar Bhatt, Aundh, V. S. 1998, IV, 2, 9, p. 342.



necessary grass and water . Every morning, the cattle were entrusted to a herdsman to look after at the time of grazing, and to guard them against their being lost. Cattle were branded to indicate their ownership.

According to Panini, the settlements of the Gopals were known as *ghoshas*.<sup>1</sup> A young gopala was called *anugavina*.

The *Dhammapadatthakatha*, *Manorathapurni*, *Papanchasudani* and *Sumangala Vilasini* describe the story of a herdsman<sup>2</sup> and devaputra Kotuhalaka. According to the story when devaputra Kotuhalaka was unable to get on well with his family, he came to the house of a herdsman, where, having eaten too much, he died and was reborn in the same house as a dog; when the dog grew up, he used to accompany the herdsman on his visit to *Pachcheka Buddha*. When the dog died he was reborn as a *ghoshaka setthi*.

In his sermon, called *Mahāgopāla sūtra*, in the *Anguttaranikaya* and *Majjhimanikaya*, the Buddha furnishes a comparative account of the good qualities of a monk and a gopala.<sup>3</sup> The passage gives essential qualifications of a herdsman. It is specifically pointed out that a good herdsman possesses an eye for the form and cattlemarks, removes ticks, dresses the wounds and smokes out lairs. In addition to these qualities the gopals had the knowledge of watering places, roads and pastures and milking the cows. This is a true picture of a pastoral people.

The *Vimanavatthu* also gives the story of a gopala, who, owing to the merit acquired by offering food to Moggallana, attained heaven when bitten by a snake.<sup>4</sup>

The cupidity of the Abhiras is evident in the story of Arjuna and the Abhiras, described in great detail in the *Agnipurana*. The hatred of Arjuna infuriated the Abhiras who assembled to decide the question of attack upon him.<sup>5</sup>

The *Divyavadana*, mentions the Abhiras in connection with the intrigue of

1. *The Mahabhasya of Patanjali*, *Op. cit.*, VI, 2, 78; VI 2, 85; Agrawal V.S., *India as known to Panini*, Lucknow, 1953, pp. 142, 409; *Panini Kalina Bharat*, *Op. cit.* p. 216.

2. *Dhammapadatthakatha*, Pali Text Society, I, 169; *Manorathapurni*, S. H. B. Series, Colombo, I, p. 227; *Sumangalavilasini*, Pali, Text Society, I, p. 317.

3. *Majjhimanikaya*, German Pali Society, II, p. 71; *Anguttaranikaya*, P.T.S. V, 347 ff.

4. *Vimanavatthu*, Edited by Rahulasamkratyayana, Anandkosalyayana, and Jagdish Kasyapa, published by Uttam Bhikku, 1937, VII, 6.

5. *Vishnupurana*, V, 38, 14; *Agnipurāṇa*, Edited by Rajendralal Mitra, Cal., 1873, I, 15, 8; Translated by M. N. Datta, Calcutta, 1903, I, p. 68.



Tishyarakshitā against Kunala. It is evident from Divyavadana that they were employed as menials in the service of Aśoka.<sup>1</sup>

The *Abhidhanarajendram* gives another story from *Uttaradhyanasutra*, relating to the simplicity of the cowherds. The story goes that there was once a village merchant, to whom one day an Abhira approached to buy goods worth two rupakas. The village merchant tried to swindle him in the transaction, which the Abhira could not understand, but due to some mistake in his balance, the merchant himself got cheated.<sup>2</sup>

Stories of the ferocity of the cowherds are famous in Sanskrit literature. The *Kathasaritasagara*, records that once a Brahman lodged a complaint with Udayana that a herdsman had cut off the hands and feet of his younger son, when he was roaming in the forest.<sup>3</sup> The cowherd was arrested and on being questioned confessed, that he had carried out the orders of his king who was incensed at the behaviour of the Brahman's son, who had refused to bow down to the cowherd King.

Another story relates, that there lived a rich but silly herdsman in a certain forest. Some rogues conspired together and made friendship with him. One day they told him that they had arranged his marriage with the daughter of a rich merchant of the town. At this the cowherd became very pleased and gave money to the rogues. Sometime after they came again and told the herdsman that his marriage had been performed and again fluced him. On the third occasion, they delivered him the news that his wife was going to deliver a son. The cowherd was so much pleased that he gave up all his wealth to them. With the desire to see his son and bring his wife home he set out to the house of the merchant, but was turned out by him as the news was false. Thus being cheated he lamented for the loss of his treasure.<sup>4</sup>

Numerous stories appear one after the other to depict the characteristics of the Abhiras. The story of Kalidas, a *paśupāla*, according to *Prabandhachintamani*, also contains a glimpse of the stupidity of cowherds.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Divyavadana*, Edited by Cowell and Neil, Camb., 1886, XXVII, p. 409.

2. *Uttaradhyanasutra*, Chapter IV, vide *Abhidhanarajendram*, p. 313.

3. PENZER, and TAWNEY, *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. II, London, MCMXXIV, pp. 51-52.

4. *Ibid.* V, 69.

5. *Prabandhachintamani*, Edited by Durgashanker K. Shastri Op. cit. p. 5.



Besides stupidity, the cowherds are famous in Sanskrit literature for their romantic nature. The *Kathasaritasagara* mentions their love affairs with the wives of the members of higher castes. According to a story, a Brahmana named Rudrasoma had gone to some distant lands for some work; when he was returning he saw a cowherd singing with joy on the bank of the river near his house, like one beside himself. The Brahmana Rudrasoma became anxious to know the reason of his rapture. The cowherd on being questioned, revealed the secret of his own connection with the wife of Rudrasoma not knowing him. When Rudrasoma got the truth of it, he renounced the world.<sup>1</sup>

According to another story, a woman pestered by a monkey, requested a cowherd to help her. The gopala agreed to help her on the condition of getting her love. She consented to the proposal, but when the cowherd was busy with the monkey she ran to her home.<sup>2</sup>

Another story also reveals the secret love affairs of a cowherd (*gopala*) with the wife of the Brahmana Vamadatta, when the latter was out. The wife being a witch, made her husband a buffalo. When the secret was out she continued her love with the cowherd.<sup>3</sup>

It is possible to question the authenticity of these stories, but the romantic instinct of the cowherd also finds support from the *Kāmasutra of Vātsyayana*. The *Kāmasutra* mentions an Abhira King of Kotta, who was killed by a washerman, employed by his brother, when he was in the house of some other citizen.<sup>4</sup> The abusive practices carried out in the seraglios of the Abhira kings noticed by Vatsyayana are not an exception here. Vatsyayana describes that the queens of the harems of the Abhira kings used to give themselves up to the guards of those harems, who belonged to the Kshatriya Caste.<sup>5</sup> Thus, from the numerous references, the passionate character of the Abhiras is apparent.

To Abhiras, life in the wilderness was very pleasant. They enjoyed the real pleasure of nature. The *Bhagavatapurana* embodies numerous sketches of their day to day life, in the woodland pastures. Starting in the morning, carrying their

1. PENZER and TAWNEY *op. cit.*, V, 148.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 4.

4. *Kāmasutra of Vatsyayana*, Benares, *op. cit.* p. 287.

5. *Ibid.* p. 294.



afternoon meals along the cattle, singing and playing on flutes, they used to go to distant lands to graze their cattle.

Their artistic talents and cultural attainments are often referred to in the Purāṇas. Their corporate life, picturised in the *Harivamśa* and *Bhagavatapurana* was full of glamour. They passed their day in the woods enjoying the bliss of nature. A scene of the forest life of the Abhiras has been described in the *Bhagavata*. Krishna desirous of taking early meals in the forests aroused his playmates, with the charming music of his flute, issued forth with the calves, joined by other boys with their horns and rods. They reached a very beautiful spot to pass their day.<sup>1</sup> Thus the party enjoyed the day, sporting, playing on flutes and horns, singing chorus. Some boys ran after the shadows of the birds, some followed the swans and some sat with cranes and some danced with peacocks.

Another scene in the *Bhagavata* also gives us the picture of their forest life. After being tired of walking, the cowherd boys sat facing one another in a circle. Some boys having converted flowers and leaves into plates, gathered tender roots and fruits and having seated on stones began partaking their meals, in joke.<sup>2</sup>

Grappling with bulls, dancing hand in hand with the young cowherdresses, on luxuriant meadows, where their cattle grazed, they used to play flutes and pass their time in the forest.

### Robbery

The Abhiras, were a forest tribe called *vrātas*. Panini mentions these *vrātas* as robbers.<sup>3</sup> The story of the highway robbery of the Yadava women, by the Abhiras, clearly testifies the above contention. The *Ramayana* also speaks of their vile deeds.

Not only in their primitive stage, but even after attaining the status of a ruling race, the Abhiras could not give up robbery. The Ghatiyala Inscription of Pratihara ruler Kakkuka bears testimony to their highway robbery.<sup>4</sup> Cattle lifting by the Abhiras has also been referred to in Jain Literature.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Bhagavatapurana*, X, Ch. 12; Datta, *Op cit.* p. 53.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

3. *Ashtadhyayi of Panini*, 5, 2, 21; Agrawal, V. S., *Bharata ki Maulika Eakata*, *op. cit.*, p. 128 f.n.

4. *Epi. Ind.*, IX, p. 279.

5. *Vivagasuya*, edited by A. T. Upadhye, Belgaum, 1935, 2, p. 24, f.n.



Merutungacharya, in his *Prabandhachintamani* alludes to the learning of the Abhiras.<sup>1</sup> It is referred to in the course of a discussion between a Brahman of Malwa and one of Gujarat. During the discussion, the Gujarati Brahmanas claimed that the Abhiras and women of Gurjaradesa were better read than the Brahmanas of Malwa. The statement may not be true, but it is fair to affirm that some members of the Abhira race would have attained some proficiency in the field of learning.

### Professions

Tending cows and preparing butter from the milk was the main profession of the Abhiras.<sup>2</sup> Tending cattle in the distant pastures throughout the day, was the work of men while the women were visiting in groups to the neighbouring markets to sell their milk and butter.<sup>3</sup> Merutungacharya gives a story, wherein the earthen pot of a cowherdess containing butter-milk (*takra*) was smashed to pieces by the crowd.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the cowherds were serving in the house of the *nagarikas* to graze the cows and they received the milk of one of the best cows out of ten, as their salary.<sup>5</sup> The gopala was expected to look out that the cows do not go astray and protect them from reptiles and dogs or falling into pits, during the day only. In case the cattle were forcibly carried away by the robbers, the cowherd (*gopala*) was not held responsible.

The profession of milkmen went on developing and organised later on. They formed their professional guilds, which indicates their efficiency and capability. The *Jainpraśanavyākaraṇa* enumerates the name of eighteen professional guilds, in which was included the trade union of the gopalas called *guarāśreṇi*.<sup>6</sup> The

1. *Prabandhachintamani*, edited by Jina Vijaya, supra.

2. *Bhagavatapurana*, X, 7, 25-7; *Avasyaka Nirukti of Bhadrabahu*, Edited by Manikyasekhara, Surat, 1939, 47; *Avasyakachurni*, Jinadasagani, Ratlam, 1928, p. 280 f.

3. *Harivamsa*, Anandasrama series, ch. 60, Sloka 39, p. 261; Merutungacharya, *Prabandhachintamani*, edited by Jinavijaya Muni, Santiniketana, 1933, Bengal, pt. I, p. 49

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Manusmriti*, Edited by Haughton, Vol. I, p. 238.

6. *Jainprasnavyakarana*, Dr. Motichandra, *Presidential address—Technical section. Proceedings, of the 16th All India Oriental Conference, Lucknow, 1953*, Vol. I, p. 226; *Avasyakachurni*, Jinadasagani, Ratlam, 1928, II, p. 319; Jagdish Chandra Jain, *Life in Ancient India as depicted in Jain Canons*, Bombay, 1947, p. 94.



existence of a trade union ensures high degree of business efficiency among the Abhiras. In the medieval period, the Abhiras were not only milkmen, but adopted various professions. The *Brahmapurāṇa* records that some of the Gopals were dealing in sugar, salt and corn also.<sup>1</sup>

### Dress and Ornaments

The cowherds wore a particular kind of costume. The *Brahmapurana* records that the mother of Kalayavana, a *gopali* or *ghoshakanya*, was recognised from her dress.<sup>2</sup> The male Abhiras used to put on a blanket and with a stick in their hand while grazing their cattle.<sup>3</sup> They had a fascination for yellow and blue clothes. Yellow garment of Krishna called *pītāmbara*, is famous in the Sanskrit and Hindi literature. On auspicious occasions, silken garments of yellow and blue colours were also used.<sup>4</sup>

They were conversant with the art of decorating their bodies with white and yellow paints.<sup>5</sup> Feathers of peacocks, white crows, leaves and flowers of wild trees were specially used for decoration.<sup>6</sup> They used to prepare their head-gear from peacock's tail and leaves so as to ensure a graceful look.<sup>7</sup> From the references in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Bhagavatapurāṇa*, it is not unlikely that some distinguished Abhira families were using cosmetics, bangles and necklaces to decorate their persons.

### The Cowherd women

The beauty of Abhira women has been a famous episode of Sanskrit poets. They contrived to attract young men by putting on fine clothes decked in shining yellow and blue colours.<sup>8</sup> Their dress consisted of a bodice and a skirt, sometimes of matching colour but mostly contrasting blue and yellow. Their heads were decorated with flowers and garlands.

1. *Brahmapurana*, Ch. 42, pp. 37-38.

2. *Brahmapurāṇa*, ch. XII, sloka 50; *Harivaṃśa*, 56, pp. 13-15.

3. *The Ocean of Story*, op. cit., V, 149.

4. *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, ch. 61, sloka 12; 78, sloka 20.

5. *Ibid* 63, sloka 3.

6. *Ibid* ch. LXIII, p. 268.

7. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Datta, M. N. Cal. 1895, XXI, p. 101; *Harivaṃśa*. Datta LXIII, p. 268.

8. *Padmapurāṇa*, Anandasrama Series, II, 72, slokas 111-2 pp. 594-596.



The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions that Abhira women had two *veṇis* (hair plaits) on their head and had a fascination for blue garments.<sup>1</sup>

Yaśodā, the wife of Nandagopa, has been represented in the *Bhāgavata* as a village woman of spacious waist putting on armlets and ear-rings.

The *Padmapurāṇa*, however, takes a special notice of their fine delicate features. Their graceful look and gait are also attested by the *Brihatkathāślokaśamgraha*.<sup>2</sup>

The women used to work in the houses and churn their curds for butter.<sup>3</sup> Buddhasvamin has specially paid attention to their hospitality shown to the guests by the Abhira women. Guests were offered cosmetics etc. at the time of bath to keep the body clean. Entertaining with milk, butter and curd was usually the practice, but wine was also served to them.

In the medieval period, their dealings with other communities were also very wholesome. In a story, embodied in the *Avāśyakaniryukti* of Bhadrabahu and the *Avāśyakachūrṇi*, the character of the Abhira women has been well sketched. An Abhira woman of Mathura used to supply milk and curds to a perfumer. On the occasion of her son's marriage, she invited her customer—the perfumer. The perfumer could not attend the wedding but sent ornaments and clothes to the bride. The Abhiras were very pleased and presented two strong bull-calves to the perfumer.<sup>4</sup>

The authors of the Jain sutras have shown favour in portraying the peculiarities of the Abhira women. Bhadrabahu mentions an occasion when some Abhira women drove a village lord Bhogika out of their own village, when the latter was staying in a temple situated in a village inhabited by the Abhiras. His stay in the temple hampered the freedom of the Abhira women. In order to drive him out, they took their herds out of the village but allowed their calves to remain in their stables. When the night came and the cows could not return to their stables, the calves started crying aloud which was equally responded by the cows who were standing out of the village. As the gateway of the village was closed by the women, Bhogika could neither go out of the village to sleep outside nor could he sleep in the temple.

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1. *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, No. CXXIV, Vol. III, 21, 68-69.
  2. *Brihatkathaslokaśamgraha*, *op. cit.* slokas 240-256.
  3. *Harivaṃśa*, ch. 61, sloka 28, Anandasrama series, p. 261.
  4. *Avāśyakaniryukti*, *op. cit.*, *Avāśyakachūrṇi*, *op. cit.*



In the morning he thought it better to make a move from the village.<sup>1</sup>

### Manners and Morals

The love play of Krishna with the Gopikas (cowherdresses) indicates the custom of promiscuity in Abhira society. Though these love scenes have been interpreted by propounders of Vaishnava cult as a symbolic representation of God and *ātmaśakti*—his own eternal blissful nature, yet the freedom of sexual intercourse among the Abhira women is doubtlessly evident from it. Being forest dwellers, the Abhiras loved nature, especially the green woodland glades dotted with the forest of Vrinda must have inspired them with art and love. The free morals of the gopis, found free expression against the sylvan background and they did not feel shy in offering their love to youth and beauty. Their wanton love is vividly described in the *Bhāgavata*.<sup>2</sup> Attracted by the soul stirring music of Krishna's flute they reached the forest and engaged themselves in love and sport, kissing and embracing him. The fact that Krishna enjoyed the women of the Abhiras in the knowledge of their husbands and parents shows lax-morals of a nomadic society.

It is evident from the *Bhāgavata*, that this physical love was not appreciated in the civilised society of the Aryans. The *Bhāgavatapurāna* records that Uddhava, a civilian from Mathura, called the gopikas as 'wanderers of forests' (*vanacharis*) and corrupted<sup>3</sup> (*vyabhichāradūshitā*). This opinion of Uddhava, a member of the civilised society, clearly reflects the general opinion of that age, about them.

### Games

Playing games was the favourite pastime of the gopa boys. Being forest-dwellers, finding out kine and roaming in the forest was their day's engagement.<sup>4</sup> The gopa boys used to tend calves near their houses in the forests. Playing on flute, foot-ball, crawling on four and imitating the sound of wild beasts like the lion and tiger, was their pastime. Sometimes, they used to imitate the sounds of thunder, crows, cocks, cows, bees, parrots and chattering in indistinct notes, or warble like

1. *Brihat Kalpasutra and original nirukti of Arya Bhadrabahu Swami*, with a commentary of Acharya Malayagiri, edited by Shri Chaturvijaya and Punya Vijaya Bhavnagar, 1936, Vol. III, p. 629-30.

2. *Bhāgavatapurāna*, X, XXXIII, Sloka 11-19, 65, 7.

3. *Ibid.* X, XXIX, Sloka 42-48; 47, Sloka 59.

4. *Bhāgavatapurāna*, X, 11, Sloka 40-43; Translation of Sanyal J. M., IV, p. 48.



a cuckoo. While playing foot-ball, the ball was struck to the ground and kicked high.

Bull-fight was a famous sport of the Abhiras. The *Harivaṁśa* describes that in the autumn nights Krishna used to arrange bull fights in the cowpens of Vraja, in which strong youths participated.<sup>1</sup> A beautiful picture of the bull fight of the Gopas is found in the mythical story of *Arishtavadha* in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Here we see an angry bull ready to fight, with huge horns and hump, pawing and shaking the earth underneath his hoofs and giving forth a terrific roar. Seeing the youths ready to fight, the bull, rushed towards them, breaking the ground underneath his legs with his tail erect, lifting earth with the ends of his horns and discharging dung and urine in small quantities with his eyes fixed and staring. Putting forth the ends of his horns he coursed swiftly towards the youth. The youths used to overpower the bull by holding his horn and drive him back. The bull also used to offer a tough fight, till he was completely exhausted and fell flat senseless on the ground. Vomitting blood profusely and simultaneously passing urine and discharging dung, throwing his eyes rolling, the bull lay dead.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after this, bull fight being over, the young cowherd-maidens used to join the youths for a bull-dance which was performed in the company of the young girls dressed in shining yellow and blue raiments and garlands of wild flowers.<sup>3</sup>

The traditions of the bull fight and the dance of Ayars, have been preserved in the Tamil classics, of the Saṅgam-Age wherein the girls used to marry the victorious youths.

While tending their kine, the Abhiras used to wrestle daily. They were famous wrestlers and travelled to distant countries to meet a challenge.<sup>4</sup> The *Harivaṁśa* portrays legendary origin of wrestling. It was first introduced by the Creator, to use skill and strength rather than weapon against the opponent. The success and failure in wrestling was decided by the judges.<sup>5</sup> Adequate rules and regulations were provided for the wrestlers. The parties were asked to wait for the appointed

1. *Harivamsa*, Translation of Bose, LXXVI, p. 208; Translation Datta M.N., XXV, Sloka 16-17, p. 316.

2. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 36, Slokas 1-10.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Harivaṁśa*, LXXXII, sloka 32; *Bhāgavata* X, 43, sloka 31-40.

5. *Ibid.*, LXXXV, sloka 12-15; 22-26.



hour for wrestling. Before wrestling the wrestlers were asked to remove their toil with water. They used to besmear their bodies with cow-dung. Particulars of the trial were given to the wrestlers before the beginning of the tournament. The success of the wrestlers in the arena mainly depended upon fortitude, manliness, good conduct and strength. By throwing down his antagonist, the wrestler was declared successful.<sup>1</sup>

The arena for wrestling consisted of many platforms and scaffolds for persons of different grades. It was perfectly decorated and drums and tabors were sounded. The platforms were decked with festoons of garlands, flags of torn pieces of cloth and ornamental arches. On the platforms town and country folk were seated in order.<sup>2</sup> There was a special apartment for ladies also.

In a wrestling tournament organised by Kāṁśa, the Yadava King of Mathura, the Abhiras won, and Krishna killed the mightiest wrestler Chāṇūra of his times. The *Bhāgavata* describes that with the sound of tabors and roars of the combatants the tournament began. Thereupon, the haughty combatants with their trainers entered in the arena. Chāṇūra, Mushṭika, Kūṭa, Sala and Toshala and their Abhira combatants took their respective positions to prepare themselves for the contest.<sup>3</sup>

The details of the contest have graphically been given in the *Harivaṁśa* and the *Bhāgavata*, which clearly represent the wrestling tactics of the Abhiras. The contest began by clasping one another by the hands and turning each other with the legs. They struck each other with their knuckle bones, knees, heads and chests. They fought with each other by moving in a circle, striking and grasping one another's arm by throwing the other down on the ground, by retreating and facing one another. They wounded each other by raising each other from the ground, pressing one another's joints and contracting one another's limbs. In the end, the combatant Chāṇūra was dashed on the ground. The other wrestler also was struck by fist vomitted blood and dropped down dead. The victorious Abhiras rejoiced by sounding drums and tabors and danced<sup>4</sup> in the arena.

This athleticis of the Abhiras were not limited to wrestling only; but they loved several other sports in which physical strength was required. Sometimes

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1. *Ibid.*

2. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, XLII, Slokas 32-38; XLIV, S. 17.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, X, 44, Translated by J. M. Sanyala, p. 184.



they used to divide themselves in two parties, each headed by a leader. At a distance, a tree was fixed as goal and both the parties used to run in competition, the winners were entitled to enjoy a ride from the tree to their place over the shoulders of the defeated party.<sup>1</sup>

In leisured hours, the boys and girls used to enjoy *andolikā* in the forest.<sup>2</sup> Playing like a deer was also their favourite game.<sup>3</sup> They played a game, known as *nilayana*, in which some acted as thieves and other played the part of protectors and keepers, while some acted as lambs.<sup>4</sup> Fatigue was removed by chafing the feet, after lying down.<sup>5</sup>

The Abhiras, being primitive herdsmen, had primitive ways of treatment also. A humped back was cured by placing both the feet on the toes of the person and after holding his chin he was raised upward, thus the body was made straight.<sup>6</sup>

Being horse-riders, the Abhiras mastered the art of controlling the most wicked horses of their times. The *Bhāgavata* presents a beautiful picture of controlling a naughty horse in the myth of the death of Keśi.<sup>7</sup> The horse rushed at the terrific speed, chafing the ground with the pawing of his hoofs and throwing his manes and terrifying with his neighs, the Abhira youngmen, who mastered the horse, after escaping from his bites.

Sometimes, the boys were decorated with foliage, peacock tails, nosegays, garlands and red ointment. After that, they used to leap, jump and strike their arms with hands. Acting like a king and councillors in company of boys was also a favourite game of the boys.<sup>8</sup>

### Water Sports

The sports of the Yadavas in the ocean described in the *Harivamśa*, have also some bearing on cowherd culture. As Krishna lived amongst the Abhiras for a

1. *Ibid.*, X, 18, Sloka 18-20.

2. *Vishṇupurāṇa*, V, 9, Sloka 8.

3. *Ibid.*, Sloka 12.

4. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 37, Sloka 23-30, Sanyal p. 153.

5. *Ibid.*, X, 15, Slokas 9-18, Sanyal, p. 69.

6. *Ibid.*, 42, Slokas, 1-10; Sanyal, p. 174.

7. *Ibid.*, 37, Sanyal, 151-2.

8. *Ibid.* 18, Slokas 15, 17-18.



long time, therefore the cultural traits of the Yadava Kshatriyas have an impact with the pastoral culture of the day. The story of the water sports as appended below, actually belonged to the Abhiras.

The *Harivamśa*<sup>1</sup> records that the Yadavas, desirous of sporting in the Ocean, set out in groups with accomplished dancing girls. On reaching the beach, Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, inebriated, adorned himself with garland of wild flowers. The Yadavas enjoyed a bath in the high tides of the ocean. Some women were rowing in the wooden boats. The dancing girls were brought by force to enjoin the party; standing in the water, they played many notes and delighted themselves by songs with music of the bangles produced by the girls. Holding the damsels by hand, they began to move about freely and dive into the water.

Throughout the day, after taking various sorts of eatables and drinks they enjoyed in the water. When the evening set in, the Yadavas came out of the water and began to sport in the house boats. These sports were enlivened by the sound of trumpets, music and dance.

The dancing girls were brought from different parts of India; and after drinking, they sung in their own languages set of thousands of tunes. Soon after, some members reeling with intoxication and holding the hands of damsels jumped sportively in the ocean. Some women started throwing water on one another with instruments in harshness. Seeing the harshness increasing, Krishna prevented them but the damsels continued dancing. When all the members of the party came out of the water, they sat on the sandy beach to enjoy their dinner and drink. Food was followed by dance and music of the women.

### Adventures of the forest life

The adventures and tribulations of the forest-life of the Abhiras, may be explained from the *Bhāgavata*. The act of hunting the wild ass from a forest closeby, demonstrated in the *Vishṇupurāṇa*, shows the hunting spirit of the Abhiras<sup>2</sup> in wilderness. While roving in the forest, the Abhiras used to face wild beasts, hence, the stories of *Vakāsura*, *Aghāsura* and *Batsāsura* in the shape of a bird, a mountain

1. *Harivamśa*, Chitrasala Press, Poona, 1936, Chs. 88, 89, pp. 371-380; Datta M. N., Chapters CC XXXV -CCXXXVI, pp. 635-647.

2. *Vishṇupurana*, V, 8, Sloka 6-13.



and snake described in details in the *Harivaṁśa* and *Bhagavatapurāṇas*, throw importance light on the nature of the cowherds.

### Food and Drink

Milk and butter was the principal food of the Abhiras. Various preparations of milk, wheat and rice were known to them. They prepared dishes of various kinds, enjoyed soup and, mostly, their plates were made of leaves.

Starting early in the morning with a morsel, the boys used to take bilva, rice, butter and curd mixed together.<sup>1</sup> Rice was also taken sometimes with honey<sup>2</sup> or boiled milk. They used to take palm dates and sweet ripe dark blue fruits in the forest.<sup>3</sup> The Abhiras preferred milk preparations as their food, even in the eleventh century as recorded by Hemachandra, though Grahripa has been accused of being a beef-eater in the *Dvyāśraya Kavya*.<sup>4</sup>

References to meat-eating of the Abhiras can even be seen in the *Harivaṁśa*. The Abhiras were also addicted to drinking. The *Harivaṁśa* sheds light upon the rich heritage of the cowherd shepherd lore, coherent in numerous stories of Krishna and the Yadavas. On auspicious occasions special dishes of meat were prepared.<sup>5</sup> A young buffalo was roasted on iron rods and soaked in ghee and mixed with salt for the dinner. A fat deer was also roasted in ghee and seasoned with vinegar. At the time of eating, a complete leg of the beast duly fried with ghee was served to one person mixed with salt and mustard. Meat was taken with the roots of *arum*, *campanula*, *pomegranates*, *asafoetida*, *ginger* and other vegetables.<sup>6</sup> It was followed by drinks, viz. *Maireya*, *Madhvika* and *Āsava* prepared specially from the meat of birds roasted on rods with ghee and juice. Salt and savoury dishes, curds and other preparations of ghee used to serve the purpose of side dishes. Various drinks, other than wine, were prepared from *palavi* and rice boiled in milk.<sup>7</sup>

1. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 13, Slokas 7-13, Sanyal, p. 54.

2. *Ibid.*, 42, 25; Trans. Sanyal, IV, p. 176.

3. *Vishnupurāṇa*, V, 8, Sloka 5; *Harivaṁśa* Datta, 63, p. 286.

4. *Dvyāśraya kavya of Hemachandra*, Edited by Kathavate, Bombay, 1915, I, Sloka 9, p. 214.

5. *Harivaṁśa*, Chitrasala Press, Poona, Ch. 89, Slokas 57-60.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, Slokas 61-65.



### Ceremonies, festivals and worship

It is evident from the Govardan worship, that the Abhira women used to enjoy equal status with men in the ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> In the eclipse of sun, they used to take bath ceremony.<sup>2</sup>

*Aja, Animat, Yajña, Achhiya, Hayagiriya, Isha, Sun and Vishnu* were their favourite deities.<sup>3</sup> *Animat*, belived by the Abhiras, to be a deity to guard knees, *yajña* to guard thighs, *Achhaiya* was deity that never lapseth and protector of waist. *Hayagriva* was regarded as the god of stomach, *Keśava* of heart, *Isā* of abdomen and Dhanurdhari and Urugaya were believed to be the blower of conch-shell and walk near the ankles of the body. Besides these the other deities were *Svetadvipa, Govinda, Madhava, Dakinis, Jaladhari, Kushmandas, Matris, Piśāchas, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Vindhyakas, Kotari, Revati, Jaishtha and Putanā*.<sup>4</sup>

### Birthday Ceremony

When the Abhiras enjoyed the kingly status, they performed all the ceremonies with royal dignity. Birthday ceremony, as picturised in the *Bhāgavata*, gives an idea of the royal customs of the Abhira kings in their glories. It was considered as a day of rejoicing and the panegyrists the singers and the royal bards used to pronounce benedictory verses. Kettle drums and tabors were sounded. The capital city was decorated and the houses cleansed and sprinkled with water and adorned with variegated pennants and flags and pieces of silk raiments and artificial garments. Oxen and calves were decked with precious ornaments, peacock feathers, garlands, garments and golden strings. The cowherds wearing valuable garments and ornaments, visited the king's palace with presents. Beautiful cowherdresses decorated themselves with collyrium visited the king's palace, putting on bright diamond, pendants and the tresses fully decked with chaplets.<sup>5</sup>

All the calves and oxen were smeared with oil and turmeric paste. They were ornamented with valuable metals, peacock's feathers and beautified with turbans and Kanchukas.<sup>6</sup>

1. *Bhagavata*, XXIV, Sloka 21.

2. *Ibid.*, VI, 21-27.

3. *Ibid.*, 42, 1-32.

4. *Ibid.*, VI, Slokas, 20-29.

5. *Ibid.*, X, V, Sloka 7-12; Sanyal, Translation p. 25.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 23.



The newly born baby was smeared with turmeric powder, oil and washed with water. The cowherds sang choruses and smeared ghee and curd upon one another and rejoiced by throwing each other down on the slippery pavement at this occasion. Gifts were also distributed.

### **Magic rites and rituals**

The Abhiras also believed in exorcism. Children were exorcized to avert the impending danger, by waving cow's tail on their head. Immediately after this, they were bathed in cow's urine and the dust of cow's hoofs was sprinkled upon their bodies.<sup>1</sup> If an earthen vessel fell down and broke to pieces, it was taken as an inauspicious sign, and its broken parts were worshipped<sup>2</sup> to propitiate the evil spirit.

### **Social life**

The traditions of the cowherd-lore in the *Purāṇas* betray the antiquity of pastoral life in India. Being pastoral people, the Abhiras loved cows and developed a liking for them. The cows and calves were loved like the members of their own family. Different names were given to the calves and cows and the cows used to hearken when called for.<sup>3</sup>

Women worked in the house and men used to start early in the morning with cattle to forest with their day's meal and returned in the evening before the sun-set.<sup>4</sup> The women milked the cows, husked corn, churned the curds before dawn in the light of a lamp, which was fixed to the door jamb.<sup>5</sup> Milk was boiled on the hearth.

The *Bhāgavata* furnishes a beautiful picture of an Abhira home, wherein, Yasodā has faithfully been portrayed as an Ahir woman. The mother (Yasoda), was churning the curds, when the child entered the room. Seeing his mother holding the churning rod, he sucks her milk. While he was busy in sucking, she saw milk boiling over from the pot placed on a hearth. Leaving the unsatisfied child, she rushed to save the milk; the naughty child, out of anger broke the churning pot with a piece of stone and when curds spread on the ground, he started eating the

1. *Ibid.*, Slokas 11-18; Sanyal IV, V, p. 27; *Vishṇupurāṇa*, V, 5, Sloka 12.

2. *Ibid.*, 6, Sloka 7.

3. *Bhāgavatpurāṇa*, X, XIX, Sloka 6.

4. *Harivaṁśa*, ch. 80, Sloka 14, p. 339.

5. *Bhāgavatpurāṇa*, X, ch. 46, Sloka 44.



butter and distributed it to the monkeys assembled outside the window. After saving the milk, when the mother saw the scene and her child eating butter seated on a wooden mortar, she rushed to punish him. The child ran out of fear; ultimately he was caught and tied to the same wooden mortar. The child tried to pacify her by weeping and wiping the collyrium with his own hands, but in vain.<sup>1</sup> No more realistic picture of an ordinary Abhira house can be furnished, than this.

From morning till night, the women used to keep themselves busy in their houses, by plastering and cleaning their houses with cow-dung, sprinkling water on the floors, watering the plants, rocking the cradles and lulling their crying babies.<sup>2</sup>

The children played with calves and cows and their bodies were pasted with cow-dung and ashes for cleaning.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, the gopas used earthen pots. Milk was kept in a *kumbha* or an earthen *bhāṇḍa*.<sup>4</sup> They had cots to sleep, while a small cot *paryāṅkika* was used for the babies.<sup>5</sup> Among the other essential things of the houses, were wooden seat, pestle and mortar.<sup>6</sup>

### Dances

The Abhiras were not only great warriors, but their artistic talents have been noted in the Puranic traditions. The monotheism of *Harivamśa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, though diffused with the idea of Krishna, as a personal god yet combines in itself the traits of Abhira culture in which love romance and outdoor life played an important part.

Their dances, as a matter of fact, popularly known as *rāsa*, were the most picturesque and valued part of their life. These *rāsas* were autumn dances, held on full-moon nights, under a cloudless starry sky.<sup>7</sup>

Love forms the supreme theme of the *rāsa*. Several stages of *rāsa* dance are depicted in the *Harivamśa* and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* each contributing to the final dance

1. *Ibid.*, X, 9, Slokas 1-11;

2. *Ibid.*, 44, Sloka 11-16;

3. *Vishṇupurāṇa*, V, 6, 11-12.

4. *Ibid.*, 6, 1.

5. *Harivamśa*, LXIV, Sloka 27.

6. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 9, 9; *Vishṇupurāṇa*, V, 5, 22.

7. *Bhāgavatayurna*, ch. 29 and 30.



where the drama ends. Besides several dialogues, songs, music and discourse, there are nine different dances in all, each with its own place and technique, for the purpose of delineation of the meaning and value of the drama of *rāsa* as a whole, so as to pave the way for and to enact the *rāsotsava*, i.e. *Mahārāsa*.

There are six main dances, in which Krishna dances with cowherdresses in different formations.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning a ballet is called *laghurāsa* but there are five others which constitute the *Mahārāsa*. Out of the five, three dances are enacted by the *gopis* alone in the absence of Krishna, as a device to recall him and undo the effect of separation. These three dances play the role of cleaning the *gopis* of the last specks of dirt from their minds and preparing them for the final beatitude in the *rāsotsava*.

The scenery of these rasas as picturised in the *Harivamśa* and the *Bhāgavata* used to change from woodland glades to the river banks, onward into waters of the river, and from thence back to dense forest, where the flowers of every shape and colour, bedecked with honeyed pearls of dew, sent out aromas of infinite and maddening variety over the soft breezes that oscillate between the river and the forest in the midst of the constant hum of wasps hovering over them.<sup>2</sup>

In the *rāsa* dance, the presence of the flute, the dress of the people and the sentiments displayed in the dance, constitute an important aspect. The *Harivamśa* describes the *rāsa* dance, played with sticks, known as *daṇḍarāsaka* and other clapping of hands known as *tālarāsaka*.<sup>3</sup> The dance were accompanied with music, while the ornaments of the women used to sound as they move to and fro with the beat of drums.<sup>4</sup> According to the *Harivamśa* and *Bhāgavata*, the damsels in dance used to stand holding one another's hand and a young man standing in the middle of the two, putting his arms round their neck. Thus, foot movements, toes, heels and legs, first start their journey to explore rhythmic expression in measured steps, long short, quick and slow, accompanied in single, double and triple timings. These rhythms of feet and legs accompanied by articulations of hands, arms and fingers like themselves up with harmony.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Ibid.*, X, ch. XXXIII.

2. *Ibid.*, X, ch. XXIX, XXX.

3. *Harivamśa*, Cal. edition, ch. 77, Slokas 4080-4096; *Vishṇupurāṇa*, 20, 27-35, Bombay, 1895, *Brahmapurāṇa*, ch. 81, 21.

4. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 33, 3 and 4.

5. *Ibid.*, X, ch. XXXIII, Sloka 10-11.



## Historical Traditions

In early classic treatises on dramaturgy, like the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, *rāsa* or *rasaka*, *hallisha* or *hallishaka* and *lasya* are the terms used to denote the dances of the cowherds. Various lexicons like the *Anekārthasaṅgraha*<sup>1</sup> of Hemachandra, *Medinī-kosha*, *Deśinamamāla* and others explain the word *hallishaka* as the dance of the cowherds, to the common parlance of the people and synonymous with *rāsa*.

*Hallishaka* has little to distinguish itself from *rāsaka* and a primitive dance type. This dance is led by one person in a circular motion. In the *rāsaka* variety of the dance embellished by various rhythmical strokes and melodies, many dancers join, the maximum number being sixtyfour. Abhinavagupta's commentary on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (9th century A.D.), describes many peculiarities of *rāsaka* and *hallishaka*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions three varieties of *rāsaka*, viz. *latārāsaka*, *daṇḍārāsaka* and *maṇḍalarāsaka*.

The heroines of *hallisha* were 16, 12 or 8 in number in the four forms known as *piṇḍi*, *śrīṅkhala*, *bhedyaka* and *latā*.<sup>2</sup> *Saṅgitaratnākara* bears testimony to the legendary origin of *rāsa*. The legend describes that, Siva, the god of dance, taught *lasya* to Parvati his consort, who in turn passed it over to Ushā, the daughter of Bāṇa, and the grand-daughter-in-law of Śrīkrishṇa; it was Ushā who gave this art to the cowherdresses of Dvaraka and from them it was spread.<sup>3</sup>

## Rasas in Sangam literature

The poets who enhanced the glory of the Saṅgam age of Tamil literature, have given a faithful portrayal of the dances of the cowherds. In Tamil literature Krishna has been described as a god of the pastoral people named Mullai.<sup>4</sup> The oft-recurring term used in these classics for Krishna, is *Mayon* or *Mayavan*, designated as black god.<sup>5</sup> He was a chief herdsman and a companion of the cattle of the

1. *Medinīkosha*, p. 185; *Anekārthasaṅgraha* of Acharya Hemachandra, edited by Pandya and Joshi, Benares, 1929, II, 602, p. 48; The *Desinamamāla* of Hemachandra edited by Banerji, Cal., 1931, VIII, 61.

2. *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, Nirnayasagar Press, IV, 291-4.

3. *Saṅgitaratnākara*, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, II, ch. 7, slokas 6-8.

4. DIKSHITAR V. R. R., 'Krishna in Early Tamil Literature', *Indian Culture*, IV, 1937-38, p. 268.

5. *Mullaipattu*, 11, 10-21, vide Dikshitar, *Ibid*.



cowherds and cowherdesses. He used to tend cattle by sending them to graze and himself enjoying all the time singing sweet songs by playing on the flute. Though, it was a difficult art, yet Krishna is said to have mastered it nicely and dexterously so as to enrapture both animate and inanimate objects. The cattle besides the milk-maids are said to have enjoyed Kṛishṇa's music.<sup>1</sup>

The cowherds and cowherdesses used to enjoy dancing, and mention is made of a dance called *Kuravaikuttu*, which Kṛishṇa is said to have danced once in the *Taterumanram*, the common hall of the cowherds, along with his elder brother Balarāma and his consort *Nappinai*.<sup>2</sup> V. R. R. Dikshitar identifies the *Kuravaikuttu* dance of Kṛishṇa with the *rāsakrīḍā* of Bhāgavata. According to *Silappadikaram*, the celebrated Tamil classic of 2nd century A.D., seven or nine women used to take part in it, with hands joined they used to dance.<sup>3</sup> This dance is said to have been originally danced in the presence of Yasodā, and subsequently brought into popular practice by the members of the cowherd-folk, as a form of prayer to Kṛishṇa to avert calamities. It is described that when Mādri, the cowherdess found portents which forbade, evils, she arranged a Kuravai-dance.<sup>4</sup>

*Kudakkuttu* is another dance associated with the name of Kṛishṇa as a form of prayers. The *Silappadikaram* mentions 11 kinds of dances which are difficult to identify in the present stage of our knowledge. Kṛishṇa is said to have staged the Kudakkuttu dance after vanquishing Bāṇāsura. Other dances mentioned are the *Alliyavadal* and *Malladal*. There is one dance called Pedu in the *Manimekhalai*.<sup>5</sup>

Kanakasabhai Pillai refers to almost the same dances of the cowherds which were devised for the good of the cattle and for the amusement of Kannaki. In the dance traditions of *rāsa* as related in the Bhāgavata, it seems that the traditions were carried out by the cowherdesses, one of the girls impersonated Krishna and another represented Balarama, and the third Radha. Seven of the cowherd lasses stood in a ring clasping each others' hands and the dance used to continue for hours.<sup>6</sup> After the dance Viṣṇu was worshipped with flowers and incense.<sup>7</sup>

1. *Silappadikaram*, Canto on Avcciyar, Kuravai, Vide *Ibid*.

2. *Ibid.*; *Manimekhalai*, xix, 65-66.

3. *The Silappadikaram*, p. 269.

4. *Silappadikaram*, *op. cit.*

5. *Ibid.* III, 11, 123-125.

6. *The Silappadikaram*, Canto xvii, pp. 228-38.

7. KANAKASABHAI PILLAI V., *Tamil 1800 years ago*, Madras, 1904, p. 157.



### Later tradition of the rasa dance

The folk dances having been patronised and popularised by the cowherds, soon gained currency all over the country, and therefore with the march of time, this form of popular dance came to be recognised and adopted by the refined sections of the society. Bhāsa, in his drama *Bālacharita* Act III, refers to *hallishaka* which was played by Kṛishṇa with the beat of drums.<sup>1</sup>

With the expansion of the cowherd cult ( Krishna cult ), the *rāsa* dance gained more popularity. Rajasekhara, the celebrated author of *Karpūramañjarī*, mentions *daṇḍarāsaka* and Jayadeva has also anticipated the same in his *Gītagovinda*.<sup>2</sup> Hemachandra in *Kavyānuśāsana*<sup>3</sup> mentions it as a form of dance accompanied by song.

Traditions of the *rāsa* dance as a matter of fact, transplanted from generations to generations with the development of the cowherd cult. Vallabhāchārya, the sage, and propounder of Vallabha-sect, in his commentary upon the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*—*Rāsapañchādhyayi*, has given a faithful portraiture of the *rāsa* dance of Kṛishṇa. This indicates the popularity and impact of pastoral culture with popular Brahmanism.

The glories of these dances of the cowherds ( Abhiras ) are still living in the shape of the folk dances in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. The *garbā* dance of Gujarat, as a matter of fact, is a derivation of the old *rāsaka*. The dance of the cowherds thus enveloped the folk art of the day and not only did it encompass the horizon of India but enriched the spirituality and art consciousness of the residents of the countries of Java, Combodia, Bali and Siam.

### Paintings and sculptures of the dances of the Abhiras

Before we conclude our study of the dances of the Abhiras, it is advisable to have a view of the earliest paintings and sculptural representations of the *rāsas*.

1. *Bhāsanātakachakram*, critically edited by C. R. Devadhar, Poona, 1937, *Balacharita*, III, 13, 99, p. 337.

2. *Karpuramajñari* with commentary of Vasudeva, Edited by M. M. Durga Pd. and V. S. L. Pansikar, Bombay, 1927, p. 14; *The Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva, with commentary of Rasikapriya Edited by M. R. Telang and Mathuranath Sastri, Bombay, 1937, 1, 12, p. 36.

3. *Kāvyānuśāsana* of Hemachandra with his own gloss edited by M. M. Pandit Sivadatta and K. P. Parab, Bombay, 1901, p. 328.









**Plate II**  
**Daṇḍarāsaka ( Bagh Fresco )**  
( *By Courtesy Dr. M. R. Majumdar* )



The theme of the dances and music as we see, could not escape the eyes of the painters. In a scene of the frescoes of Bagh caves a musical party has been exhibited.<sup>1</sup> It portrays women dancing in a circle, keeping time with small sticks (*daṇḍa*) held in either hands. Evidently, it represents the scene of *daṇḍarāsaka* as given in *Harivamśa*. This fresco of Bagh is unique in the pictorial History of India.

### Music

The musical propensities of the Abhiras are a familiar feature in the Sanskrit Literature. These musical traits were a part and parcel of their variegated activities. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, clearly reflects upon their musical talents. From the primitiveness of the Abhiras, to the highest stage of their culture, or in other words, from woodland glades to the palaces of the Abhira Kings, we find a peculiar happy blend of the sentiments and erotic expression, pulsating the life of the people which is more pronounced in their history.<sup>2</sup> The panorama of Vraja would have served as a beautiful background for the cowherds to pour out their sentiments in the form of music.

Kṛishṇa was exceptionally efficient in the flute and learnt the diverse ways of playing on it. He could play all the notes of the *gamut*.<sup>3</sup>

According to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, he could make out all the *svaras viz. rishbha, nishada, sadja*, in *hṛasva, madhyama* and *dirgha*<sup>4</sup> form. The excellence of his sweet melodies, not only hailed the heart of the human beings, but cattle also were not out of it. The cows and calves used to gaze attentively at a moment by hearing the appeasing notes of his flute, and used to stand paralysed.<sup>5</sup> He was unequal in his music but the Abhiras as a whole were capable enough to sing and dance. Their instrument, *parṇavādya* has been described in the *Harivamśa* of pleasing sound. It resembled in shape like three snake-hoods.<sup>6</sup> Trumpet sounding was regarded as a sacred sign and it was used to please the gods on auspicious occasions.

1. MARSHALL SIR JOHN and others, *The Bagh Caves, in the Gwalior State*, London, 1927, pl. D. pp. 49-51.

2. In several stories of the *Kathasaritasagara*, the cowherds have been portrayed as singing in rapture.

3. *Bhāgavata*, X, 19, 16; III, 2, 29.

4. *Ibid.*, X, 35, 14-15.

5. *Ibid.*, X, 35, 4-5.

6. *Harivamśa*, ch. 63, 3, p. 268.



### Music of the cowherd women

The gopikas who also excelled in music, have been depicted in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as *Veṇuvādyanipūṇaḥ*.<sup>1</sup> Though, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* speaks of their knowledge of classical music, their capability to take *alāpa* and transform some of the *rāgas* into *dhruvatāla*,<sup>2</sup> it seems doubtful to accept that the Abhiras mastered the classical music, specially at the nomadic stage of their culture. The classical music was an outcome of the civilized society, though it was developed from the songs of the pastoral people in the very beginning.

In the advance stage of their culture, the Abhira women seem to have learnt the art of painting also. Mention is made of a gopi *Raṅgaveṇī*,<sup>3</sup> in the *Padmapurāṇa*, who was well-versed in this art. *Raṅgaveṇī* has been described as the daughter of a cowherd of Vraja.

### Later traditions of Abhira music

Looking up at the history of the classical music of India we find that the acharyas of music have divided it into two parts, viz. *mārgī* and *deśī*; later when applied to music means indigenous born in the land, natural and unrefined as opposed to *mārgī* which is refined. The *deśī* ragas according to king Someśvara (1131 A.D.) derived their names from their regions.<sup>4</sup>

Sāraṅgadeva, the author of *Saṅgitaratnākara* (1210 to 1247 A.D.), lays down that the folk music captivates the popular ears and appeals directly to the heart of the people of various lands and climate.<sup>5</sup> He mentions *Abhirika* and *Abhiri* ragas in the catalogue of *grāmarāgas*.

The folk music, therefore, may be defined as a viamedia of inner feeling, unbounded by any rules or regulations. It originates from the heart of a person, hence it bears the true impression of the society.

Narada, the author of *Saṅgitamakaraṇḍa* (C. 7th to 9th A.D.), mentions a *rāga* named *gopika*, to be sung in the day time. Thus *gopikārāga* seems to be a form of cowherd music, as *Abhīrī* or *Ahīrī* or a variant form of it.<sup>6</sup>

1. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 33, 9-10; *Padmapurāṇa*, Anandasrama Series, II, ch. 72, p. 595.

2. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X, 33, 10.

3. *Padmapurāṇa*, op. cit. Sloka, 20, p. 593.

4. *Manasollasa*, Slokas, cited by Prof. O. C. Gangoly from a MSS of B.O.R.I., Poona, Supra, p. 20.

5. *Saṅgitaratnākara*, Anandasrama series, 1896, I, 1, 23.

6. *Sangita Makaranda of Narada*, Edited by Mangesh Ramkrishna Telang, Baroda, 1920, 3, 14, p. 15.



A tradition of the folk (*deśī*) music of the Abhiras, is also traceable from the *Brihaddeśī*, a treatise on *deśī* (folk) music, ascribed to the period of c. 4th to 7th century A.D., by Prof. O. C. Gangoly.<sup>1</sup> In this treatise the author has specifically mentioned Abhiri as a famous melody in the ancient ragas with its compound notes as a minor *rāgini bhāshāgītī* affiliated to *Pañchamarāga*.

The iconographic features of this raga as noticed by Prof. Gangoly are as follows:—

*Nāga kanyātitaraṅgī dugdhapāna madotkaṭā  
sukunḍalā nāgavāhā āhīrī kaṭhinaṣṭhanī*

Further, *Saṅgītasāraṇī*, a work on classical music furnishes the iconographic features of *Abhīrī* or *Abhīrikā* as follows:—

*vā...kaṅkaṇa vibhūshita bāhuvallī  
runnidra champakamanoharagātrayashṭīḥ  
srikhaṇḍaśailaśikhare gajamauktikaundhaiḥ  
ābhīrikā vidadhatī śrajaminduśubhram<sup>2</sup>*

These iconographic features of Abhiri raga impend the glory of the Abhira culture of India. The basic traits and characteristics of the Abhiras, trimmed in their true colours and transcended in their history and culture, have nicely been projected and picturised in the above iconography. It represents a complete view of the Abhira society with their true personation, embedded in love and life of wilderness so pronounced in their traditions.

The first description symbolically represents an amorous Abhira damsel in her full bloom. Her love for snake recalls the story of Hira, the so-called ancestor of Ahirs or their appellation *Ahir*, divided into two, *ahi*, a 'snake' and *hīra*, a 'lover'. The idea of such a daring sport, viz. to play with snakes, reveal the adventurous spirit of the Abhiras, enjoyed in forests. In a life as theirs, love and mastery over snakes is not unlikely.

Another prominent factor in the Abhira culture, has been the beauty and youth of the Abhira women, known to Sanskrit literature. The Abhira women were

1. *Brihddesi of Matanga*, Edited K. Sambasiva Sastri, 1928, Trivendrum Sanskrit series No. XCIV, 1928, pp. 106, 116, 121; Gangoly, 'Non-Aryan Contribution to Indian Music', *Jourl. of Bhan. Ori. Res. Insti.*, Poona, XIX, p. 268.

2. *Saṅgītasāraṇī* vide *Bharatakosa*, Comp. by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, edited by Prof. P. V. Ramanujasvami, Tirupati, 1951, p. 53.



amorous by nature, similitude of which has been drawn with a *nāgakanyā*, putting on *kundalas* (ear-rings) in her ears.

The tradition, that the Abhiras originally constituted a part of hilly races of nomadic herdsmen, has been clearly delineated in the second iconographic portrayal of the *rāga* *Abhiri* or *Abhirika*, recorded by *Sangitasaraṇi*. The author of *Sangitasaraṇi* tends to delineate the features of the Abhiras, with their kingly glamour. The woman, figured in the iconography dilates the ideas of delicate feature of the Abhira damsel. The ornamentation and gait of the goddess *Ābhiri*, is an impressionism of their advance culture. The exponents of these iconographic forms, have carefully commingled the pastoral and luxuriant life enjoyed by the tribe in their hey-day. The description of the youthful gait and fully decorated goddess again, bears the import of their amorous contexture.

*Abhiri* and *Ahiri* as a melody has also been mentioned by later *āchāryas* of music in their works. In 1131 A.D. Someśvara, the author of *Manasollasa* has given a catalogue of the different *ragas* current in his times.<sup>1</sup> He describes the structures of various melodies, in which *Ahiri* is one of them. In his treatise the author has given many *rāgas* and *rāginīs* of the tribal people like the *Todas*, *Takkas*, *Śakas* and the *Śavaras*.

To the first quarter of the 14th Century, an interesting document hailing from Mithila, *Varṇaratnākara* written by a scholar and connoisseur of music named *Jyotirīśvara*, a high official of King Harisimhadeva of Karnata dynasty, ruled between 1300-1324 A.D., confers a long list of the *rāgas* and the *rāginīs* current in his times. In his work he refers to a *rāga* named *Gaula* along with *Gujjari*.<sup>2</sup> The term *Gaula* evidently means a cowherd.

It is interesting to note that *Lorika*, the famous legend of the Ahirs was also developed in the form of a dance in the 14th Century, as mentioned in the *Varṇaratnākara*.<sup>3</sup>

In 1550 A.D., the greatest land-mark in the South Indian music, was provided by a short but eminently scientific treatise, called *Svaramela-kalānidhi*,<sup>4</sup> the com-

1. *Manasollasa* of Someśvara, *op. cit.* vide Gangoly, p. 21.

2. *Varṇaratnākara*, Edited by Dr. S. K. Chatterji, Calcutta, 1940, 60 Ka.

3. *Ibid.*, 10 Kha.

4. *Svaramelakalanidhi*, reprinted in Captain N. A. Williard's A treatise on the Music of Hindustan, 1882, p. 167; M. S. Ramaswamy Aiyar, *Svaramelakalanidhi of Rāmamāya*, Annamalai, 1932, ch. V, p. 35.



position of which we owe to Ramamatya a minister of Vijayanagar king Ramaraja. He mentions all the *rāgas* of Karnataka school, current in his times, in which *Abhīrī* is one of them and has been described as the tenth raga in the list of the roots of the *rāgas*. Besides *Ahīrī*, he describes *Kannaḍagaulā* and *Gaulī* as variant from *Ahīrī*. It seems that by the time of the Vijayanagar kings, the music of the Abhiras became prevalent in the society. Consequently we find the development of the *Gaulārāga* which has been defined as *Kannadagaula*, *Ritigaula*, *Narayanagaula*, called *gramarāgas* or the folk music. Ayyar has given the grammar of the *gaula raga*.<sup>1</sup> These songs would have been the developed forms of *Abhīrī*, the music of the *Abhiras* as given by Matanga.

Coming to the age of Akbar, we find that *Pundarik Vittal*, in his work *Sadrāga-chandrodaya*, written sometimes between 1562-1599, under the service of prince Burhan Khan of Khandesh, has classified all the South and North Indian ragas under nineteen *ṭhāts* or parent scale, in which *Abhīrī rāga* has been described to be sung in the afternoon. Deva, a famous poet of Hindi, has also given a form of *Ahīrī rāgas*.

Prof. Gangoly opines that *Gurjari*, *Saindhavi*, *Gandhari* and *Abhīrī* are some of the earliest feminine melodies designated by Matanga under the name of Bhasa. In the second stage, the melodies derived their names from the ancient tribes inhabiting various parts of India. Thus the Sakas, the Pulindas and the Abhiras appear to have lent their names to the *Sakaraga*, *Pulindi raga* and *Abhīrī ragas*, respectively. The Bhairavas according to Saradatanaya's *Bhavaprakasha* were an aboriginal sect mentioned with the *Todas*, *Sakas*, *Abhiras* and *Chandelas*.<sup>2</sup> Somanatha, in his *Ragavibodha*, ( 1609 A.D. ) gives the timing of the various ragas in which he places *Abhīrikā* between day time after the third watch.<sup>3</sup>

Thus we see that the Abhiras influenced the culture of India in various fields specially religion, art and social customs. In the field of religion they gave an impetus to the Krishna Cult ( Cowherd Cult ) and introduced various customs such as *Govardhanapuja* amongst the high *varṇas* of the Hindus. Their contribution to the field of art is specially noteworthy. They vanished from the map of India

1. C. SUBRAHAMANYA AYYAR, *The Grammar of South Indian Music*, Madras, 1951, p. 48.

2. *Bhavaprakasan*, Gaekwad Oriental series, Vol. XLV, 1930, Introduction, pp. 61, 73.

3. *Somanatha Ragavivodha*, translated and edited by M. S. Ramaswami Aiyar, Madras, 1933, ch. V, p. 27; Gangoly, *Ibid.*, p. 88.



as a political tribe but have left a lasting impression upon the music and dances of India. They have excelled in their folk songs and to this day the folk songs of the Abhiras are very famous for their sweet melodies. These folk songs are sometimes called as *birha*, i.e. the 'song of separation from the lover.' They have some heroic ballads also in which the ballad of *Lorika* is very famous to-day. Their dances developed in the shape of *garbas* and *rāsas* throughout the state of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. The tradition gives one an idea of the hey-day of the Abhiras.



## CHAPTER V

### THE PEOPLE TODAY

After studying the social life and culture of the Abhira tribe, it is advisable to probe into the life of the present Ahir community to understand the continuity of the Abhira traditions. Today, the Ahiras are a significantly numerous community inhabiting almost all the states of India and rank in social status with the Gujaras, Jats, Bhars, Bharwars and Kurmis.<sup>1</sup>

The appellations *Ahir*, *Gauli*, *Goala* and *Goar* signify their profession.<sup>2</sup> The Ahirs converted to Islam are called *Ghosis* and *Gaddis*; they inhabit Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Vindhya Pradesh and Maharashtra<sup>3</sup>. The offshoots of this community can even be traced in South India, where they are called *Gollar*, *Gollam*, *Golla*, *Golkar* or *Gopal* in Belgaum, Kanara, Chanda, Dharwar, Bijapur, South Maharashtra, Ratnagiri, Berar and Telugu speaking districts.<sup>4</sup>

The most significant feature of the Ahir traditions is homogeneity and to a certain degree continuity of their traditions. Yet, wherever they migrated, they adopted the local caste and kinship. In the following pages, a few details of material

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1. ELLIOT, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore of the races of N. W. P. and O. of India*, Edited by Beams, Vol. I, London, MDCCCLXIX, pp. 5, 6; Raebareli Settlement Report No. 15 and *Chronicles of Unao* No. 20, vide Crooke, *The Tribes and caste of North Western Provinces of Oudh*, Calcutta, 1896, I, p. 52; Risley, *The Tribes and castes of Bengal*, I, Calcutta, 1891, p. 290; Dalton, *The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Cal. 1872, p. 314. Prof. Ghurye in his *Caste and Class in India* p. 176, opines that Ahirs come next to Kayasthas in grade in Hindu Society. This opinion of Prof. Ghurye seems to be doubtful as the present day Kayasthas are a well-advanced community, occupying a prominent position in the Hindu society, while the Ahirs constitute a backward class.

2. RISLEY, *op. cit.* p. 282.

3. RUSSELL & HIRALAL, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, Vol. III, London, 1916, p. 32; Crooke, *op. cit.* II, 419; Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and castes*, Vol. I, London, 1872, p. 334; Tod understands that Pal is a synonym of Ahirs. Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Vol. II, Madras, 1880, p. 409.

4. *Golla*, is a contracted form of *Gvala*, Sanskrit *Gopal*. Mysore, Iyer, *The Mysore tribes and castes*, Vol. III, 1930, p. 197; Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, II, p. 18; III, 35, 36; Enthovan, *The Tribes and castes of Bombay*, II, Bombay, 1922, pp. 9, 22.



culture and customs of the Ahirs of Northern India is given to throw some light on their culture.

The traditions of the Ahirs throughout India ascribe their common origin from Mathura and gradual migration to distant places.<sup>1</sup> This is itself seems to suggest oneness of their traditions throughout India.

In Cutch, Kathiawad, Palanpur and Khandesh and in other States they consider themselves as immigrants from the North. Some of them came from their home on the bank of the Yamuna as milk suppliers to the Mughal armies marching towards the South.<sup>2</sup> Some of the surnames of the Ahirs of Madhya Pradesh still preserve the memory of their ancient homes in Uttar Pradesh, e.g. *Jujhotia* named after Jujhoti or Jujhota an old village in Tahsil Aliganj in District Etah of U.P., and *Kanaujia* from Kanauj. The Ahirs of Purnea District of Bihar cherish the tradition of their original home in Brindavana.<sup>3</sup> The Kantitaha Gualas of Bihar also believe that their ancestors migrated from Uttar Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> They are, however, debarred from inter-marrying with other Ahirs and are consider inferior in grade.

### Divisions and Surnames of the Ahirs

Generally speaking, the Ahirs form three distinct divisions, viz. *Nandbans*, found chiefly in Central Doab, the *Yadubans*, found chiefly in Upper Doab and West of the Jamuna river and the *Gvalbans* found chiefly in the Lower Doab and districts adjoining Varanasi.<sup>5</sup> These three groups of Ahirs are not inter-connected and do not intermarry. The *Nandbans* division is further divided into 84 gotras in Uttar Pradesh some of them are:—

*Samarphalla, Kishnaut, Bhagta, Bilehnia, Diswar, Nagowa, Kanaudha, Dunr, Rawal, Tenguria, Kor, Kamaria, Barausia, Mujwar, Dahima, Nirban, Khar khari, Dirhor, Sitauliya, Jarwariya, Barothi Gonda Pathak.*

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1. ELLIOT, *op. cit.*, p. 3, Risley, *op. cit.*, p. 283; *Ethnographical Survey of Bombay*, 1903, pp. 13-14.
  2. GUNTHERPE, 'On the Ghosis and Gaddis of Deccan; known as Muhamdan Gvalis', *Journl. of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, Vol. I, p. 41.
  3. BUCHANAN FRANCIS, *An account of the District of Purnea* (1809-10), Patna, 1921, p. 225.
  4. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, I, p. 284.
  5. BHATTACHARYA J. N., *Hindu Castes and Sects*, Calcutta, 1896, p. 297. In the *Arch. Survey of India*. The Gujars are also included in the Ahirs, *A. S. R.* IV, p. 230; Elliot, *op. cit.*, I, p. 4.



Besides these, there are sixty-four surnames, some of which are as follows:—<sup>1</sup>

*Molak, Santoriya, Bighoto, Khosiya, Khalliya, Linival, Aphariya, Maila, Khiala Khoru, Sesotiya, Gondwal, Gird, Bhamsara, Janjoriya, Kankauriya, Nagamiya.*

In U. P., the Ahirs have eighteen sub-castes, e.g. *Benbansi*, off-spring of Raja *Bena*, *Bhargudi, Dauwa, Dhindhori, Gaddi, Gamel, Ghorcharha, Ghosi Gujar, Khunkhuniya, Rajauria and Rawat*.<sup>2</sup>

The endogamous groups i.e. the groups which intermarry are:

*Lilar, Chopar, Gaddi, Gujar, Padhan or Pradhan, and Lala.* Besides these, there are local endogamous groups like *Deswali, Kanaujia, Maghariya* and *Purabiya*. The surnames of the Mohammedan Ghosis or Ahirs are: *Baghela, Behua, Chaudheri, Chauhan, Gahlot, Gaur, Gual, Pathan, Rajput, Sayyid, Sadiq, Tomar and Turk*.<sup>3</sup> In Bihar a series of subcastes different from those of the U.P. Ahirs have developed. They include *Naomulia* or *Majraut, Satmulia* or *Kishnaut* and *Goria* or *Dahiraj* and *Dahiaras*.<sup>4</sup> In punnea district, there are some other groups also such as:

*Ghosin, Nandgop, Saphasi* and *Goyaria*. In Bengal and in Purnea district of Bihar some local divisions are prevalent, which are *Goyalas*,<sup>5</sup> *Sadgop* or *Saphal gop*, all claim kinship with Krishna.

In Madhya Pradesh, the *Ghosis* claim themselves as Thakurs and their geneologies can be had from the bards, known as *Patias*. These *Ghosis* have been divided between two groups, namely *Havelia* living in villages and *Birchheya* who are forest dwellers.<sup>6</sup>

In Chhattisgarh and Orissa area, the Ahirs known as *Rawat* and *Gahra* are numerous.<sup>7</sup> The *Rawats* are further divided into various groups known as *Jhadia*,

1. *Ibid.*, Crooke, *op. cit.*, I, p. 53.

2. *Ibid.*,

3. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 419-20.

4. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, I, p. 284.

5. BUCHANAN, *op. cit.*, (Purnea Report).

6. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-6, III, pp. 34-35.

7. *Ibid.*, II, p. 19.



*Kosaria* and *Kanauja*. The surname *Jhadia* came in vogue due to their forest dwelling habit. *Kosaria* was derived from *Kosala*.<sup>1</sup>

The *Dhauwa Ahirs* of being illegitimate off-spring by the union of Bundela Rajputs and Ahirs are inferior in rank and serve as wet-nurses in the houses of *Raghubansi* and *Ranya Ahirs*.<sup>2</sup> In Madhya Pradesh there are *Narwaria* section of Ahirs who hail from Narwar near Gwalior.<sup>3</sup>

The settlement of the Ahirs in Cutch and Saurashtra is older than the other residents of Gujarat State whose surnames are as follows:—

*Ambalia*, *Baradia*, *Bhadarka*, *Bharia*, *Bhuthar*, *Chetaria*, *Chhuchar*, *Chudasama*, *Gagia*, *Gogham*, *Gohel*, *Gorai Jugal*, *Kachhot*, *Nandania*, *Pithia Ravaliya*, *Sisotia* and *Vasra*. Their endogamous groups have been named on a territorial basis, e.g. *Machha* from Machhu river near Morvi, *Prathalia*, living in *Vagad*, *Boricha Sorathia* from Sorath, *Chorida* from Chorad in Runn.

There are no inter-marriages between these groups but *Sorathias* are regarded as inferior. These *Sorathias* are the descendents of Rao Navaghana of Junagarh.<sup>4</sup> In Kathiavad all the above mentioned groups dine with each other.

In Khandesh the Ahirs have seven sections, of which *Gvalbansi*, *Bharvathia* *Dhidamvar Ghosi* and *Gujar* are prominent.<sup>5</sup>

The exogamous sub-divisions of the Ahirs of Poona and Khandesh include: *Baldarkhamvale*, *Bania*, *Barodiye*, *Biloriya*, *Dhanoriye*, *Hajariye*, *Himvar*, *Pathariye*, *Katariye*, *kookrelive*, *Moriye*, *Parwar* and *Phulsunge*.<sup>6</sup>

The Deccan Ahirs constitute endogamous groups like *Romabans*, *Gvalbans*, *Dhidamwar*, *Bharvathiya* and *Ghosia*. The Ghosis and Gaddis of Deccan have two sections which are called *Bendis* and *Gujars*.<sup>7</sup> The Gollars of Mysore style themselves as *Yadu-Kula* or *Krishnakula* and profess that they belong to the same caste as Krishna.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Ibid.*, p. 25; Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

2. CAPTAIN, J. MURDO, 'On the Country of South', *J.R.A.S.*, I., p. 248.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ethnographical Survey of Bombay*, p. 9.

5. *Bombay Gazetteer*, (Khandesh Dist.), XII, p. 79.

6. *Ethno. Survey Bombay*, p. 9.

7. GUNTHERPE, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

8. IYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-99; Thurston, *Castes and tribes of South India*, II, Madras, 1909, p. 284.



The endogamous groups of the Kannada Gollas are as follows:—

*Hal Golla, Hav Golla, Kad Golla, Kempe Gollas and Uz Golla.*

These groups have inter connections between themselves.<sup>1</sup> In Belgaum district, the Gollas have six endogamous groups namely the *Advi* or *Telugu Golla*, *Hanam Golla*, *Kishnaut Golla*, *Kenguri Golla*, *Paknak Golla* and *Sastra Golla*.

The *Kenguri Gollas* rear white sheep and are found mostly in Andhra Pradesh.

In Bijapur the exogamous groups of the Gollas are:

*More, Pavar, Shinde and Yadav.*

The last two have an infusion of Maratha blood.<sup>2</sup>

In Bengal the *Pallabh* or *Ballabh* are said to have been the descendents of *Gham Ghosh* who is believed to have sprung up from the sweat of Krishna while the *Bogre* or *Ujjainia* came from Ujjain. In Dacca the *Sada Gollas* or white Gollas and *Lal Gollas* or the red Gollas got their name from the colour of the clothes put on by the bride at the wedding ceremony. The *Sadas* are recognised higher than the *Lalas*.

The *Kantitaha* got their name from the custom of branding the cows with a *Kanti* or hook.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, the Ahirs in Madhya Pradesh eat pigs, fowl, sheep and goats, but some of them even eat mice.<sup>4</sup> They however, do not eat beef. There is a social uniformity between the Jats, Ahirs and Gujars who smoke and drink together. In Bombay State Ahirs take *Pukka* ( Puris and Vegetables etc.) and *Kachha* (Chapatis, Rice and Dal etc. ) with Marathas and smoke with them.<sup>5</sup> The Ahirs and Ghosis offer their pipe to the Marathas with a piece of cloth but the Marathas when offering the pipes to the Ahirs or Ghosis do not offer any cloth.<sup>6</sup>

The dress of a male Ghosi constitutes tight short drawers of white cotton, waist band with a fringe on either end, a short coat and saucer shaped tight turban, while their women wear a petticoat and long boddice peculiar to themselves. They live in mud and wattle huts. The chief of the caste is designated as Patel, who

1. ENTHOVEN, *op. cit.*, II, p. 12.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

3. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, I, p. 284.

4. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*; II, pp. 34-35; III, 33, 38; *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 15.

5. BLUNT, E. A., Bombay, MCMXXXI, p. 89; Crooke, *op. cit.*, I, 65; Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

6. *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 15.



deals with the internal feuds with the help of his subordinates called *Chaudhari* and *Gaurwa*.

### The Panchayats

The Ahirs and Ghosis have Panchayats all over India to manage the internal affairs of their caste. In Uttar Pradesh these councils are called Panchayats and are presided over by a permanent chairman called *Sarpanch* or *Chaudhari*.<sup>1</sup> The councils meet at the occasion of the marriage or death of a member of the caste, and on that occasion current affairs are discussed.<sup>2</sup>

These tribal councils or Panchayats discuss cases pertaining to the breach of caste rules and regulations, and family feuds in respect of immorality, eating with prohibited caste etc.

During the hearing of the case, the accused is not allowed to sit on the mat with the fellow members of the caste. The president of the council uses the members present on the floor of the council as assessors and after due enquiry and investigation, the decision is announced.<sup>3</sup> In Madhya Pradesh, if a man commits a serious offence, he is made to stand in the middle of the stream till he begs for mercy. In that case he is also fined to offer two feasts to the community<sup>4</sup> as a sort of punishment. In the Ahirs of Uttar Pradesh, people guilty of immorality are also dealt with the same way but in addition, the accused is required to deposit one rupee as a fine. Disobeying the orders of the Chaudhari is punished by hitting the guilty party with shoes before the council and ex-communication.<sup>5</sup> The cases of cow-killing are dealt with very severely. The accused is sent to *Goshain* who weighs the evidence and if the charge is proved he is made to beg for four months roaming in the villages.<sup>6</sup>

### Occupations

Breeding milch cattle specially the cows and she-buffaloes is the main profession of the Ahirs.<sup>7</sup> In some States the Ahirs or Gaulas are cultivators and land-

1. GUNTHER, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 43-46.

2. CROOKE, *op. cit.*, I, 58; Blunt, *Op cit.*, p. 107; Russell and Hiralal, *Op cit.*, III, p. 38.

3. CROOKE, *op. cit.*, I, 58.

4. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 34-35.

5. CROOKE, *op. cit.*, I, p. 58;

6. BLUNT, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

7. The Gollas of South India keep cattle and sell milk. Thurston, *op. cit.*, II, p. 284.



lords also, but the Ghosis are simply cultivators and keep buffaloes only. They also serve in the cities as domestic servants.<sup>1</sup> Almost all the Ahirs have given up nomadic life, only some of them still rove about for pastures with their herds of cattle and families. During their temporary stay in the pastures, these nomads prepare encampments out of large bamboo mats.<sup>2</sup> In the days of Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali, the Gollas were considered to be most trustworthy, and were appointed custodians of the treasury.<sup>3</sup>

### Marriage

The marriage customs of the Ahirs and the rules governing to the various ceremonies in this connection do not differ much from those followed by the caste Hindus. A marriage is forbidden in U.P. between member of the same gotra and the gotras of their sister's relations upto three generations.<sup>4</sup> In Bengal the character of the exogamous groups of the Ahirs and the rules by which the inter-marriages are governed, differ markedly from those found in the Ahirs of other parts of the country.<sup>5</sup> The rules in general seem to have been borrowed from the Brahmanical system. In Bihar, inter-marriage is regulated by a large number of groups called *mul*s which are of territorial type. They avoid the following gotras:

1. His own *mul*
2. His mother's *mul*
3. His maternal grandmother's *mul*
4. His maternal great grandmother's *mul*
5. His paternal grandmother's *mul*
6. His paternal great grandmother's *mul*
7. His paternal great great grandmother's *mul*

These rules apply to all the Ahirs with little variations throughout India. The Gollars marry in endogamous groups.<sup>6</sup>

1. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, II, p. 18; III, pp. 33, 37; Crooke *op. cit.*, II, p. 420; Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 314; Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 296; Risley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 284; *Ethno. Surv. of Bombay*, p. 8; Tod, *Travels in Western India*, London, 1839., p. 359; Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

2. DALTON, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

3. IYER and NANJUNDAYYA, *The Mysore Tribes and Caste*, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

4. *Ibid.*, I, p. 57.

5. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 285, 288; Blunt, *op. cit.*, p. 62; Elliot, *op. cit.*, p. 5. In Khandesh both sisters can be married to one husband. *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 9.

6. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, III, p. 26.



As a rule all the Ahir girls are married before or just after puberty, while the Golkars of Chanda, insist upon infant marriages, and fine the parents if an unmarried girl attain puberty. The *Kanora* Ahirs of Mandla, do not marry their girls till they show the sign of puberty<sup>1</sup>.

If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant by a person of the same caste or by one outside, the girl is made over to him.<sup>2</sup> Among the Gualas of Bengal and Orissa, the orthodox view of Hindu marriage is wholly accepted. In Bihar the infant marriage is regarded as a matter of enhanced social respectability. In U.P., Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar,<sup>3</sup> there is also a custom of exchanging the girls between the two Ahir families. In the Ahirs of Chhotanapur both adult and infant marriages are recognised, the latter being regarded as a counsel of perfection for the well-to-do persons. If an Ahir girl in Orissa remains unmarried in her father's house, after attaining her puberty, the breach of ceremonial requirement may be got over by giving her away to an old man or invalid man. After such marriage the girl is divorced by her husband and remarried like a widow.<sup>4</sup> Smearing vermilion over the forehead of the bride is believed to be an important part of the marriage ceremony. On the marriage day, in Khandesh, women dance in a circle to the sound of drum and men perform the stick dance, moving in a circle round the image of Ganapati.<sup>5</sup>

The marriage ceremony in Khandesh is performed under a shed of twelve posts in front of the bride's hut. Twelve earthen pots full of water are kept under the shed for five days. The details of the marriage ceremony do not differ much from those followed by other Hindus.<sup>6</sup> In Poona and Khandesh the marriage of the Ahirs is conducted by the Northern Brahmans called Pandes<sup>7</sup>; but in Madhya Pradesh it is conducted by the relations called *Saivasins*.<sup>8</sup> In Bihar the final ceremony, celebrating the departure of the bride to the house of the bridegroom and regular connubial relations ordinarily take place after four months of the

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1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. RISLEY, *Op cit.*, I, p. 289.

5. *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 8.

6. ENTHOVAN, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

7. *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 14.

8. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, 7, II, p. 27.



wedding ceremony.<sup>1</sup> In the marriage ceremony of the Mohammadan Gaddis or Ghosis, songs are sung in praise of the Hindu deities. It is believed that every house of the Ghosis must possess a silver image of the goddess. On the whole the marriage of the Ghosis is just like that of the Ahirs but partly performed by a Kazi.<sup>2</sup>

The Ahirs permit second marriage of a person, in case of infidelity on the part of the first wife; and for this, the permission of the tribal council is necessary. The woman thus divorced from her husband is entitled to marry again. Adultery, however, is looked upon as a great offence. If a woman commits adultery with a man of higher caste, the matter is hushed up; an intrigue with a low caste man is punished with immediate expulsion from the caste. The Ahirs are polygamous in U.P. but polyandrous also in some districts along the bank of the Jamuna. Individual instances of adultery are not considered as a crime. The children of a virgin or widow rank equally. In some Ahirs of Maharashtra formerly an unchaste woman was punished very severely. Such a woman was tied with a tree and the man was also made to be dressed like a woman before the tribal council.<sup>3</sup> Widow-marriage is also recognised among the Ahirs but the ceremony is very simple. No Brahman conducts this kind of marriage. The bride is given a new *sari* and sweets by the bridegroom and vermilion is painted either by the widow or by the bridegroom himself, and then they are locked in a room. From that day, they start their usual married life. As a rule widow-marriage is allowed with the brother of the deceased husband, but if the brother is very young or unfit for marriage, she is allowed to select her husband from the persons of the same *gotra* of her husband, or she may remarry anybody of her choice. Under no circumstances she is allowed to marry the elder brother of her husband.<sup>4</sup>

### Birth and death ceremonies

The ceremony of fulfilling the longing for pregnancy is called *sidhori*. In cases of delayed delivery, a line of men or boys is made and an earthen pot is passed from one to another and returned back to the room. Sometimes the lady is made

1. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

2. GUNTHORPE, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 43-44.

3. GUNTHORPE, *op. cit.*, p. 47; Enthoven, R. E. *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Bombay, 1922, Vol. I, p. 10; Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, III, p. 37, Blunt, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

4. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 288; Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, III, p. 35; II, p. 27; *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 13; ENTHOVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 297.



to drink the water, and the clay left on the potter's wheel for early delivery. If after three girls a boy is born, he is supposed to be unlucky, and in order to avert the impending danger he is kept in a basket, and fire is kindled around it in a pot which is then smashed on the floor to avoid the evil luck. If a male and female child are born on the same day in the same quarter of the village, it is considered to be a bad omen and the boy may suffer from illness and to avert this danger the maternal uncle of the child has to weigh the child against a lump of cow-dung.

After delivery, the woman is kept excluded for 21 days and the branches of *Kindu* and *ligu* are hung near the door of the house. Fried rice and wheat are distributed to the friends and relations on the occasion of the celebration of the birth ceremony. The worship of the goddess *Shashthi* is performed by placing two lumps of cowdung on each side of the door, and red powder is smeared for 14 days with green grass plucked from the side of a well. On the eighth day of the birth, all the members of the community are invited for dinner and finally on the 21st day, new cooking pots are brought into use. During this period the mother and father both are regarded as impure.<sup>1</sup>

### Death Ceremony

The dead bodies are burnt. They generally put leaves, milk, rice, a rupee or gold in the mouth of the dead man before the dead body is taken for cremation. In U.P., Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh, the dead bodies are burnt,<sup>2</sup> but in some parts of Maharashtra State they are buried also.<sup>3</sup> The Gollas of Belgaum and Dharwar bury their dead.<sup>4</sup>

### Religious belief

The Ahirs in Bengal are Vaishnava and celebrate *Janamshtami* and other festivals connected with the faith. In Bihar, most of them are Saktas and Saivaites. In general, the Ahirs observe all the religious festivals in honour of Krishna.<sup>5</sup> On the 10th lunar day of *Asauj*, the Ahirs worship *Sakambharidevi*, with red flags

1. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, II, p. 28; Risley, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

2. CROOKE, I, p. 62; Russell and Hiralal, III, pp. 35-37; *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, 14.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

4. ENTHOVEN, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

5. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, I, p. 289; *Essays on the Religion of Hindus*, Vol. II, vide Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 314.



installed on the mountains.<sup>1</sup> In Khandesh and Poona they worship *Bhavani*, *Siva*, *Kalabhairava*, *Parvati* and *Krishna*.<sup>2</sup> On auspicious days they offer sacrifices to the mother goddess. Among other deities they pay special respect to *Bisahari*, *Ganapati*, *Gohil*, *Gosawan* the god of cattle disease, *Kalumanjhi* and some other ghosts. In the local deities they worship *Habby* of *Habba* hill and *Vachara* a special form of snake worship.<sup>3</sup> In Madhya Pradesh the Ahirs worship some caste deities like *Kharkadeo* located near *Khirka* or cattle pond represented on the platform in the form of a horse. *Matardeo*, the god of enclosure of cattle pound, made in a jungle is also their caste deity. The *Rawat* Ahirs, sacrifice goats to *Matardeo* within three days of Divali. Once a year they worship *Gurayadeo*, who is believed to be a deity of cattle stalls of the villages. The *Mahakula* Ahirs worship *Sahadeo*, one of the five *Pandavas* represented by a cow and Mahadeo is represented by a buffalo and Lakshman by rice.<sup>4</sup>

The Holi is regarded as their special festival which they enjoy in the company of their caste followers. In *Doljatra* which is held on the 14th day of the first half of *Phalgun*, they renew their ornaments and harness and equipments of their cattle. They take a bath on that day and paint their forehead with Sandal and turmeric.<sup>5</sup>

Divali is the main festival of the Ahirs. On the day next of Divali they raise a big mound of earth called *Govardhana*.<sup>6</sup> They dance around it and run their cattle over it; this being over all the people drink and enjoy. In *damoh* they put on fantastic dresses and decorate their bodies with cowries and go round the village singing and dancing. In some places, they dance around a pole, tied with a peacock feather or white cock. They offer sacrifices to *Khilamutha*—the god of floor. In their 'walking ceremony' (*dhora jagana*) they roam about taking their stick tied with the branch of a tree in hand and shout loudly to declare the arrival of *Nanda Guala*. In *Raipur* the women also dance around the idol of *Parvati* to please her. In *Gurgaon* district, the Ahirs consider the *Banyan* tree as sacred, which is

1. *Ind. Ant.*, Vol. XXXIX, p. 323.

2. *Ethno. Surv. of Bombay*, p. 13; Enthoven, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

3. *RISSELY, op. cit.*, p. 290; *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, p. 8.

4. *RUSSELL and HIRALAL, op. cit.*, II, pp. 31-32.

5. *DALTON, Op. cit.*, pp. 314, 315.

6. *VARRIER ELWIN, Folk songs of Chhattisgarh*, Bombay, 1946, p. 130; *Russell and Hiralal, op. cit.*, II, p. 33.



worshipped till it remains green.<sup>1</sup> In Bengal, a pig is let loose among the herds of buffalos on the 1st day of Kartik and buffalos are encouraged to gore it to death and the carcass is given to *Dosadhs* to eat.<sup>2</sup>

When the pestilence brakes out in the herd, the Ahirs propitiate the spirits by pouring blood, flesh and wine to appease them. After this sacrifice, a pig is buried under the ground with only head above the earth and cattle are made to trample it.<sup>3</sup>

### Tattooing

The Ahir girls are tattooed immediately after the marriage, specially in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> In Sagaur district tattooing is done on the occasion of Divali in honour of Krishna. The tattooing consists of various patterns representing their artistic talents and philosophy of life. The patterns of Rama's bed and Sita's heart represent the craving of Ahir women for a faithful husband. The symbols representing Krishna and Gopis<sup>5</sup> are tattooed two inches below their elbow.

### Folk songs of the Ahirs

The folk songs of Ahirs are called *Birhas* which have direct connection with the yearnings of the heart of the Ahirs.<sup>6</sup> These songs are of three kinds: (1) fairly long ballads sung in accompaniment of flute; (2) short songs, sung on the bamboo flutes and (3) *Doha*.<sup>7</sup> All the *Birhas* are sung in the same melody. The *Birhas* express the inner feelings of the people and portray the glimpses of the care-free life of the cowherds. In Madhya Pradesh, the *Birhas* generally deal with the traditions of the past Ahir heroes, who ruled in the tract known as *Ahirwara*. Sometimes, these *Birhas* portray various events of devotion to their sacred gods. In these songs they also propitiate the goddess Durga by offering the milk of their best cow. The

1. *Ind. Ant.*, XXXVIII, p. 54.

2. RISLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

3. *Ethno. Surv. Bombay*, pp. 13-14.

4. GUPTA, 'Female Tattooing in Vindhya-chala and U.P.' *Indi. Ant.*, XXXIII, p. 117.

5. Various designs of the tattooing of Ahir women, *Ibid.*

6. GRIERSON, 'Some Bhojpuri Folk songs', *J.R.A.S.* XVIII, p. 211; Verrier Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

7. *Ibid.*



*Birhas* also deal with the rapacity of the goddess. One can also trace in them many stories of the Mahabharata. Some of the *Birhas* sing of the transient world and offer prayer to the Almighty for mercy. The *Birha* love songs are equally enchanting and represent the love-life of wilderness full of youth and vigour. In the historical setting, they portray the heroism of their tribal chiefs. These songs bring before us the names of many unknown chiefs of the tribe like *Danu Rai* who is believed to have ruled over Mandla.<sup>1</sup> Some of the *Birhas* deal with family fueds, e.g. behaviour of a drunkard husband and advice to the drunkards.

### Lorik legend

Among all the legends of the Ahirs Lorik is most famous and is a source of inspiration to these people, as is evident from a proverb current in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>2</sup> The story as it is now before us, is a fiction and not a history. Even if, Lorik is taken as a historical figure, the account does not seem to be so much importance.<sup>3</sup>

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1. According to the story Danu Rai was a Raja of Mandla who was famous for his bravery. He never allowed the Mussalmans to enter in his country. In an encounter with the Mussalman he died fighting and his Rani performed the rite of Sati. *Ind. Ant.*, XXXIX, pp. 325-26. The scheme of the *Birha* is as follows: 6-4-4-2; 4-4-3; or 6-4-2-2-; Grierson, *op. cit.*, XVII, p. 213.

2. 'How so clever an Ahir be, he will not sing other song than Lorik' based upon the personal survey of the U.P. Ahirs.

3. There are various legends about Lorik but the famous account is about a woman Chandin and Lorik an Ahir. The story however describes various escapades of the woman Chandin who started loving Lorik. Chandin was the wife of Sivadhar an Ahir of the eastern part. Being cursed by Parvati, Sivadhar lost his manhood and Chandin forms an attachment with her neighbour Lorik and eloped with him. Sivadhar pursued the couple; Lorik fights with Sivadhar and defeats him. The pair goes to Mahapatya Dusadh the chief of gamblers, and in a game of disc Lorik loses everything including his wife. Chandin argues that her ornaments did not form part of the stake and induces Lorik to play again. she takes her seat before the eyes of Mahapatya and exposes herself while the latter was playing the game with Lorik. Mahapatya could not see the game due to the enchantment of the woman and finally lost it. Lorik cuts the head of the chief and starts wandering again. He defeats Hardin the king of Monghir who is assisted by the king of Kalinga. Lorik releases the king Hardin and returns to his kingdom and comes back to his native land. There he learns about the death of his brother Simru. Lorik determines to avenge the death of his brother Simru, and marries another beautiful woman Satmanin. He lived for many years and died at Benaras.

CROOKE *op. cit.*, I, p. 56.



## Traditions

The exploits of the Abhira chiefs are often referred to in the songs sung by the Abhirs of different States of India. The glories of these chiefs or Rajas have not been recorded by any author in a chronological order but they have been retained by their descendents in the form of songs. The Ahirs of Madhya Pradesh, and Khandesh, still dream of the glories of these past heroes and their buried past.<sup>1</sup> Possibly, these traditions would have retained some of their historical footing which is difficult to make out due to the lack of proper contemporary evidences.

Among all the legends of the Ahirs current in India, the conquest of Nepal is invariably represented. The nature of the tradition is purely legendary<sup>2</sup> and unsupported by any evidence. The bardic tradition asserts that the Ahirs ruled over Nepal for 521 years and their dynasty continued for eight generations. The founder of the Ahir Kingdom was Bhuktamana, a cowherd who ruled for 88 years. In the time of Yakshagupta, the last ruler of the dynasty, another Ahir named Barasinh came from Hindustan and ruled the country. Barasinh was followed by his son Jayantisinh who in his turn was followed by his son Bhuvansinh the last mentioned was conquered by the Kiratas.

1. GUSTAV OPPERT, *On the original inhabitants of India*, Leipzig, MDCCCXCIII, p. 142.

2. The geneology of the princes is as follows:—

(1)	Bhuktamana founder of the line ruled for	88 yrs.
(2)	Jayagupta do	72 yrs.
(3)	Paramagupta do	80 yrs.
(4)	Bhimagupta do	93 yrs.
(5)	Bhimagupta do	38 yrs.
(6)	Manigupta do	37 yrs.
(7)	Vishnugupta do	42 yrs.
(8)	Yakshagupta do	71 yrs.

Shew Shunker Singh and Gunanand, *History of Nepal*, translated from the Parvatiya, edited by D. Wright, London, 1877, pp. 108-9.

There is a variation in the names of the above dynasty from the account given by Colonel Kirkpatrick. The name of fourth prince has been given as Hurkh and 7th and 8th are Bishengupta and Jayagupta (2nd). The dynasty according to the Colonel ruled for 491 yrs. and 4 months.

Colonel Kirkpatrick, *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, London, 1811, pp. 169, 266; Francis Hamilton Buchanan, *An account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, Edinburgh, 1819, pp. 188-189.



Apart from the doubtful character of the chronicles, one may question, whether the dynasty was Gopal at all. Francis Buchanan takes the suffix *gupta* attached to the name of the princes to mean a cowherd, which is itself doubtful.<sup>1</sup> *Bhula Sinh* or *Bara Sinh*, came from Hindustan, has been taken by Francis to be a Rajput, but he agrees that the Ahirs were also the sovereigns of Nepal sometimes. The whole geneological list is a creation of bards, and the names Barasinh or Bhulasinh seem to be quite modern. Some scholars have recorded the dominance of Ahirs over the whole Gangetic Valley in later pre-historic period, which is rather fantastic.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the traditions indicating the former dominance of the Ahirs have also been kept in some districts of Uttar Pradesh where they are said to have been supplanted by the Rajputs.<sup>3</sup> The importance of the Ahir traditions is clearly discernible in Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh. The village folk still recapitulate that the Ahirs ruled over the land before the Gond.<sup>4</sup> The general authenticity of the traditions is attested by the name of the districts as Ahirwara which reminds of their previous glory.<sup>5</sup> Ferishta mentions a tradition that Asirgarh was found by Asa, an Ahir chief in the beginning of the 15th century A.D. Scholars are unanimous in their opinion that the foundation of Ahirgarh is a fiction.<sup>6</sup> The Ahirs, however, maintained their dominance over Kathiawad upto the end of 8th century A.D. till the arrival of Kathis.<sup>7</sup>

The tribe attained considerable importance in the Deccan also. In Khandesh and Gondwana districts several sites and ruins are attributed by the local residents to the Goali rajas.<sup>8</sup> According to the traditions of Bareilly district, U.P., the Ahirs were dominating the territory round about this district till the subjugation of Hindustan by Timur. At that time Raja Kharak Singh and Rao Hari Singh of Tirhut were deputed by the Emperor to defeat the rising Ahirs.<sup>9</sup> Tod also

1. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

2. WADDELL, Traditional Migration of the Santhalas, *Ind. Ant.*, XXII, p. 294; *Jorl. of Francis Buchanan*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

3. *Gazetteer Gurgaon district*, p. 62; Elliot, *op. cit.*, I, p. 307.

4. GUSTAV OPPERT, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

5. TOD, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, II, pp. 338, 409.

6. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, II, 20; Elliot, *Op cit.*, I, p. 3; Crooke, *Op cit.*, I, p. 50.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Bombay Gazetteer*, I, pt. I, p. 619; XII, p. 39; *Ind. Ant.*, I, p. 205.

9. ELLIOT, *op. cit.*, I, p. 307.



records another tradition that in Akbar's reign the Ahirs wielded much political power in the Saurashtra Peninsula. They had 3000 cavalry and equal number of infantry units with which they used to harass the Mughal armies and the Jadeja Rajputs.<sup>1</sup> Another tradition of U. P. Says that the Ahirs migrated to Farrukhabad district with Jagjit Chauhan and owned properties there.<sup>2</sup> In Kanpur district, they were much hostile to Chandela Rajputs of Sivarajpur.<sup>3</sup> They were principal land-owning classes in Dhampur Nagina, U.P. In Madhya Pradesh during the 15th, 16th and the 17th centuries they held Chhindwara, Deogarh, Gawilgarh, Nimar and Narala fortresses. The Sagaur tradition relates the dominance of the Ahirs to the end of 17th century.<sup>4</sup>

The aforementioned unrecorded traditions, however, prove the turbulence of the Ahirs in the Muslim period.

The significance of these traditions cannot be denied altogether as they do point out to certain basic facts about the history of the Ahirs of that period. Under British patronage, they slowly advanced and occupied prominent positions in the army and police and in other executive posts. They have come up now and getting good education and have opened some colleges and schools for the education of their children.

1. TOD, *Travels in Western India*, p. 358.

2. *N.W.P. and O. Gazetteer*, VII, p. 282.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

4. RUSSELL and HIRALAL, *op. cit.*, II, 20; *Bom. Gaz.* I, Pt. I, p. 619.



**Appendix—I**  
**INSCRIPTION OF RUDRABHUTI ABHIRA**  
Saka Era 102 ( A.D. 180 )

**Text<sup>1</sup>**

- १ सिद्धं राज्ञो महाक्षत्रपस्य स्वामि चष्टन प्रपौत्रस्य राज्ञो क्षत्रपस्य स्वामिजयदाम पौत्रस्य
- २ राज्ञो महाक्षत्रपस्य स्वामिरुद्रदामपुत्रस्य राज्ञो क्षत्रपस्य स्वामि रुद्र—
- ३ सीहस्य वर्षे द्युत्तरशते सं. १०२ वैशाख शुद्ध पंचमी धन्यतिथौ श्रवणनक्ष—
- ४ त्रमुहूर्ते आभीरेण सेनापति बाहकस्य पुत्रेण सेनापति रुद्रभूतिना ग्रमरसौ—
- ५ पट्टे हूदार्थे खनित बन्धापितश्च सर्व सत्वानां हित सुखार्थमिति

**Translation**

Hail ! In the year one hundred and two of the King Kshatrapa Svami Rudrasiha ( Rudrasinha ) son of the King Mahakshatrapa Svami Rudradaman, grandson of the King Kshatrapa Svami Jayadaman and great grandson of the King Mahakshatrapa Svami Chashtana on the fifth day of the light half of the month of *Vaisakha*, on the lunar day called *Dhanya* in the *Sravana nakshatra muhurta*, Senapati ( General ) Rudrabhuti, son of Senapati Bahaka, an Abhira, caused the excavation to be made and an embankment to be thrown up for a tank in the village Rasopadra for the welfare and comfort of all living beings.

**NASIK CAVE INSCRIPTIONS OF ISVARASENA**  
Year 9 ( c. A.D. 258-9 )

**Text<sup>2</sup>**

- १ सिधं [ १ ] राज्ञः [ मा ]दरीपुत्रस्यशिवदत्ताभीरपुत्रस्य
- २ अभीरस्येश्वरसेनस्य संवत्सरे नव[ मे ] [ ९ ] [ गि ]—
- ३ म्हपखे चोथे ४ दिवस त्रयोदश १० [ + ] ३ [ एत ]
- ४ या पुर्वया शकामिबर्मणः दुहित्रा गणपक[ स्य ]
- ५ रेभिलस्य [ मा ]र्यया गणपकस्य विश्ववर्मस्य [ मा ]
- ६ त्रा शकनिकया उपासिका( क )या विष्णुदत्ता( त्त )या सर्वसत्व( त्व )हि—
- ७ [ त ]सुखार्थं त्रिरश्मिपर्वतविहारवास्तव्यस्य [ चातुदिश ] [ स्य ]

1. *Int. Ant.*, Vol. X, p. 157.

2. *Mirashi V. V.*, *Corpus Inscr. Indicarun.*, Vol. IV, pt. 1, p. 3.



- ८ भि[क्षु] संवस्य गिलानभेषजार्थमक्षयनीवी प्रयुक्ता व [वास्त—]  
 ९ व्यासु आगता[नागता] सु श्रेणिषु यतः कुरिकश्रेण्या हस्ते क (का) र्पाण—  
 १० सहस्रे १००० औदयंत्रिकश्रेण्यां सहस्राणि द्वे २.....  
 ११ [ण्यां] शतानि पंच ५०० तिलपिषकश्रे[ण्यां]  
 १२ एते च क (का) र्पाणा चतालो[पि].....  
 १३ .....[त]स्य [मास] वृद्धि[तो].....

### Translation

Success ! In the ninth-9-year of the king, the Abhira Isvarasena ,son of the Abhira Sivadatta ( and ) son of Madhari, on the thirteenth-10 ( and ) 3-day in the fourth-4-fortnight of summer, on this aforementioned ( day ) the lay devotee Vishnudatta of the Saka race, mother of the Ganapaka Visvavarma wife of the Ganapaka Rebhila ( and ) daughter of the Saka Agnivarma, has invested the ( following ) perpetual endowment in the present and future guilds, dwelling at Govardhana, in order to provide medicines for the sick among the community of monks from the four quarters dwelling in ( this ) monastery on mount Trirasmī, for the well-being and happiness of all creatures, viz., a thousand-1000-*karshapanas* in the hands of the guilds of Kularikas, two thousands-2000-*karshapanas* in the guild of the manufactures of hydraulic machines, five hundred-500- in the guild of.....( and ).....in the guild of oil-millers.

( Line 12 ) All these four ( investments of ) *Karshapanas*.....by the monthly interest of.....

### INDORE PLATE OF SVAMIDASA

Abhira era ? 67 316-17 A.D.

### Text<sup>1</sup>

- १ वल्खा[त्] परमभट्टारकपादानुद्धयातो महाराजश्रीस्वामिदासः समाज्ञा—  
 २ पयति सर्वानिवासत्सन्तकाना युक्तकाद्वि ज्ञातमस्तु व[ः] समनुजा—  
 ३ नीयोस्मि शाण्डिल्यसगोत्रमुण्डब्राह्मण( ण )स्य नगरिकापथके दक्षिणव—  
 ४ लिमकतल्लवाटके आर्यवानि( णि )जक प्रत्ययक्षेत्रपदं ब्रह्मदेयमाचन्द्रा—  
 ५ कर्तारककालीयं पुत्रपौत्रन्वयभोज्यं भोगायैवमिदानि( नी ) मस्य ( स्या ) स्मा—  
 ६ भिक्कृतः नञस्यो चितया ब्रह्मदेयभुक्त्या भुज्जत[ः] कृषतः कृषा

1. *Ibid.*, p. 5.



७ पयतश्चः सवरेवा[स्स] पक्षतक्तुल्यादिभिस्समनुमन्तव्यं( व्यम् । )

८ नन्नभट्टि दूतकः [ १ ] वर्षे ६० [ + ] ७ ज्येष्ठ शु. ५ [ १ ]

९. ( In The Margin ) महाराजश्रीस्वामिदासस्य[ १ ]

### Translation

From Valkha—the Maharaja, the illustrious Svamidasa, who meditates on the feet of the Paramabhattacharaka ( Great Lord ), issues the ( following ) order to all his officers—

“ Be it known to you that We ( hereby ) give Our assent to the Brahmadeya gift of a field belonging to the merchant Arya and situated in the southern Valmika-tallavataka in the Pathaka of Nagarika, to this Brahmana Munda of the Sandilya gotra, to be enjoyed ( by him ) ( and ) by a succession of his sons and sons' sons as long as the moon, the sun and the stars would endure.

( Line 5 ) ( Wherefore ) all persons connected with Us, those born in their families and others should consent to this grant, ( since ) he has now been permitted by Us, so long as he enjoys ( the field ), cultivates it and causes it to be cultivated according to the conditions for enjoying Brahmadeya ( land ).”

( Line 8 ) The Dutaka is Nannabhatti. In the year 60 ( and ) 7, ( in the month of ) Jyeshtha ( and ) the bright fortnight, ( on the lunar day ) 5.

( In the margin ) Of the Maharaja, the illustrious Svamidasa.

### ABHIRA INSCRIPTION OF THE TIME OF RUDRASIMHA III (?)

( C 348-78 A. D. )

#### Text<sup>1</sup>

१ सिद्धं [ ? ] राज्ञो महाक्षत्र [ त्र ] पस्य स्वामिचष्टन

२ पुत्रपुत्रस्य राज्ञो महाक्षत्रपस्य भट्टिदम

३ पुत्रपुत्रस्य राज्ञो महाक्षत्रपस्य वर्ष अत .....

४ व्युत्तरके वसुपुत्रस्य प्रलदपुत्रस्य आभीरस्य

५ हरिहोवकसगोत्रस्य वसुराकस्य गुत्थज्ज दुहितुस्य

६ कात्तिकस्य शु ५ राजज्येश्वरस्य भर्तुर् यदि प्रष्टापि

७ .... भवनम् च

1. Diskalkar D. B., ' New Light on the history of the Kshatrapas of Saurashtra ', *Proceedings of the Fifth Oriental Conference*, 1930, Vol. I, p. 565.



## Translation

This sepulchral stele (*yashti*) and.....abode have been set up by Vasuraka, the Abhira, the son of Vasu, the descendent of Prahalada and the daughter's son of Gutthajja of Harihovaka gotra for the welfare of the king Mahakshatrapa..... the descendent of the king Mahakshatrpa Bhaddidama (Bhartridamana), the descendent of the king Mahakshatrpa Chashtana in the year past three.....of the month of Kartika, on the fifth day of the brightfortnight.

## NAGARJUNIKONDA INSCRIPTION OF VASUSHENA ABHIRA

Regnal Year 30

Text<sup>1</sup>

- १ नमो भगवतो देवपरमदेवस्य पुराणपुरुषस्य  
नारायणस्य राज्ञी [ राज्ञो ] वाषष्ठी पुत्रस्य अभीरस्य वसुषेणस्य संवत्सर ३० गंहपखे [ गिम्हपखे ]  
सिद्धं ।
- २ दिवस १ महाग्रामिकेन महातलवरेन महादंडनायकेन  
कौशिकस गोत्रेण परिविदेहाणं [ परिवृहणं ] शिवसेवनं संजयपुरिणा योराजिभिः [ योनराजभिः ]
- ३ अवंतिकेन शकेन रुद्रदामेन वनवासकेन च विष्णुरुद्र—  
शिवलानन्द[ शात ] कर्णानस्थजन [ स्वजन ] पिनचालितो[ ष ] च भगरुंवर [ भगवान् उदुम्बर ] भव  
अष्टजस्वामिस [ अष्टभुजस्वामिस ]
- ४ [ सेद ] गिरिय स्थपितः पर्वतस्य प्राकारो विनिमित्तो [ विनिर्मितो ]
- ५ वपिच [ अपिच ] महानन्दा सेवितो तडागानि च सेदगिरियमुदराय च[ खा ]नितानि तलवजसि  
रोपितानि देव ब्राह्मणार्थि मित्रार्थि प्राणापिन  
परिक्षति गुणतश्च सर्वतीर्थेन सर्वसाधु कृतज्ञः सत्यव्रत शत्रुगणमुद्र राजपदन्य सेत प्रमाणी[ व ]
- ६ यामिक सज्जनाभिनंदि रिषिदेशश्च स्वसंवत  
वर्धमान १००(?) भरद्वाज सगो[ त्रे ]ण अमतेन तिप्य सदितं भागव [ भार्गव ] भटः स्वस्ति गोदानस्य

## Translation

Hail ! The god of gods, the supreme being, Narayana ( and ) Vasushena, the son of king Vashashthi, the Abhira, in the samvat ( regnal year ) 30 on the first day of the fortnight of the summer.

1. A text and photograph of this inscription was kindly supplied by Dr. R. Subrahmanyam, formerly incharge of the excavations at Nagarjunakonda.







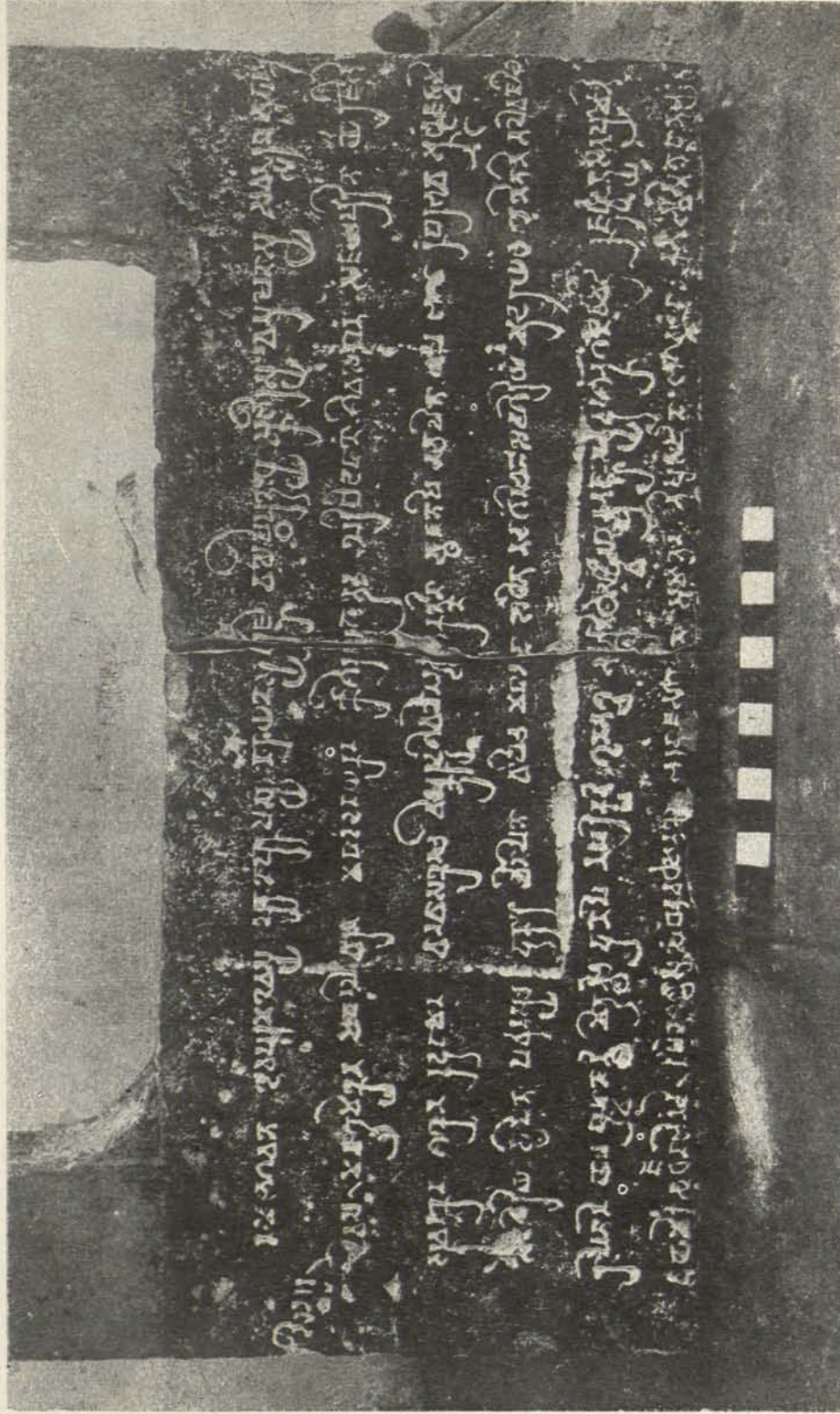


Plate I

Nagarjunikonda Inscription of Rājā Vasushena Abhira  
( By Courtesy Archaeological Survey of India )



Success! The wooden<sup>1</sup> image of god *ashtajasvami* (*ashtabhujasvami*)<sup>2</sup> has been set up at Sedagiri<sup>3</sup> by *Mahāgramika*, *Mahatalavara Mahadandanayaka* Sivasevana of Kausikagotra, the Yonarajas of Sanjayapura, Rudradamana the Saka of Avanti and Vishnurudra Sivalananda Satakarni<sup>4</sup> of Vanavasi for the merit and prosperity<sup>5</sup> of their kinsmen. They have been blessed by *Mahānandā*.<sup>6</sup> Ramparts have also been erected around the hill and tanks have been constructed in the centre of the Sedagiri hill. Trees have been planted on the slopes of the hill. All these are meant for the use of gods, Brahmanas and friends, they are not to be destroyed.

1. *Rumbara*, Sanskrit *audumbara*, mean a tree named *ficus glomerta*. In Konkani language also the word *rumbarha* means the same. The wood of this tree is used to prepare the wooden images of gods for the temporary use even today, hence I have translated the word *rumbara* as 'wooden image'. I owe this information to Pandit-ratna B. L. Shanbhague, Research Officer, Oriental Institute Baroda.

2. *Ashtabhujā* is the name of Durga, hence the word *ashtabhujasvami* means Siva. Therefore the wooden image referred to in the inscription was of Siva.

3. Sedagiri restored to Sanskrit as *siddhagiri*, may be identified with the hillock named *Siddhurduri* in the vicinity of Nagarjunikonda; this inscription is reported to have been discovered exactly from the same place. This hillock constitutes the eastern fringe of Firangulamurti hill.

4. The prince Vishnurudra Sivalananda Satakarni was evidently a scion of the imperial Satavahanas. He may be identified with the Prince Vishnukada Chutukalananda Satakarni of Malavalli inscription, who flourished shortly before the Kadamba conquest of the Kuntala country. Dr. D. C. Sircar suggests that Vishnukada Chutukalananda Satakarni would have been a feudatory of the Pallava king Sivaskandavarman. It is not unlikely to suggest that he would have been a feudatory of the Abhira monarch Vasushena before the Pallavas.

5. I could not understand the word *paribidehanam*, possibly it may be the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word *paribrimhanam*—which means prosperity.

6. *Mahanandā* according to the Mahabharata is the name of a tirtha and by paying visits and offerings to it, one gets bliss of heaven. The sacrifices to this tirtha are offered on the ninth day of the month of Magha in the bright fortnight.

करवीरपुरे स्नात्वा विशालायां कृतोदकः ।  
देवहृद उपस्पृश्य ब्रह्मभूतो विराजते ॥  
पुनरावर्तनन्दाच्च महानन्दाच्च सेव्यं वै ।  
नन्दने सेव्यते दान्तस्त्वप्सरोमिरहिसकः ॥

—*Mbh*; 13, 25, 1731, Cal.



Hail to this *godana* ! This Brahmana named Bhargavabhata, who owing to his merits is sacred like the tirthas and grateful to all pious people., who is an oath of truth, who has been honoured by those kings who have stamped ( of their prowess ) upon their enemies, who is honest and ever self-controlled, pleasing to the people, who is like sages. ( This has been executed ) by the Amatya of *Bhardvaja-gotra* in our own samvat<sup>7</sup> ( Abhira samvat ) 100 on the day of the *tishya* constellation.<sup>8</sup>

7. This inscription has been assigned by Dr. D. C. Sircar to the year 278-79 A.D. He opines that the year 30 recorded in the inscription may be referred to the Abhira-era, which was started by Isvarasena in 248 A.D. The panegyrist has expressed the year specifically with the phrase *Vasushenasya samvatsare*. Which would indicate more to the regnal year of the king Vasushena rather than the Abhira-era. In the last line of this epigraph, it runs as follows :

*rishideśaścha svasambata vardhamāna*

After this there is a numerical figure which I have read as 100. As the inscription belongst o the Abhira kings, the year referred to in the record, may be reckoned to the Abhira era and thus the record may be assigned to the middle of fourth century. The palaeography and language of the inscription according to D. C. Sircar suggest its ascription roughly to the second half of the third or the first half of the fourth century<sup>1</sup> A.D. The other internal evidences also corroborate the above conclusion. It is possible to suggest that the Abhira occupation of the region near about Nagarjunikonda, may be placed sometime before the Kadamba conquest ( c. 345 A.D. ). The absense of any Abhira coin in the region may indicate that the conquest was short-lived.

8. Tishya is same as *pushya nakshatra*

पुष्ये तु सिध्यतिष्यौ तिष्यो नक्षत्र मेदे स्यात् ।

*Amarakosa*, Nirnayasagar, p. 38.

1. Sircar D. C. ' New light on the chronology of the Ikshvakus and the Pallavas', *Indian Hist. Quar.* XXXVI, p. 24



## INDORE PLATE OF BHULUNDA YEAR 107

Abhira era ? ( A.D. 356-57 )

Text<sup>1</sup>

- १ वल्खाः ( लखात् । ) परमभट्टारकपादानुद्धयातो महाराजभुलुण्डः समाज्ञापयति  
 २ सर्वनिवासत्सन्तकानायुक्तकाद्विज्ञातमस्तु वः समनुजानीमोस्य  
 ३ भारद्वाजसगोत्रकुसारक ब्राह्मणस्य आषाढण( न )न्दि विज्ञाप्या उल्ल—  
 ४ दन सीमायां खुद्दतकप्रत्ययक्षेत्रपट्टि( ट्टि ) सह मण्डलकच्छेन ब्रह्मदेय—  
 ५ मभागमाचन्द्रार्कतारकाकालीनमन्वयभोज्यं भोगायैवमिदानी—  
 ६ मस्यास्माभिकृतानुज्ञस्योचितया ब्रह्मदेयभुक्त्या भुञ्जत[ : ] कृषा—  
 ७ ताश्च स[ व्वे ] रेवास्मत्पक्षीयै समनुमन्तव्यं( व्यम् ) ( १ )  
 ८ प्रतिहारस्कन्दो दूतकः ( १ ) वर्षे १०० ( + ) ७ : फल्गु व १० [ + ] २ [ १ ]  
 ९ ( *In The Margin* ) मा ( म ) हाराजभुलुण्डस्य [ १ ]

## Translation

From Valkha—Maharaja Bhulunda, who meditates on the feet of the Parama-bhattaraka ( Great Lord ), issues the ( following ) command to all his officers—

( Line 2 ) “ Be it known to you that at the request of Ashadhanandin We ( hereby ) give Our assent to the entire Brahmadeya gift of a strip of land consisting of the field belonging to Khuddataka, together with the surrounding kachchha ( bank ), on the boundary of Ulladana, to the Brahmana Kusaraka of the Bhara-dvaja gotra, to be enjoyed by ( him and ) his descendants as long as the moon, the sun and the stars would endure.

( Line 5 ) ( Wherefore ), all persons connected with Us should consent to this grant, now that he has thus been permitted by Us, so long as he enjoys and cultivates the field according to the conditions for enjoying Brahmadeya ( land ).”

The Dutaka is Pratihara Skanda.

( Line 8 ) In the year 100 ( and ) 7, in the month Phalguna ( and ) the dark fortnight, ( on the lunar day ) 10 ( and ) 2.

( In the margin ) Of the Maharaja Bhulunda.

1 Mirashi V. V., *op. cit.*, P. 9.



## SIRPUR PLATE OF RUDRADASA, YEAR 117

Abhira-era ( ? ) ( A.D. 366-67 )

## Text

- १ [ वल्खा ] : परमहृरक पदनुद्धयतो महरजरुद्रदसः समा—  
 २ [ ज्ञापय ] ति सर्वाणिवास्सदीयानयुतक[ न्नि ] ज्ञातमस्तु वः समनु—  
 ३ [ जानी ] मोस्य भरद्वज सगोत्रद्रोणिलकब्राह्मणस्य कशपुरा—  
 ४ [ न्तर्गत ] विकट्टाणकग्रामस्यापरसीमाया ( यां ) या भट्टिवैद्यप्र—  
 ५ [ त्ययं ] क्षेत्रं घोटकतलत्ताम यावत्कोहलट्टकसी—  
 ६ [ मासन्धिं ] ब्रह्मदेयं शाश्वतमचन्द्रार्कतारकाकालीनपुत्रा—  
 ७ [ पौत्रान्व ] यभोज्यं भोगायैवमिदानीमस्याभि[ : ] कृतनु—  
 ८ [ ज्ञस्यै ] तक्षेत्रं भुञ्जत[ : ] कृषतः श्चास्मत्पक्षीयै[ : ] समनुम—  
 ९ [ न्दव्यमि ] ति [ । ] प्रतिहरदोद्धिरदुतकं ॥ वर्ष । १०० १० ७ वै तृयाया

## Translation

( From Valkha )—Maharaja Rudradasa, who meditates on the feet of the Paramabhattacharaka ( Great Lord ), issues the ( following ) order to all his officers—

“ Be it known to you that We ( hereby ) give Our assent to the Brahmadeya gift of a field, called Ghotakatala, which belonged ( formerly ) to Bhatti Vaidya, which is situated on the western boundary of the village Vikattanaka included in the Kasapura ( sub-division ? ), extending as far as the boundary of Kohalattaka, to the Brahmana Dronilaka of the Bharadvaja gotra, to be enjoyed ( by him ) ( and ) by a succession of his sons and sons' sons for all time as long as the moon, the sun and the stars would endure.

( Line 8 ) ( Wherefore ), all persons connected with us should consent to it while he is enjoying and cultivating that field ( since ) he has now been permitted by Us.

( This charter has been issued ), by the Pratihara Doddhira being the Dutaka, in the year 100 ( and ) 10 ( and ) 7, ( in the month of ) Vaisakha, on the third ( lunar day ).



## GHATIYALA INSCRIPTION OF KAKKUKA SAMVAT 918

Text<sup>1</sup>

- १ ओं सिद्धिः [ १ ] दिवारात्रौ च संध्यायां [ कार्ये विघ्नैश्च ] संकुले सिद्धिं करोतु सर्वत्र स्तम्भधामा  
वि [ ना ] यकः ॥
- २ रोहिन्सकूपकग्रामः पूर्वमासीदनाश्रयः । असेव्यः साधुलोकानां आभीरजनदारुणः ॥
- ३ विचित्र वीथि संपूर्णं हट्टं कृत्वा गृहाणि च, विप्रवणिप्रकृतीनां गृहं गत्वा प्रियेण च
- ४ श्रीमत्ककुक्ष्य पुत्रेण सत्प्रतीहारजातिना ककुकेन स्थितिं दत्वा स्थापितोल महाजनः
- ५ महाजनस्य सद्वृद्धिः लाभः पूजा सुखं भृतिः । श्री ककुक्ष्य कुन्दाभा कीर्तिर्भवतु शाश्वती ॥
- ६ संवत् शते ९१८ चैत्र सुदि २ [ १ ] लिखितं मगे[ न ] मातृरविणाउत्कीर्णं हेमकारेण [ कृ ]ष्णश्वरेण सूत्रधारोत्र  
नि.....विष्णु

## Translation

On success ! May Vinayaka, who is inscribed on a pillar, bestow success in all matters, like the actions coupled with obstacles. during the day and night.

The village Rohinskupaka, which ceased to be a shelter and abode of good people formerly, became unsafe due to the menace of the Abhiras, has again been rehabilitated by Kakkuka, the son of Srimad Kakka, of noble Pratihara lineage, by constructing streets, markets and the houses of the subjects. He went to the houses of the Vaishyas and rehabilitated them here (again) for their growth, worship, happiness and prosperity.

May the fame of Kakkuka, bright like the *Kunda* flower, endure for a long time.

( This charter ) has been drafted by Matriravi and engraved by the goldsmith Krishnesvara.....by artisan ( *sutradhara* ) Vishnu, in the samvat 918 on the second day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra.

<sup>1</sup> *Ep. Ind.*, IX, p. 279.



## Appendix II

## DISTRIBUTION OF THE ABHIRAS

<i>Period of the Abhira Settlements</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References of the Abhira Settlements from the Sources</i>	
		<i>Direction of the republics as mentioned in the sources</i>	<i>Names of the tribes in order from the sources</i>
1	2	3	4
Upto the 1st century B.C.	Mahabharata Sabhaparva	On the banks of the rivers: Sindhu	Sudras were living with the Abhiras on the banks of the Sindhu
		Sarasvati	Sudras settled with the Abhiras on Sarasvati
		Matsya region	Matsyas
		Mountainous region	Nothing is mentioned
	Mahabharata Bhismaparva	North Western	The Ramathas, Chinas, Dasamalikas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas & Sudras, Sudrabhiras, Daradas & Kasmiras
	Mahabharata Bhismaparva	Madhyadesa	Vahikas, Vatadhanas, Abhiras & Kalatoyakas
1st century B.C.	Ptolemy	Region above the Patalene to the Gulf of Kanthi	To the north of Patalene the Indus delta country
	Periplus of the Erythrean Sea	Interior part of Indo-Scythia	Sea board of Indo-Scythia was Saurashtra
	Ramayana	Marukantara	Drumakulya was called Marukantara
	Vishnupurana Brihatsamhita Bhagavatapurana	Adjacent to Anarta Adjacent to Anarta and Sauvira	Anarta, Arbuda, Pushkar and Saurashtra Sauvira, Anarta, Avanti



## IN ANCIENT AND MODERN INDIA

<i>Identification of the neighbouring tribes of the Abhiras</i>	<i>Proposed identification of the Abhiras</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
5	6	7
Bhawalpur State  Upper Rajasthan at Vinasana; Sarasvati (modern Ghaggar) Matsya region: Jaipur, Alwar, —	To the South of the Bhawalpur State adjacent to the Sudra settlements Near about Sirsa where river Sarasvati disappears Near about Alwar Bharatpur upto Mathura Obscure	Shifted probably to Madhya Pradesh on the banks of river Sind which falls into Yamuna No Ahir habitation now  Still living: Mathura is a cradle of the Ahir legends throughout India Probably this region would have been Kangra and Chamba, as the oral traditions of the place suggest
Ramathas—modern Gazni Chinas—Ethnic term and not a geographical designation Daradas—Gilgit Yasin Daradistan Kasmiras—Kashmir Valley Dasamalikas—between Ravi and Chinab	Kangra and Chamba hills	Ahirs inhabiting this region are called Gaddis and land is called Gadderan having its own dialect <i>Gaddi</i> . The existence of the Gaddi (Ahirs) and their antiquitarian remains prove their hoary antiquity and continuity.
Vahikas—between Indus & Sutlej (Punjab) Vatadhanas—Southern Punjab lower Sind & Southern Rajasthan	Western Rajasthan, Jodhpur, Sirohi, Udaipur and Dungarpur	The Abhiras migrated from this place to Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Konkan and Khandesh
Patalene—Indus delta country in Sind  Indo—Scythia—Gujarat and Saurashtra Marukantara—S. W. Rajasthan Anarta—Gujarat Arbuda—Aravali range Sauvira—Sindh Avanti—Malva	Abhiradesa comprised of Thar Parker, Hyderabad (Sind) to the north of Indus delta  South Western Rajasthan, Marwar, Ajmer, Mewar, Pushkar and whole Southern Rajasthan upto Malwa	After some time the Abhiras shifted their activities to Nasik and Khandesh. This region has also been called Abhiradesa in the <i>Jaina Sutras</i> and <i>Saktisangama tantra</i> . The continuity of the settlements is evident from the existence of Ahirs who happen to be a large community. Numerous legends spread over there suggest their antiquity.



## DISTRIBUTION OF THE ABHIRAS

<i>Period of the Abhira Settlement</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References of the Abhira Settlements from the Sources</i>	
		<i>Direction of the republics as mentioned in the sources</i>	<i>Names of the tribes in order from the sources</i>
1	2	3	4
In the 1st century A.D.	Markandeya Purana	Dakshinapatha	Vanavasakas, Maharashtra, Mahishikas, Kalingas, Abhiras, Atvyas
	Markandeya Purana	Along the river Vena	Brigukachchhas, Konkanas & Abhiras



## IN ANCIENT AND MODERN INDIA

<i>Identification of the neighbouring tribes of the Abhiras</i>	<i>Proposed identifications of the Abhiras</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
5	6	7
Vanavasakas—modern Maharashtra Mahishikas—Southern Hyderabad Kalingas—Orissa	Round about Chhattisgarh	Abhiras moved to this region from the side of Sarasvati river and are still living here. Numerous legends of strong Abhira rule are current in this region. This fact is also attested by Varahamihira's <i>Brihatsamhita</i>
Brigukachchha—Broach Konkan	Khandesh, Nasik and some parts of Konkan	Abhiras (Ahirs) are still living there. Numerous legends of Ahir rule, the existence of Ahirani dialect and the endogamous and exogamous groups of the Ahirs prove their antiquity, continuity and migration from the Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The Nasik cave inscription refers to an Abhira King Isvarasena.







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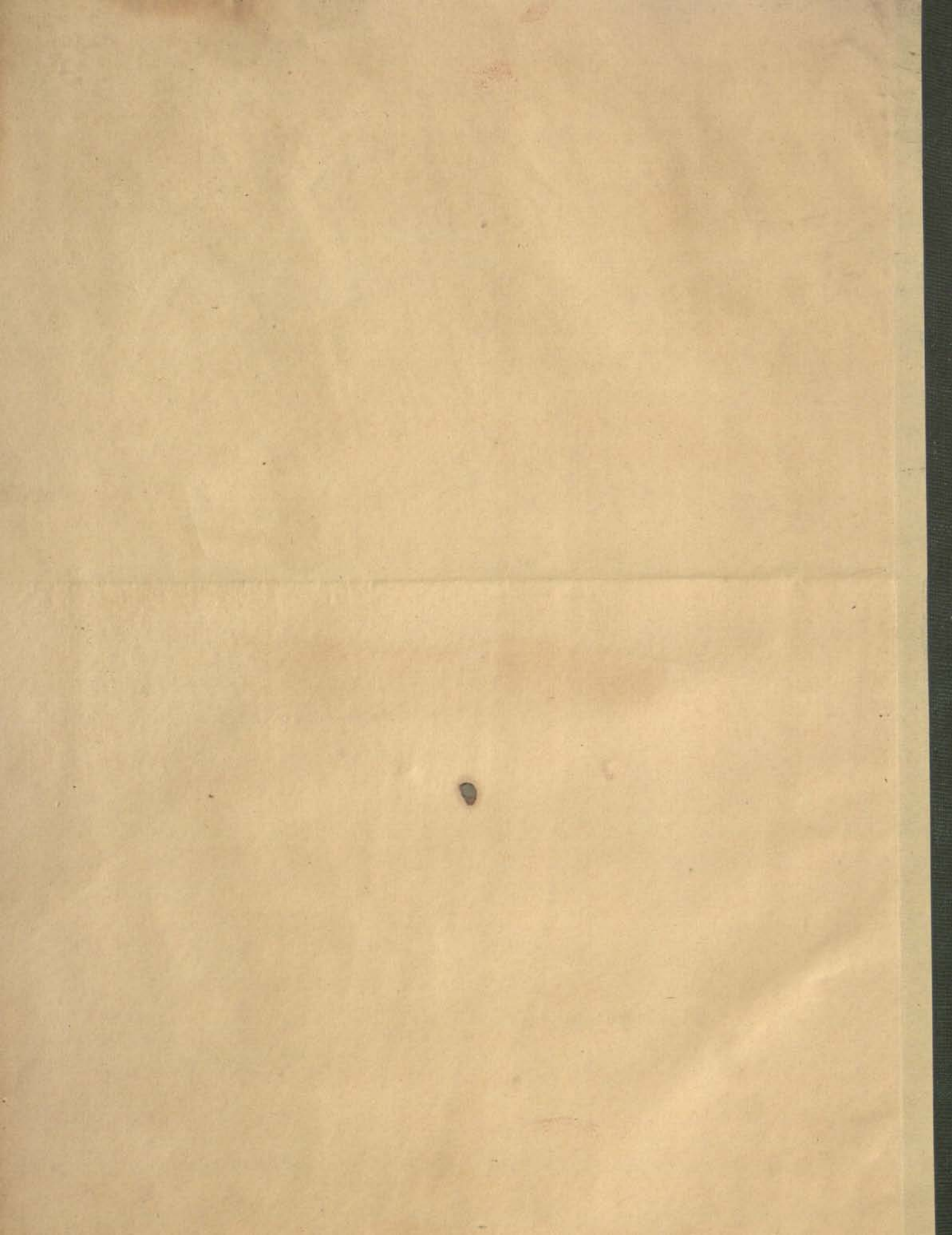














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