THE ASUR
A STUDY OF PRIMITIVE IRON-SMelters

42462

by

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WITH A FOREWORD BY
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Dedicated

to

[.M. Shrikant
FOREWORD

Last year I had the privilege of writing a Foreword to Mr. V. Raghaviah’s book on the Yanadis and I greeted him as one of the new tribe of philanthropologists, already beginning to have some influence in India. Mr. K.K. Leuva, whose book on the Asurs is also published by the Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, is yet another member of this growing tribe. Mr. Leuva is well qualified for membership: he was once Backward Class Officer of the former Baroda State, then he became Welfare Officer in the old Bombay State, and finally, an Assistant Commissioner for Bihar, West Bengal and partly Orissa. His parish today seems to extend to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the Ranchi area. What is so striking about his work is its happy blend of scholarship, academic curiosity and a deep concern for the welfare of the people he studies. He goes into considerable detail about their methods of agriculture, their former craft of iron-smelting, their education and struggle to find a place in the modern world.

I myself first visited the Asurs of Neterhat when I was writing a book on the Agaria iron-workers of Madhya Pradesh in 1940. I shall always remember my first glimpse of this enchanted plateau three thousand feet above the heat of the plains, and the people, as I saw them then, full of energy, happiness and beauty. Even then, however, this tribe of traditional iron-workers had begun to develop a conscience, a sense of guilt about their craft, for Government was doing all it could to stop the burning of trees for charcoal, and their financial returns were pitiful. Many of the Asurs were shy of allowing me to see their work or even of admitting that they did it; Dr. Ruben who wrote the first book (in German)
about them also had great difficulty in witnessing the process of Asur iron-smelting. Yet in many places I found smithies and kilns and it occurred to me that the Asurs were probably one of the oldest iron-working communities in India. But the craft was already dying under the orders of an unsympathetic administration.

When I went again to Neterhat nineteen years later for the Committee on Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks I must admit that I was a little disappointed. The smelting and smithy industry had almost entirely disappeared and it seemed to me that the changes in the Asur's life, with some exceptions, were not always for the better. In my Report I wrote that: "Surely, where iron is in the blood of a small tribe, efforts should be made to encourage it. The Asurs seem to have given it up when their forests came under official control and they could no longer obtain sufficient wood for charcoal. If this could be straightened out, they might take to their ancient craft again, at least as a subsidiary industry, for here is something that is already there."

I am glad to see that Mr. Leuva agrees with me. He has studied the techniques and traditions of working iron in a very thorough and effective manner and he points out that many of the Asur families still know the art and have preserved the necessary instruments to carry it on. Some of them buy iron from the markets and make their own plough-shares in such of the smithies as have survived. But they are not satisfied with the quality of this iron which is considered by them to be inferior to what they used to smelt themselves. Mr. Leuva rightly feels that the Asurs, who are not traditionally agriculturists, are unlikely to be able to earn enough in the fields to become prosperous and that it is necessary for them to have a subsidiary industry to supplement their scanty incomes. He suggests, therefore, that a training-cum-production centre should be established; a few forests coups should
be earmarked for the Asurs so that they can make the charcoal required for iron-smelting; and that they should be encouraged to take up their ancient craft again. He thinks that the Asurs will be able to get much better prices for their products now that their area has been opened up. It should not be impossible to teach these people to prepare charcoal in an economical manner—apparently one of the reasons why Government stopped this work originally was because they were unnecessarily, almost exaggeratedly, wasteful of the forests.

This book, in fact, raises in an acute form the need of developing tribal people along the lines of their own tradition and genius. Iron-smelting is their tradition; it is essentially their genius. It was brought to an end as a result of policies adopted by a foreign Government and these people, already poor, have thus been deprived of that little extra which would make just the difference between hunger and sufficiency. If Mr. Leuva's book succeeds in inducing Government to look with a more kindly eye on the Asurs, who surely have a claim on their consideration, he will, I know, feel that all his labour has been well worth while.

I welcome this book whole-heartedly and I hope that it will have a wide circulation. In these days of vast steel projects let us not forget the poor and humble worker in the hills who can in his own way make his contributions, however small, to the national economy.

Shillong, 18th Feb., 1963.  

Verrier Elwin
PREFACE

I have got a splendid opportunity to work among the tribal people and this period which is of more than a decade and a half has been the best period of my career in the Government service. During this period, I have had contacts with the aboriginals of Gujarat, Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal, but nowhere was I so much fascinated as by the Asur living in Ranchi district who were engaged in iron-smelting till the end of the last century. I agree with Dr. B.S. Guha that without a thorough knowledge about the tribes, their customs and rites, no suitable arrangement for their education or economic and social amelioration can take place. This fact has led me to make a thorough study of the Asur even though the tribe is not important numerically. I shall feel rewarded if this study is helpful to social workers and administrators in dealing with the problems of the Asur as well as of other tribes among whom they may be working.

The most popular belief is that the Asur is a branch of the Munda, the famous Proto-Austroid tribe of Chotanagpur. But my study of the Asur has revealed some startling facts with the help of which I have discarded this belief. Various ethnologists had tried to determine the racial affinities of the Asura whom we come across in the Rigvedic and Post-Rigvedic literature. But it is not difficult to prove that they were a Pre-Aryan people with magical powers and a practical knowledge of the working of metals. No definite conclusions have yet been drawn as to who were the authors of the Indus Valley Civilization. The Asura, according to some scholars, are one of the peoples to whom this civilisation is attributed to. After the age-long struggle between the Aryans and the Asura, the latter have had to migrate from their ancestral
home in the Indus Valley to various parts of India where they had come in contacts with the indigenous people who were there. One of the divisions of the Asura had moved towards the Gangetic Valley from which it diverted its course to the south in Chotanagpur which area had remained under their occupation till the Munda followed. The Asura have had to struggle again for their existence, but ultimately they were vanquished by the Munda and driven to the mountain fastnesses of Netarhat. Efforts have been made in this treatise to establish some relations between the Asura of the Rigvedic and Post-Rigvedic period and the Asur whom we find at present in Ranchi district. In order to avoid confusion between the Asura of the Hindu literature and the Asur of Ranchi the words have been spelt differently everywhere in the book.

This inaccessible plateau of Netarhat has served as a safe haven for the Asur. It may be considered as being both a blessing to them as well as being responsible for their primitiveness. It has been a veritable blessing in the sense that they have continued to live here unmolested by others for centuries. But due to their isolation, the Asur could not march with the time and their age-old material culture could not be preserved by them which seemed to progressively decline. Earlier as a vanquished people, they had to move from place to place which brought them in contact with the people of a low cultural level until they reached the Netarhat plateau which did not help them to regain their old status of high material achievement which has been described in the Vedic literature as Asur Vidya.

At present the Asur have as their neighbours the tribes like the Oraon, the Munda and the Kharia whose culture has had a visible impact upon the former, particularly in their religious beliefs and practices. But it is in the social life that the Asur have still preserved their individuality and culture which is quite distinct from that of other people. In
fact some of the features of the social life of the Asur which
attracted me are so peculiar and unique that I selected this
tribe for my study. Here are a few instances. Unlike the
other tribes, the Asur aspire for a daughter as a first issue even
though a son is the hope of any human society. Cohabitation
as husband and wife known as Idi-Me without performance
of a regular marriage ceremony is a unique social institution
of the Asur. Every Asur who has started a married life with
Idi-Me aspires for performance of the regular marriage cere-
mony which is sometimes postponed without obvious reasons.
But he cannot marry unless his parents have married cere-
moniously beforehand. So there are sometimes happy
occasions of having the marriage ceremonies being performed
on the same day and in the same bower of the parents
followed by that of the son. The death of parents who have
not gone through the marriage ceremony is a very regrettable
thing in his eyes. But the most surprising thing in their social
life is that there is no divorce among them. This custom of
the tribe approximates to the custom of the so-called high
Caste Hindus. From an episode in the Chhandogya Up-
anishad it is learnt that Virochana, the Great Asura misinter-
preted the teaching of the Preceptor Prajapati about the
Atman, and so he advised his fellow-men to bury the dead
supplied with food and clothing. And even today the Asur
of Netarhat continue this practice with the further addition of
coins which are tied in a knot and kept under the head of the
corpse when it is buried.

The Asur seem to live every moment with magic. It is
too difficult for the Asur to realise the inherent falsehood and
barrenness of magic. Of course, they have to confess human
ignorance and weakness when the desired effect is not achieved
by magic. Hence they have already started entertaining
belief in some supernatural powers who are far stronger than
human beings and who control the destinies of man. The
Asur system of beliefs and practices has therefore been
evolved and organised to face this unknown supernatural world.

The Asur stands in constant dread of the mysterious powers which according to them afflict pain upon mankind in a number of ways. They feel surrounded by evil spirits and bad people like witches and wizards. What is the origin of these evil spirits who are prone to cause harm without any reasonable cause? We learn from the Asur Kahani that the Munda owe the origin of these evil spirits to the Asur women when their men-folk were immolated in a struggle that took place between the former and the Asur. The Oraon attribute the existence of these spirits to a similar legend in which Dharmes in the garb of a magician killed the males of the iron-smelting tribe of Asur whose widowed females turned into evil spirits. The Asur have a horde of evil spirits who according to a legend seem to have originated from some mysterious vultures.

Though there is not the slightest chance of the revival of the cottage industry of iron-smelting, still I have suggested in this book that a small forest coupe may be set apart for a few individual Asur families to prepare charcoal for iron-smelting and enable them to subsist by this industry. There are, however, very good chances for improvement of agriculture. Potato cultivation has been very successful in this plateau. There are also good potentialities for tea plantation which should now be tapped. Full use of land will change the entire face of the plateau. The immediate need is a well-planned reclamation programme with a provision for artificial irrigation. Simple bunding of small depressions here and there would convert quite a good acreage of the upland into paddy fields. Iron-ores located in the elevation of the Netarhat plateau should not now be considered valueless, because the country has been opened up remarkably well. The Geological Survey of India should now take up the job of resurveying the plateau in view of the changed conditions to estimate the
mineral wealth which should be exploited in the interests of the country and particularly for the well-being of the Asur.

Would this development make the Asur unto 'man'? According to Kaloo Mahto, headman of the Asur at Sakhua-pani, he is no better than a mongrel. Whatever increased land use there has been due to potato cultivation in recent years it has not brought about any significant change for the better in their life, because all that they produce in the fields by dint of hard labour is squandered on drinks of liquor and handia, the home-brewed rice beer. Here is a challenge to the Government and it is a matter for serious consideration whether it will be able to do much for these people in the way of their welfare when they are supplied liquor at their door steps in violation of the Excise Laws. I view the problem of the Asur as 'Welfare versus Drink'. Which would win? If the welfare has to win, the Government shall have to rise to the occasion. Stop this system of Parchinia, that is hawking of liquor outside the licensed shops, and I am confident, the Welfare shall win. Of course, a change in their way of life also will have to be brought about simultaneously through education and healthy cultural contacts.

The future of the tribal people will be most happy and fruitful for themselves and others if they are integrated within the wider community of India. In the process of integration the tribal people require help. This should be rendered in a manner keeping in view the time factor in its proper perspective. How this help can be rendered has been shown at various places in this book. And how much the Indian community will be indebted to the tribals who when fully integrated would be able to retain their age-old traits like honesty, truthfulness, ability for hard work and care-free life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my gratitude to all the renowned authors from whose works and papers I have drawn considerable material for writing this book. I may make a special mention of Dr. A. Bannerjee-Shastri, the author of 'The Asura India' who had enlightened me very much by personal discussion as and when I met him at Calcutta for clarification of certain points. Considerable material has been utilised at some places in the book from the the Paper on 'Features of Kinship among the Asur' by Mr. R.K. Jain for which I am highly obliged to him. I also acknowledge with thanks the generosity of Messrs. Zephyr Studio, Ranchi, Department of Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta and the Bihar Tribal Researech Institute, Ranchi for the photographs appearing in this book.

But for the help I got from a multitude of friends, I would not have been able to present the book in this form. I am deeply indebted to Dr. L.P. Vidyarthi, Head of the Department of Anthropology, Ranchi College, Dr. Sachchidanand, Director of Bihar Tribal Research Institute, both of whom offered me valuable suggestions on each of the Chapters which were shown to them in manuscript. I am thankful to my colleagues, Mr. P.C. Dave and Dr. B.K. Roy Burman, for going through the manuscript. Mr. K.B. Srivastav, who has had very close contacts with the Asur when he was the Project Executive Officer of the Tribal Development Block, Bishunpur, was always eager to place before me his vivid experiences and important suggestions relating to the Asur life and facilitate my field work in the Netarhat plateau. I shall remember with warmth, Mr. Bharat Nag and Mr. Hari Mahli, teachers of the Asur Residential Schools and Thutha (xvii)
Asur and other leading Asurs who always willingly came forward even at odd hours to answer to my queries on the Asur life. How can I forget Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, Director, Anthropological Survey of India, who could find considerable time in the midst of his heavy engagements for editing this book. I am simply overwhelmed by kindness and sympathetic attitude of Verrier Elwin who willingly agreed to write a Foreword to it.

RANCHI
12th Feb., 1963

K.K. LEUVA
CHAPTER 1
THE PAST OF THE PEOPLE

The Asur are one of the twenty-nine Scheduled Tribes in Bihar. They live in the Netarhat plateau of Chotanagpur which region has also been the home of numerous tribes for several hundred centuries. It is, therefore, rightly described by Col. E. T. Dalton as the great living anthropological museum in India. The Netarhat plateau forms the north-west corner of Chotanagpur. The eastern end of the southern range of the hills of Palamau district in Chotanagpur increases in height and turns towards the south where it culminates in the Netarhat plateau. About this plateau wrote Mr. Forbes eighty years ago that ‘the jungle becomes forest and the hills put on almost a grand appearance. The roads and paths wind about now over the top of a lofty eminence, which enables you to look down upon the valley below and over to the blue hills beyond. On reaching the bottom of the ghat, the path sometimes follows the bank of a brook or watercourse which emerging from the fastnesses and gorges among the hills winds in and out till it joins the stream that waters the valley below’. The peculiar hill features of this plateau and in particular of the north-west corner are the level cultivated hill tops locally called Pats which extend westward into Surguja and Jashpur. Of these, the largest and best known are Rajadera or Banspahar. These hills are of a nearly uniform height, say, 3,600 feet above the sea level. Looking at them from a distance, the summit appears to be as level and uniform as a masonry wall, and they form as perfect horizon as the sea itself. The whole plateau comprises of an area measuring about 485 sq. miles in the centre of which flows a small stream.

Climate of the plateau is unsurpassed in Bihar. The elevation gives it a uniform lower range of temperature. Even
though it rises to 100°F. in summer, still for all practical purposes it maintains its claim to be considered as a health resort. The nights are cool and the atmosphere so dry that the heat is not oppressive at all. During this period of the year occasional showers cause a refreshing fall in the temperature. The rains break usually before the end of June and the climate during this period compares favourably with that of many hill stations. In December and January the temperature falls sometimes to freezing point. A strong cold wind blows throughout January and the climate during the period is extremely bracing. Hence it is developing rapidly into a favourite resort for tourists who are attracted by its beautiful natural scenery.

The plateau is formed of crystalline rocks and has its summits capped by great masses of stone trap or laterite resulting from the decomposition of basaltic beds of the Deccan trap formation. It is from these rocks, the Asur extract iron ore for iron-smelting which was their principal industry for several centuries. In this plateau we come across a different class of flora in the wooded hills and valleys. The steeper slopes are covered with a dense forest mixed with many creepers. Though trees are not so large, yet many of them are economically usefull yielding timber, fruits, oil, etc. *Sal* (Shorea Robusta) is gregarious and there are noteworthy species which share with similar forests on the lower Himalayan ranges.

The Asur tribe living on these *Pats* consists of three divisions namely, the Bir Asur, the Birjia and the Agaria. In Bihar, the Birjia has been classified as a distinct Scheduled Tribe while the Agaria is a Scheduled Tribe in Madhya Pradesh. We are mostly concerned here in this book with the Bir Asur whose population in Ranchi and Palamau districts will be in the neighbourhood of 4,388 persons. They are dispersed in the Police Stations of Bishunpur, Chainpur, Ghaghra, Lohardaga and Mahuadand.
How did the tribe whose main occupation was iron-smelting until only a century back came to be called Asur? An attempt has been made in this chapter to offer an interpretation of the term with reference to the ancient Indian literature. But what do the Asur themselves mean by the term? In one of the ‘Reservations’ in the United States of America, there is one small tribe called Nawaho. Members of this tribe call themselves ‘a people’. Similarly in India, the word Munda which is the name of the famous Proto-Austroloid tribe means ‘headman’. The Munda, as a rule, do not call themselves Munda: this name has been given by the other people. They call themselves ‘Horoko’ the men. Likewise the Ho of Singhbhum call themselves ‘Horo’ which is a contraction of ‘Horoko’. The Santhal call themselves ‘Hor’ which means ‘man’. The Birhor, a small tribal community in Chotanagpur call themselves ‘men of forests’, ‘Bir’ means forest and ‘Hor’ means man. The Oraon who belong to the Dravidian speaking people of Chotanagpur would like to be called as ‘Khurukh’ meaning ‘Sons of God’. The word Asur has a resemblance with Ashur in Assyria* where it means ‘Powerful People’. The word Asura occurs in a number of places in the Rigveda, Brāhmaṇas, Āranyakas, Upnishadas and Epics which comprise the Sacred Literature of the Hindus.

Sāyanāchara has interpreted the word as ‘powerful’ (balavān), ‘highly intelligent’ (pragnāvan), ‘destroyer of enemies’ (shatroonam niratisah), ‘giver of life’ (pranasya data) and so on. In short, the most prominent meaning that has been made out in the Rigveda is ‘Powerful People’. I met a number of elderly persons from among the Asur in the plateau to ascertain as to what do they themselves mean by

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* The two great empires Assyria and Babylon which grew up on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates can be separated as little historically as geographically.

† बलवान् I ‡ प्रज्ञावान् I § शत्रुष्णां निरसित: I
|| प्राणस्य दाता I
the word. Mangra Asur (70) of village Lodapat told me that they were Bir Asur meaning 'Powerful People'. What valourous deed the Asur have done so that they take pride in calling themselves a Powerful People? Mangra had no knowledige about it, but he told me that their ancestors in ancient times must have done some such deed. Hence for all purposes, the word Asur means 'Powerful People'.

Have the Asur of Ranchi district had any ethnic relations with the Asura with whom we come across in the Sacred Literature of the Hindus in India? It would be very interesting to trace the history of the Asura since their first mention in the Vedas. The Asura were people who preceded the Aryans and probably the Dāsas in India. The question would be whether the Asura were the autochthon people of India or were immigrants. 'The Vedic, Brāhmaṇic and Epic Literature provides enough material for us to prove that they came from outside India. The Bhavishya Purāṇa answers the question that the Asura came from across the sea of salt water. What manner of men were they? Hiranya Hastāha Asurāha* 'men with golden hands' or say with brown complexion and Shubhrāha, 'white'**. The Epic Literature, particularly the Mahabharat describes the ocean as the abode of the 'Asura'. The Asura in India in fact has been a riddle in the past and will continue to remain so till the joint labours of the anthropologists, historians and archeologists dispel the mists of obscurity. Mohen-jo-daro has lifted the veil to a certain extent to provide some clue, but that in itself is not quite enough.

What does the word Asura signify.? It has been used as an epithet of praise and veneration in the Rigveda for various gods. Varuna claims to be the first to have been invested with it.

*हिरणय-हस्ताः प्रसुरा: ।
**शुभ्रा: ।
THE PAST OF THE PEOPLE

*Ma No Vadhair Varuna Ye ta Ishtavenah
  Krinvantam Asura Bhrinanti
Mā Jyotishah Pravasathani Gamma Vishoo
  Mridah Shishratho Jeevase Nah
  (Rigveda II, 28, 7)

'Do not strike us, Varuna, with those weapons of thine
that at thy instance smite down the sinner. May we not be
away from light; please, rout our enemies that we may live.'

Here Varuna is addressed as Asura meaning 'destroyer
of enemies' according to Sayanacharya.
Savitri, the Sun God is Asura:
†Hiranyahasto Asurah Sunithah
  Sumrlikah Svayam Yatvarvan
Apasedhanrakshasop Yatudhanan
Asthadevah Pratidoshah Grinanah
  (Rigveda I, 35, 10)

'Let the golden handed divine spirit, of good guidance,
most gracious, aiding well, come hither, chasing away demons
and sorcerers, the god being lauded has arisen towards even-
tide'.

Here Savitri is addressed as Asura meaning 'possessed
of property'.
Agni is Asura:
‡Tvamagnye Rudro Asuro Mahodivastvam
  Shardho Mārootam Priksha Eeeshishe
Tvam Vātairaroonair Yāsi Shangayastvam
  Poosha Vidihahe Pasinutmanaha
  (Rigveda II, 1, 6)

*Ma no vadhair yē ta ita śātvēna: krūvāntaksuḥ bīṣṭānita
  ma jyotih pravasatana gamā bhīṣmōgaḥ śrīksho jīvase na: || 2, 28, 7
†hirayā hato asurah suniḥah
  sumrlikah svayam yatvarvan
apasedhanra kṣaṣanko yatudhanan
aṣṭhadēvaḥ pratidoshah grinanah
  (Rigveda I, 35, 10)

†tvamagnye rudro asuro mahodivastvam
  shardho mārootam prīksha evaśishe
tvam vātairaroonair yāsi shangayastvam
  poosha vidhihaḥ pasinutmanaha
  (Rigveda II, 1, 6)
‘Thou, O Agni, art Rudra, the Asura of high Heaven; thou, being the host of the Maruts, rulest over nourishment. Thou goest along with the flame-coloured Winds, bringing happiness to our home. Thou being Pushan, protectest thy worshippers by thy own might’.

Here Agni as a form of Rudra is addressed as Asura meaning ‘destroyer of enemies’.

Agni Vaishvanara is Asura:

\[\text{Pita Yagnamasturo Vipashchitam Vimananamagnir} \]
\[\text{Vayunam cha Vadhatam} \]
\[\text{Avivesha Rodasee Bhoorivarpasaa Puroopriyo} \]
\[\text{Bhadante Dhamaabhih Kavih*} \]

(Rigveda III, 3, 4)

‘The father of sacrifices, the miraculous lord of those who know prayers (?); Agni is the measure and rule of the sacrificers; he has entered the two manifold-shaped worlds; the sage beloved by many people is glorified in his foundation,‘

Here Agni Vaishvanara is Asura meaning ‘the miraculous lord’ according to Prof. Max Muller, while Sāyana-chārya interprets the word as ‘giver of power’.

‘In short in as many as one hundred and five references in the Rigveda, the word Asura has been used as a term of praise. A detailed list of Asura celebrities has been given in the ‘Index to the Rigveda’. Against this, the term has been used only twice in the hostile sense in the older parts of the Rigveda, (II, 32, 4 and VII. 99, 5). Over and above there are 13 references in that sense in the last Book. Thus the Asura became wolfish (Rig. II, 30) from being friendly and dependable. (Rig. II, 151). From being the epithets of Varuna or Mitravaruna as gifted with Maya-occult power, the Asura

\[\text{*पिता यज्ञानमासुरो विपश्चितस्विमानान्माणिब्युष्म च वास्तासु।} \]
\[\text{श्राविषेषा रोदसी भूरिकथंश पुरुषपीयों भदन्ते धामभि: कबि: ॥} \]
becomes wicked (Rig. X, 124), hostile (Rig. X, 53), and godless creature (Rig. VII, 85) who must be vanquished. Patanjali called Asura ‘Mridhravachah’* of ‘unintelligible speech’ and therefore ‘Mlechchhah’** ‘deficient in grammar’, because in a fight between the Asura and the Aryans, the former shouted while retreating ‘helayo helayah†’ instead of ‘he, arayah’, ‘he arayah’ meaning‡ ‘Oh, ye enemies§.

What led to a different construction being put on the word Asura in latter Sacred Literature? It became a term for contempt in contrast to praise and esteem that it connoted during the Rigvedic Age. An answer can be found if we could trace all the details of the struggle which took place between the Asura and the Aryans for supremacy over the Indus Valley. As we have seen earlier, ‘the Asura was a power which claimed and received homage even from the Vedic Aryans. Varuna was the principal deity of the Asura. He has ever been their guiding star. Mitra and Varuna, better still Mitravaruna is for the Asura. Varuna’s gift of empire to the Asura is being sung. Bhojás, Angirasas and others are of the Asura breed and Vishwāmitra is their priest as well as commander-in-chief. The sea was the Asura element. Hardly a dozen hymns survive in the professedly Aryan version, and even these testify to Varuna’s moral superiority over all others including Indra and Agni. It was not so easy for the Vedic Aryans to vanquish the Asura as the latter were assisted by Varuna who was ‘Mayāvin’‡ gifted with Maya-occult power with which the Asura could put up a strong resistance. The Indo-Aryans coming from the north were led by that famous priest Vasista, while the Asura divisions headed by the Purus, Turvasus, Yadus, Anus, Druhyus, Bhrigus and others had Vishwāmitra as their commander-in-chief. Tradition has it that the Aryans were worsted at the outset, but they could win in the end only by artifice. The Asura lost their military

*मृद्रवाच: । **मृलिच्छ: । †हेलयो हेलव: । ‡हे अरयः, हे अरयः: । §मायाविनः
prestige, industrial skill and the Aryans scattered their strongholds. Sons of the Asura were killed by the hundreds and thousands, so that they could never raise their heads again. The struggle between the Aryans and the Asura had dragged on for several centuries till it ended in the assimilation of the two. The Mahābhārata witnessed the last struggle of the Asura for a separate existence. Those of the Asura who refused to be absorbed in the Neo-Aryan body politic were classed along with the despicable Rākshasas or demons. After the Aryan-Asura amalgamation the Neo-Aryan pantheon contained many men of non-Aryan entities and affinities. The success of the process can be judged by Agastya, Vasista, Vishwāmitra and others being regarded as descendants from the same father Mitra-Varuṇa. Even the different gods like Varuṇa of the Asura, Indra of the Aryans became each other's gods and then as one God. The same synthesis in the mediæval days succeeded in turning sectarian deities into all Indian Avatāras-incarnations⁴.

Against the above theory, which has been propounded by the learned Dr. Anantprasad Bannerji-Shastri we came across quite a different exposition about the Asura by Dr. P. L. Bhargava, who thinks it simply ridiculous to link the Asura with the aborigines in India who were there at the time of the incursion of the Aryans. These aborigines have been described according to Dr. Bhargava as Dāsas. He is of the opinion that the word Asura has a history of its own. In the beginning, the Asura was a synonym of god which changed later on as a synonym of demon. This change according to him is not accidental. In the Amarakosha, the Asura has been called Poorvadevah* meaning one who was formerly a god. He thinks that the Vedic and Epic struggles between the Devas and the Asura can be between the worshippers of the Devas and the worshippers of the Asura. It

*पूर्वदेव:
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is actually a war between the two sects of the Aryans. This theory can be easily challenged with the help of numerous hymns in the Vedas and other Post-Vedic literature which clearly indicate that the Asura were a distinct group who were earlier occupants of the Indus Valley from across the seas.

But what about the Asur of Netarhat? Have they anything to do with the Asura of the Vedic, Brahmamic and Epic Literature as described above? The evidence at our disposal will prove that the present day Asur are the descendants of the Vedic Asura. We may trace the movement of the Asura from the Indus Valley to other parts of India in the Post-Vedic period. Those Asura who refused to be absorbed have had to traverse many lands in order to maintain their freedom. Rigvedic hymns find the Asur at the mouth of the Indus. The Vedic struggle drove the Asura from the Indus Valley. From the Indus Valley the Asura moved towards the north-west. However, the Asura attempt to reach the north-west portion of the country by the tributaries of the Indus had failed. Of course, 'the Nagas who were the spearhead and backbone of the Asura people in India had ruled for sometime in Goshringa in Khotan. The massacre at Taxila known as Sarpa Yagna*, snake sacrifice was a belated clearing up of the Asura descendants in the north by the Aryans. With the down-fall of the Nagas ended the organised supremacy of the Asura in India. The remnants of the Nagas who once ruled Goshringa had to seek shelter in places still bearing their name, e.g. Nagpur, Chotanagpur where they were completely absorbed in the Dasab aborigines in abounding woods, mountain fastnessess and desolate regions of the jungles of Assam, of Chotanagpur and of the Vindhya Range. The Budhist, Jain, Epic and Pauranic Literatures trace their course when they spread from the Indus Valley to the other parts of India. The Asura expansion southwards to Ceylon

*सर्पा यज्ञः
attained an epoch of greatness long before the toiling Indo-Aryan hordes by land in the Ramayana met their peninsular outposts under the command of Khara and Dushana and outwitted them with their Dāsa allies, the ‘nose-less’ aborigines, the ugly men ‘Vānara’ looking like monkeys and bears. The story ends with the Indo-Aryan conquest of the last Asura stronghold in Ceylon. Thereafter the vanquished Asura lose their identity among the Dasa. Dr. A. C. Haddon, University Reader in Ethnology, Cambridge, is of the opinion that in the Mundari vocabulary there are numerous undoubted and probable Sanskrit words and it has been suggested that ‘the civilized Asur of Munda tradition may be the pre-Aryan Asura who contested the valley of the Five Rivers, of the Ganges and Jamna against the Aryan immigrants, as related in the Rigveda and that they spoke an early form of Sanskrit or an allied language. According to this view, the Asura were a primitive leucoderm people who absorbed an indigenous meloderm race (the Nishād of ancient Sanskrit Literature) and developed a civilization of their own. Being finally worsted by the Aryans, a section retreated to Chotanagpur and were finally overpowered and absorbed by intrusive, short statured Pre-Dravidian hordes coming from the south. From the above account we get sufficient indications that the Asura migrated from the Indus Valley to Chotanagpur.

We come across a number of references in the Rigveda describing the Asura as great builders. They made fortified places called Pur. The Asur sculpture and architecture had their symbols also. Sarat Chandra Roy during his field studies on the Asur of Ranchi in the twenties of this century had come across certain remains of the Asur which indicate that the inhabitants of this area had attained a degree of civilisation which has remained a standing wonder. There is a garh of an Asur Raja at village Bhelwādāg at a distance of 4 miles to the south-west of Khunti which is the present subdivisional headquarters. Similarly at village Bichna 6 miles
from Khunti there are remnants of an *Asur garh*. A stone hammer head with a shaft hole and a four legged low stool were found during excavations. In the villages of Lupundi, Digri, Ridari and Saridhkel, there are remnants of ancient buildings. No such archaeological remnants are come across having connection with any of the aboriginal tribes in India. These archaeological evidences indicate in clear terms that the Asur occupied this region even before the Munda came here. But the main important difference between the Indus Valley finds on the one hand and those of Chotanagpur and the south Indian pre-historic finds on the other have led Roy to think that ‘the ancient Asura of India had more than one main division and these had developed important differences in their respective cultures, in their respective environments and in the course of their respective social and economic history’’. This fact has already been corroborated in the above account of the Asura having several divisions which need not be repeated here. Though the archaeological finds in Ranchi district alone may not be called as conclusive evidence to prove that the Asur of Netarhat belonged to one of the divisions of the Indus Valley Asura but the same still provide very very important evidence in this controversy. Surprisingly enough the Asur of Netarhat still claim descent from the ancient Asura.

But how did the Munda begin to call the iron-smelters of Ranchi district as Asur? Dr. Reuben, Professor of Sanskrit in the Ankara University who had studied this problem more elaborately has mentioned in the conclusion to his *Eisenschmiede und Damonen* in Indien that ‘old buildings of the Asur, because of the similarity of names were taken as Asura by the Arya, or not first by the Arya, but by the Munda people of the old Gangetic civilisation. One has to note, however, how the Munda people of today indentify the Asur with demons in their Asur myths. Further they say that they found the Asur in the country before they them- selves came, but that is difficult to combine with the idea that
they had learnt the term Asur as ‘demon’ from the Arya and used it for the Asur who received the name Asur only by this way. Verrier Elvin has tried to interpret the implacable enmity between the gods and the Asura. The Asura of Sanskrit mythology held the very place which tradition assigns to the blacksmith all over the world. The Deva like fairies and spirits of Europe, belong to the Age of Stone. The Asura like the blacksmith, is the new, disturbing, hostile bringer of the Age of Iron. Though he does not venture to give a more certain answer for the solution of the problem for which there is the most scanty evidence, still he thinks that there are at least hints and indications that the modern Asur are linked with whatever metal working tribes which are represented age-old by the Asura. He could have got good support from Dr. Reuben, who being inclined to the view that the traditions of the present day Asur appear to connect them with the Asura of Hindu mythology, could find some difficulty in connecting the Asura of Sanskrit Literature with iron and iron-smelting. But Dr. Hutton is of the view that ‘the Asura of Sanskrit Literature were a pre-Aryan people with magical powers and a practical knowledge of the working of metals’. The controversy can be set at rest if the evidence both subjective and objective is forthcoming to attribute iron or metal-smelting to the Asura of Sanskrit Literature.

So far as subjective evidence is concerned, it is available in abundance in the Vedic and Post-Vedic Literature in which iron or metal-smelting is described as Asur Vidya, science or technology of the Asura. As mentioned by Verrier Elvin in the Story of Tata Steel, ‘Iron was certainly known in Vedic times’ and the Asura of the Indus Valley Civilisation were iron-smelters. In the Mahabharat it was Mayadānava who constructed flooring of the palace of the Pandavas which appeared deceitful to Duryodhana who lifted his garments to
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prevent them being wet while walking on this flooring which
had a close resemblance to water. As regards the objective
evidence, mention may be made about a place called Ghasi
which is situated at a distance of 24 miles from the present
town of Azimgarh in Uttar Pradesh. Here are still pointed
out the remains of a large mud fort which local legends
attribute to the Asur. In Azimgarh district there still exist
traces of a large excavation which seems to have once connec-
ted the Koonwar and Munghi rivers and is still known by the
name of Asureen.

Traditions regarding a powerful ruler known as Bānasur
are met with over greater part of northern India from U. P.
to Bihar, North Bengal and Assam, and remains at numerous
places are ascribed to him. Village Masar in Shahabad
district is reputed to be the residence of Bānasur whose
daughter Okhā was married to Aniruddha, the grandson of
Krishna. On the west side of Masar is a pretty considerable
ruin of bricks extending perhaps fifty yards each way and in
the centre rising to a considerable height and said to have been
erected by Bānasur. Bānasur lived very long ago and after
him the country was subject to the Cheros, a chief of which
tribe resided in this place. There are two old tanks one to
the south and a larger one to the east of Bānasur's house.
Along the south side of this lake is a long heap of ruins which,
the local people, say, has been occupied by various small
temples ever since the time of Bānasur, rebuilt from the ruins
by various sects, and this account seems abundantly just.

At village Bakri which is situated at a distance of three
miles from the present district head quarters at Arrah, there
is a small elevated piece of ground said to have been the resi-
dence of another famous Asur named Bakāsur. A very in-
teresting legend is woven round this famous personality of the
Asur tribe: Daily food of this powerful Asur was one human
being, and the victim was being supplied alternately by the
residents of Bakri and Arrah. Bhim, one of the Pândawas killed Bakãsur at Bakri and dragged his body to Arrah to show it to the people. 'In whatever way this legend may have been written, it is not of modern date, as it is found in a much more complete form in the Mahabharat, that Great Epic of India. It is, therefore, at least as old as the Christian Era and at the period of Hwen Thsang's visit in the 7th century it must have been one of the time honoured legends of antiquity. Hwen Thsang has described Bakãsur as the 'man eating demon of the wilderness' in his "Travels in India". In Bhagalpur district there is a small stream called Asurin. Many sites in the hilly parts of south Bihar are associated in tradition with the Ancient Asura. Here we have also the tradition of their gigantic bones found in the fossilised condition which are called Asur-hâr (bones of the Asura) by the local people.

Coming nearer to Chotanagpur we have records to show the traces of the Asura civilisation in Gaya and Patna districts in Bihar. Gayâ Mâhâtmya mentions about 'a great Asura called Gayasura who performed penance for a thousand years at Gaya'. The name of the town of Gaya is a standing memory to the member of that mighty race of the Asura. We come across the most significant remnants of the Asura civilisation at Râjgrih. The greatest Magadha King Jarâsandha ruled here who was also an Asura. His fight against Krishna of Mathurâ is surely a historical fact. His town was Girivraja, the Indian "Troy". 'The 30-mile-long cyclopean stone walls of this town are still existing. They are one of the most impressive monuments, a quite unique ruin, the important point of connection between archaeology and epic literature. India is waiting for the man who will excavate the place." Here also there is a throne of Jarâsandha which is as old as fifth century B.C. This throne or Baitihak of Jarâsandha was constructed with stones from the quarry.
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nearby which later on was converted into a Budhist cave known as Vaibhara Cave which was subsequently lined with a brick wall in the lower portion. 'This is a specimen of an Asura building which is at least two hundred fifty years older than Asoka. It is true that the stones are not dressed, but they are fitted together with great care and ingenuity and the skill of the builder has been proved by the stability of its structure which is still perfectly sound after the lapse of twenty three centuries'. Over and above the throne, 'there was a very good old road called Asurin between village Singhual in Nawadha Subdivision and Rājgrih leading to the residence of the noble king Jarāsandha. It had a run in a perfect straight line and was also hundred and fifty feet wide'. In Ranchi we come across numerous remnants of the Asura civilisation scattered all over the district. Sarat Chandra Roy thinks that 'the finds of urns, copper and metal ornaments and terracota from excavations of the Asur graveyards in Khunti subdivision resemble to those of the* Mohan-jo-daro finds'. The whole evidence shown above clearly goes to prove that the present day Asur of Netarhat plateau have had some links with the Asura of Sanskrit Literature.

II

The popular belief so widely prevalent is that the Asur tribe is a branch of the Munda. This appears to be untenable for certain important reasons. Determination of the racial origin or affinities of the tribal communities of India is one of the most complicated tasks that has had to be faced by the Indian Anthropologists. The task becomes much more difficult when one tries to determine the ethnic stock to which the Asur belong. The Anthropologists and the Ethnologists in India have described the Asur as a branch of the famous

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*Indus Valley Civilisation is the civilisation of the Asuras who invaded the Vedic Aryans in the region of the Indian basin and remained there as conquerors for a few centuries.—Paranjape, V. G.—Asura Domination in Rigvedic India.
Munda tribe of Ranchi. Dalton calls it 'a branch of the Munda family living almost entirely by iron-smelting who strange to say, like the fallen angels...... are commonly designated Asuras, infidels, and have taken quite kindly to the name'\textsuperscript{22}. Mr. Ball who was with the Geological Survey of India was 'chiefly struck in Palamau by the iron work of Agharias (Asur) whom he considered to belong to the Munda family of the aborigines'\textsuperscript{23}. Sir G.A. Grierson has mentioned in his famous Linguistic Survey of India that 'the Asuri Grammar so agrees with the Santhali and Mundari that there is no philological reason for separating the Asur from the Munda tribe. They believe in a god whom they apparently identify with Sing Bonga, the Sun and their religion is, so far as we know, of the common Munda character. We are not, however, in this place concerned with their origin. So far as philology is concerned, they are a Munda tribe pure and simple'\textsuperscript{24}. Sarat Chandra Roy has mentioned in his paper, the Asur-Ancient and Modern that 'except their name and iron-smelting, they (the Asur) hardly differ from any other Munda tribe...... It may be reasonably inferred that the present day Asur are but a tribe of the Munda or Kol stock who adopted the characteristic occupation of the ancient Asuras and with it the tribal name'\textsuperscript{25}. Sir M.G. Hallet has given the following description of the Asur in the Ranchi District Gazetteer.

'The Asurs, a small non-Aryan tribe, are found in the north-west of the District and live almost entirely by iron-smelting. They also practise a form of cultivation akin to to jhuming on the Pats or level hill tops. Extremely little is known about the origin of this tribe. Colonel Dalton was inclined to connect these with the Asurs who, according to Munda traditions, were destroyed by Sing Bonga, and it has been conjectured that they are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the plateau, who were driven out by
the Mudas and of whom the only traces now to be found are a few scattered tumuli and occasional stone or copper celts. Another conjecture is that they are a branch of the Mudas, who like the Turis, split off from the rest of the tribe on account of their profession. Whichever theory is correct, it is certain that the Asurs resemble the Mudas both in appearance and language and like them are divided into exogamous, totemic septs...... At the census of 1911 there were 3,383 Asurs in the district, of whom 284 were classified as Hindus. The Agarias, who number only 250 persons, are probably akin to and perhaps a sub-caste of the Asurs.26

And lastly, Rev. John Hoffmann, S.J. in his famous Encyclopaedia Mundarica has expressed his opinion that 'in view of the beliefs and practices of the Asur and philological similarities in the language spoken by them, the Asur seem to be one of the cut off branches of the Munda race carrying on a struggle for life that is foredoomed to failure and must needs lead to extinction which is now imminent for them'.27 Against this heavy evidence one would find it very difficult to strike a different chord to assert that the Asur are a different tribe and quite different and distinct from the Munda. There is, however, evidence to prove that the Asur have no ethnic relation with the Munda. This is detailed below.

Dr. Reuben finds that the Asur represent a cultural stratum different from that of the Munda and other aboriginal 'Kolarian' or Proto-Austroloid Tribes as the Birhor, Baiga, etc.28 Risley who supervised the census of 1891 thinks that 'they (the Asur) are a remnant of a race of the earlier settlers who are driven out by the Mudas'.29 Verrier Elwin suggests that 'the Agaria or Asur are descendants of a tribe which is represented by the Sanskrit literature and it is possible that this ancient Asur tribe was invaded by the Munda rallying under the standard of their deity Sing Bonga, and was driven to the very border of Bihar'.30 From there the Asur spread west and north through Surguja and Udaipur, Koreo and the north
of Bilaspur, a weaker branch filtering down to Raipur, until in the Maikal Hills they found a congenial home and a plentiful supply of iron.

Before I proceed further to disapprove the theory that the Asur was one of the branches of the Munda race, I would like to mention here about a mythological story known as Asur Kahani summary of which has been reproduced elsewhere in the book. This legend is still being heard both among the Asur and the Munda, of course with certain variations here and there. It relates to the causes leading to the destruction of the Asur and the manner in which it was effected by Sing Bonga who adopted the appearance of an itch-covered youth called Ksrakora.

It is difficult to offer any possible conjecture regarding the time and place* in which this legend arose. The Munda themselves can throw absolutely no light on the subject. Looking to the archaeological finds in the excavations in Khunti subdivision of Ranchi district as referred to by Roy, it can be inferred that the struggle between the Asur and the Munda did not take place in the Netarhat plateau, but in the Khunti subdivision from which they have been ousted and driven out to find the habitate in the mountain fastnesses of this plateau. The struggle must have taken place at the time of arrival of the Munda in Chotanagpur from the Gangetic plains. According to Munda tradition, 'Raja Phani Mukut's foster brother of the Munda race had a son called Setea. It was the oldest of the eight sons of Setea who established the village of Khunti. The time when the Munda came to Chotanagpur may be estimated sometime in the fifth century A.D.'

*In one of the versions of the Asur Legend, name of the place where the struggle between the Munda and the Asur took place is mentioned. It is Ekasi Piri and Terasi Badi, meaning eighty-one high fields and eighty-three terraced fields. Geographically both places are to the south-east of village Tupudana in Ranchi district—Encyclopaedia Mundarica—page 1281.
very large dimensions unearthed in this parts are pointed out as having belonged to the buildings of the Asur who had their forts in this region.

The bloody struggle that has taken place between the Asur and the Munda as referred to in the above legend is in itself sufficiently indicative of the fact that the Asur cannot be a branch of the Munda. The legend also does not allow to infer either any racial connection nor any political interdependence between the Asur and the Munda. The legend shows clearly the victory of the sun-cult over the religious system found to be prevalent among the Asur. In the legend, the Munda are conceived as natural proteges of Sing Bonga and perceptibly under the influence of Hinduism. When Sing Bonga comes to the earth flying a golden hawk, it reminds us that he must be none else than Lord Vishnu who has played a prominent part in the struggle between the Devas and the Asuras always helping the former. Sing Bonga or the Sun-God is one of the forms of Lord Vishnu as can be seen from the following verses containing some of his one thousand names:

*Adityo Jyotiradityah Sahishnurgati sattamh Vihaaya Sagatirjyotih Suruchirhut bhug Vibhuh Ravir Virochanah Sooryah Savita Ravilochanah.*

The Asur unlike the Munda seem to have refused to come under the influence of Hinduism which is evident from the above legend. Surprisingly enough there is something noteworthy in the inherent trait of the Asur which keeps them aloof from the impact of any outside influence. In the Netarhat plateau, there are other tribes like the Oraon and the Munda living side by side the Asur who have found solace in Christianity and consequently discarded their tribal religion.

*श्रद्धावर्गित सत्तमः॥
विहाय सगतिज्योतिः सुरुचिहृद भुग विभुह॥
रविर विरोचनः सूरिः सविता रवि लोचनः॥
due to preaching of the Christian missionaries. But the Asur, still refuse to be proselytised at the hands of these missionaries who have still to find out any specific reasons as to why they fail in the mission. This noteworthy trait of the Asur also distinguishes them from the Munda as well as other tribes.

From the archaeological finds in the Khunti subdivision which is the Munda country in the real sense of the term, it can be conclusively stated that a race far more advanced in material culture was once living and ruling there before the Munda came on the scene. Examination of the human remains found in the old Asur graveyards will no doubt decide the point. The Munda when they came first in Chotanagpur were over-awed with the might of the Asur who were in occupation of the country. Roy tells how the Munda described the old Asur giants an ‘a pundi or white people of enormous stature, strength and ability, who could in the course of one night walk a hundred miles with joint strides to attend dances at distant villages and walk back to their own homes before dawn’.

This belief of the Munda supports the fact that the Asur were a distinct people from the former.

A question would arise whether the above fact can further be corroborated with anthropological measurements of the Munda and the Asur. Such measurements may be available in respect of the Munda, but no anthropologist has yet ventured to study the Asur to determine its race with the help of anthropometry. It is a matter of gratification that the Anthropological Survey of India has taken up this matter in hand recently, but it will take time to have data available for the above purpose. But we can get much support in this matter with the help of the new technique that has been adopted by anthropologists to test the interrelation of racial groups as based on the distribution of ‘blood groups’. Macfarlane has tested bloods from the Munda and Sarkar did the same in respect of certain aboriginal tribes of Chotanagpur.
The following table will indicate* blood group frequencies different tribes and their agreement with Bernstein's theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>D/\alpha</th>
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<tr>
<td>Asur</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
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<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be obvious from the above table that the Asur are quite distinct from the other tribes of Chotanagpur and particularly the Munda. Of course, data comprising a small sample may not give a correct picture of the total population, but the trend is indicative. Blood group B is conspicuously absent among the Asur, whereas it occurs in highest frequency among the other tribes, excepting the Munda in whom it occurs nearly equally to A and O. Among the Asur, blood group A is highest in frequency which is not so among others.

Now let us examine whether the philological similarities between the languages spoken by the Asur and the Munda would alone establish ethnic relations between the two. The Asur speak the Asuri language which is one of the 14 Mundari dialects as recorded in the Linguistic Survey of India. The pre-Aryan inhabitants of the Gangetic provinces had among them primitive races like the Chero, the Kherwar, the Kolarian tribes and some others. The Dravidian dialects spoken by the Oraon and the Paharia in the Rajmahal hills appear to be of comparatively recent introduction while the Kolarian or Munda language is the only pre-Aryan tongue now spoken in Bihar and Bengal. Sir G.A. Grierson has mentioned Kherwari, that is the language spoken by the Kherwar tribe in Bihar.

*From Races and Cultures of India—Majumdar, D.N.*
which is found to be spoken by about eleven-twelfths of all the Munda, in varying dialects. Estimated speakers from among the various tribes at the census of 1901 were shown in the Linguistic Survey as follows —

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of dialect</th>
<th>Estimated speakers</th>
<th>Population in 1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Santhali</td>
<td>16,14,822</td>
<td>17,95,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mundari</td>
<td>4,06,524</td>
<td>4,60,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bhumij</td>
<td>79,079</td>
<td>1,11,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Kora</td>
<td>8,949</td>
<td>23,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Birhor</td>
<td>1,234</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ho</td>
<td>3,83,126</td>
<td>3,71,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Turi</td>
<td>3,727</td>
<td>3,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Asuri</td>
<td>19,641</td>
<td>4,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Korwa</td>
<td>20,227</td>
<td>16,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Kurku</td>
<td>1,11,684</td>
<td>87,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Kharia</td>
<td>72,172</td>
<td>82,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Juang</td>
<td>15,697</td>
<td>10,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Savora</td>
<td>1,02,039</td>
<td>1,57,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Gadaba</td>
<td>35,833</td>
<td>37,230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28,74,753 31,64,036

The following table will indicate the relationship of the different Kherwari dialects.

**KHERWARI**

| Santali | Karmali | Mahli Munda | Bhumij | Birhor | Kora | Ho | Turi | Asur | Korwa |

It will appear from the above that the most important form of Kherwari is Santali. It has two slightly different sub-tribes, Karmali and Mahli which connect Santali with Koi dialects proper, namely Mundari, Bhumij, Birhor, Kora, and
Ho. Kol dialects are those Munda dialects, which use the word *Hor* or similar other word for ‘man’. ‘The remaining dialects, Turi, Asuri and Korwa are more closely related to Mundari than to Santali. In some characteristics, however, they agree with the latter dialect as against the former. Again Turi is more closely related to Mundari than are Asuri and Korwa. Korwa, on the other hand, may be considered as the link connecting Kherwari with Kharia and the western and southern Munda dialects’

There are many Oraon villages in Chutia Nagpur in which the Oraon language is quite lost, but the inhabitants nevertheless speak two tongues Munda and Hindi. It is highly probable that other tribes speaking the Munda language, have acquired it, losing their own. Dalton has observed that ‘there is so much difference in character, physical traits and customs between the Santal and the Singhbhum Ho that I should not be surprised to find they were of distinct origin, though speaking the same language and having a common faith’. The Asur being a small tribe scattered over a vast area and having communication with the principal Munda tribe of the region for the purpose of sale of iron articles required by the latter for agricultural and domestic purposes in return of cash or kind might have lost their own Asuri language and adopted the Mundari dialect.

It is quite common to see peoples of totally different ethnic origins speaking the same language. For example, the Negroes in the United States of America who all speak English or the Negroes in Haiti who all speak French. The Baltis, are a people allied to the Kashmiris—Aryans, but they speak a form of Tibetan. It is only too common in the world for a people to change its language and take up another. ‘Hence to a question whether language means race, the reply is emphatically ‘No’’. In view of this fact, the Asur cannot be said to be of Munda stock simply because they speak a Mundari dialect. One will be tempted to make a query as to what are the circumstances which lead a people, big or small, to
abandon its own language and take up another. Circumstances differ in different areas and it is decided by what has been called ‘the Compulsion of History’. Large masses of the present day Indian people in different parts of the country at one time spoke non-Aryan languages like the Dravidian, Austric and Sino-Tibetan. But now they speak different forms of the New Indo-Aryan language. In the transitional stage, when a people passes from one language to another, they are bi-lingual. Thus there are many Santhals who do not know Santali any more, but speak either some Bihari dialect or Bengali or Oriya. There are other Santals, living slightly more in the interior, who speak both, their mother-tongue or some contiguous Aryan language, and finally in the far interior there are others who speak only Santali. After all it is a question of time and cultural and economic pressure which helps to stamp out the earlier language.

Resemblance of affinities if any between the Asur and the Munda would be better understood if we take the case of the Agaria and the Gond in Madhya Pradesh. Russel thought the Agaria to be an offshoot of the Gond tribe. In 1891, Sir B. Robertson classified the Agaria among the ‘Tribes allied to Gonds’. P.N. Bose, then Deputy Superintendent of the Geological Survey of India, wrote in 1887 to say that ‘the furnaces are worked by a class of Gonds who style themselves Agarias and Pardhans. They almost invariably speak the Gondi language.....Though the Agaria have the same customs and beliefs as the Gond, often the same spots, Verrier Elvin seems to be perfectly justified to think that ‘the Agaria are something more than a branch or collection of branches, of another tribe or tribes’\textsuperscript{137}. The same analogy applies to the Asur which leads us to believe that the tribe is quite distinct from the Munda inspite of the former’s resemblances and affinities with the latter.

Similarities in socio-religious ceremonies, and totemic clans, existence of youth’s dormitories, rules of inheritance
and other practices would lead one to link the Asur with the Munda. But these are also met with among the other aborigines and to a great extent, and even among the Sadans of Chotanagpur. On the apparent similarities in the socio-religious practices, we also find some fundamental differences in them when we compare certain important practices adopted by the Asur for marriage and disposal of their dead. The Munda cremate their dead, but of course, under the influence of Christianity they are now giving up this practice. But the Asur always bury their dead. The Asur bury along with the dead some coins and ornaments in a jug with their dead. The Asur never open their graves and collect bones like the Munda who keep them under the stone-slabs with an important ceremony called Jan-topa. Another important difference is found in kinship ties among the Munda and the Asur. Even though relationship with cousins, both parallel is unknown to the Asur, a fact which contrasts sharply with the very wide prevalence of cross cousin marriages among the neighbouring tribes of the region. There is a prominent belief among the Asur that if a first born in a family is a female child, it will be a most welcome arrival, as she would bring prosperity and long life to the family. Such beliefs should be considered important, because they reveal certain fundamental ideas regarding the life and nature, and sentiments attaching to these ideas in the Asur’s mind. All this account would prove the fact that the Asur is not a branch of the Munda tribe, but a distinct tribe in itself having the historical connections with the Asura of the ancient Indian Literature.

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CHAPTER 2.
MATERIAL CULTURE.

The Asur villages stand on a flat-topped upland in the Netarhat plateau, locally known by the Asur as 'Pat'. They are situated away from the principal thoroughfares. Unlike the Munda or Ho villages, huge trees and luxuriant jungle do not obscure the Asur houses from sight. The houses are scattered haphazardly. This may be due to a multiplication of the families in the course of time. In the centre of the Asur village there is an Akhara or dancing arena which is on an elevated piece of land under the shade of a tree or trees, and the number of large stone slabs at the roots of these trees serve as seats for dancers and spectators. The Akhara is also the usual venue for public meetings and also for regular sittings of the village council. In the yough dormitory known as Giti-Ora which overlooks the Akhara the bachelors of the village sleep at night and lounge during the day.

The popular belief is that the Asur are primitive and most backward among the tribes in Chotonagpur. My contacts with them never allowed me to entertain this belief. In fact the Asur have the heritage of a remarkable civilisation as mentioned in the first chapter. They were great builders and that fact is also reflected in the construction of their houses which are well-built, durable and quite spacious. Though the Asur are poor, their houses are at least not indicative of that fact. An average house consists of three parts, one of which is a sleeping apartment, one a kitchen and the third a cattle-shed. If an Asur is very poor, his house comprises a small room which is used for kitchen as well as for sleeping purposes. The average built-up area of a house is 30 ft. long and 20 ft. broad with a height of about 15 ft.
It has a verandah on the three sides which is covered. The house has, however, only one door, but no windows. The houses are built of mud walls with heavy rafters on the roof which is thatched with earthen tiles.

The tribes living in Chotanagpur have their huts or houses ordinarily thatched with paddy straw or a kind of grass, locally known as Khar. Of course, we find now-a-days the Oraon, Munda and some other tribes also making use of the earthen tiles on the roof of their houses. This has been possible in the tribal villages where the potters are available for preparation of the tiles. The Asur employed their inherent art of building in the preparation of the tiles which were needed to make a long lasting roof. For that they do not find the potter’s wheel absolutely necessary, but they prepare them by a simpler method using a half round piece of wood about two and a half feet long having a smaller diameter at one end. Though the process of tile making with the piece of wood may be slow, still the Asur could prepare quite big-sized tiles and even thicker than the ordinary ones made on the wheel by the potter. It was convenient and safe for the Asur to have their houses covered with the tiles. As iron-smelters, they have had to play with fire. Fire was required to be kept burning continuously for about fifteen hours in their furnaces to smelt iron which would provide them two meals on its sale. These furnaces being sometimes in vicinity of human habitation, there was always a danger of accidental fire which would burn the houses to ashes if they were covered at all with straw or grass. It was also convenient to burn the tiles, because charcoal and other fuel were readily available.

We come across a number of complaints from the Birhor, Parhaiya or Mal Paharia when they are settled in colonies under a rehabilitation programme for the nomadic tribes. The houses in such colonies have the roof thatched with the
Though the Asur are considered to be most backward, their houses at least are not indicative of that. They are all well-built, durable and spacious. The walls are built of mud with a roof thatched with earthen tiles made by them on a round piece of wood. It is far superior to the leaf hut of a Birhor or the flimsy structure of a Parahaiya. It however cannot be compared with that of a Santal or Ho which is most lovely and artistic. Surroundings in an Asur village are not kept clean.
Though the houses of the Aser are well-built, they are not kept in good repair.
earthen tiles. The main complaint of these settlers is that they feel severe cold in these houses during winter as the tiles allow free access of air. As they have nothing much by way of covering, they say, they feel quite uncomfortable in these houses. They assert that their flimsy structures of twigs and grass kept them fairly warm. The Asur living at an altitude of more than 3,000 feet where the temperature lowers down almost to a freezing point in winter would have found it more convenient to cover the houses with grass or straw in order to keep themselves warmer. But their ancient art of house building prevented them from resorting to such flimsy structures as have been the rule with the other neighbouring tribes. Iron-smelting, as an economic pursuit, has made it necessary for them to use tiles for their roofs.

The Asur carefully select a site before building a house on it. His Oraon neighbour on this plateau puts a few grains of rice on the intended site. Next morning he returns and if he finds that rice has disappeared, having been eaten by white-ants or birds, he abandons the site as ill-omened; if it is untouched he begins to build. Similar is the practice adopted by the Asur. Instead of keeping rice grains at one place, he puts down four small heaps of rice on the four corners of the proposed house site. If any one is reduced, he would try to find out another. It is a strong belief among the Asur that if a house is constructed on such a site, the family would not be happy.

Thutha Asur of Sakhuapani said, "I built my house two years before, when I was selected as one of the beneficiaries under the Rural Housing Programme. Before construction was started, I took special care to see whether the site on which I intended to build the house was proper or not. I placed small heaps of husked rice on four corners of the proposed site one evening. When I examined them in the next morning, the same were found all in tact. I was satisfied that the site was
good and there would be no trouble if the house was built here. My house is now complete and I am happy to live therein."

"Lothe Asur of village Bhathipat selected a site for building his house. He placed rice on the four corners of the site one evening. To his surprise he noticed in the next morning that a heap from one of the corners had vanished. Taking it to be unexplainable accident, he placed rice again, but at a little distance from the corner from which rice had vanished the day before. Rice vanished again from the said corner. He made a third effort, but the result was the same. Being disgusted at the unfavourable indication, he became adamant to build the house on the same site ignoring all consequences that would follow inspite of strict warnings from his fellow villagers. But it was not too late for him to pay heavily for his unwise step. When construction was going on and walls were half done, one of them collapsed actually killing Lothe Asur."

Bhikha Asur of village Nawatoli said, "I am a very unhappy man now-a-days for which I myself am to be blamed. Some six or seven years back, I built a house which seemed to be the cause of all my unhappiness. I ignored the warning when rice which I had kept at the site had disappeared. I built the house and started living therein. After six months, my daughter died and within six months my wife Kandari also died. After sometime, I brought Lahri as my second wife. She gave birth to a male child who died soon. She also followed her son shortly. Now I am alone. I am convinced that the cause of this misfortune is the house. I intend to demolish it and build a new one on a proper site."

When an Asur builds a house, he expects help in construction, particularly of the roof from his co-villagers. It is almost an obligation on the individual villagers to render it without hesitation. They, of course, will expect a hearty drink
of rice beer and also *chakhni*. *Chakhni* is any thing eatable in a very small quantity which is usually prepared by mixing meat and rice.

Makdu Asur of village Nawatoli said, "I built a house in March-April 1961. My three grown-up sons, my wife and myself raised the walls. I asked the fellow villagers to help me in placing the roof over the walls. All came unfailingly and within a short time my house was ready. I entertained them with rice-beer for which four big pots were kept ready beforehand. In order to add taste to the drink, I had prepared *chakhni* by killing a pig. We all enjoyed the feast. There were a few persons among the villagers who were quite poor. I thought to pay something more to them as they were living hand to mouth. I paid some Gondali* and Madua* for their labour."

Gandua Asur and Nondan Asur of village Nawatoli said, "When we two brothers raised the walls for our house we invited the fellow villagers to help us in placing the roof. They came and did their job. They felt satisfied with a small pot of rice-beer which we could prepare. They accepted it willingly knowing fully well that we could not afford more."

Though the houses of the Asur are well-built, they do not compare favourably with the houses of the Ho of Singhbhum or the Santhal of Santhal Parganas which are beautiful and artistic. The houses of the Asur are not kept in good repair and the surroundings are not kept clean. Fire in the kitchen serves several purposes at a time. It is used for cooking meals, it lights up the room at night and keeps the family members warm when they sleep around it in winter.

There is no furniture worth the name in an Asur house. A few mats woven from date-palm leaves by women form the only beds. A group of women in the afternoon if their presence

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*Millet grown on an upland.*
is not required in the fields, go to nearby forests to collect date-palm leaves. They weave mats in their leisure hours, when young girls are also taught how to weave them. There is a bamboo suspended on both ends from the roof horizontally inside the room close by the hearth on which are kept sheaves of maize. Fumigation by smoke does not allow the maize grains to rust and be spoiled by insects. The sheaves thus preserved are used for seeds. There are also two or three wooden pegs driven in the walls on which are kept some articles along with a few clothes. In a corner we find one or two bundles (moras) made of paddy straw woven into ropes in which is preserved paddy which is used both for seeds as well as for consumption. Sticks and umbrellas are inserted in the roof and are taken out when the Asur go to visit their friends in the neighbouring villages or to a weekly market. In the house of a well-to-do Asur, a Khatia or string bed-stead and a Manchi or sitting string stool may be found. Brass utensils such as tharis and chipnis (plates) dubhas (cups) and lotas (jugs) are purchased by those who can afford to do so. The poor families rest content with the earthen pots made by the local potter (Kumhar) such as Ghara, a vessel used for drawing and storing water for drinking and the Chuka for the same purpose as the lota. Though the industry of iron-smelting is dead, quite a good number of the Asur families have preserved their instruments and tools like the pair of bellows, pincers and hammers which are stored in a separate room if available along with the agricultural implements. The bellows and the other tools are used in preparing ploughshares and small other iron articles in smithies in their court yards from iron purchased from a weekly market. To this extent, the Asur are self-sufficient in their requirements.

The personal appearance of the Asur is quite as distinctive as that of the Santhal, Ho or Oraon. However, in build the Asur are stout and muscular and of medium stature. He has high cheek bones and broad nose sometimes sunken at the
Asur youth

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
An Asur couple

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
Asur woman with her baby
(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
Asur woman with her babies

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
root. The colour of the skin of the Asur is a tawny brown often a shade approaching chocolate brown. Both men and women when young may be described as comely and their cheerful laughing countenances are quite pleasing. The Asur woman has not that handsome physique as that of a Ho woman who also has charming gait and admirable disposition. Of course, the arduous task in the fields and drudgery in the house have proved a blessing to the Asur woman in maintaining her sturdy figure. The best qualities of the Asur are his keen sense of self-respect, his love of truth, honesty and straight-forwardness; his worst qualities are his inordinate love of the drink and improvidence.

The dress of the Asur is very simple and scanty, the men ordinarily wear lion cloth called botoi and use a piece of cloth as wrapper for the upper portion of the body known as pichouri. Now-a-days they are also found putting on a kurta or shirt and young boys put on shorts. The woman wears a long piece of cloth called paria round her waist allowing a portion of it to pass diagonally over the upper part of the body. Rarely she puts on a blouse at home. Grown-up girls are, however, particular to wear blouses or choli when they have to go to a weekly market or a fair (jatra). Shoes are seldom worn and the head is usually bare. Elderly Asur men put on a piece of cloth on the head and wear it like a pagri.

Both the young men and young women of the Asur tribe are very fond of personal decoration. A young man wears round the waist a sort of belt made of cocoon silk or plaited thread (kardhani) and his hair though not very long is well oiled. Strings of coral or china beads or silver four anna pieces adorn his neck on festival days and sometimes flowers are used to decorate his hair. The Asur women keep their hair clean and glossy by frequently washing it out thoroughly with a fat kind of loam serving as a soap, and then anointing it with oil. They part it in the middle, comb it closely backwards and gather it into a graceful chignon-like knot called supid. This knot is
kept together by a string made of either hair or cotton thread. Its position varies. It is sometimes gathered behind the right ear. The Asur girls deck themselves with bracelets, anklets, earrings and other ornaments of silver, brass or lac and coloured glass. The poorer Asur woman wears a peculiar trinket in the ear, called Tar-Sakon which consists of a role of palm leaf dyed red and set-off with a tinsel or lac. The women also get the upper portion of their ears pierced and wear five or six rings called Kanaosis in them. Some women wear necklaces made of coral beads and small coins. In the fingers of the feet they also wear rings called Dhela.

Tattooing is very popular among the tribes as also among several non-tribal groups in India. Though it is a painful operation, individuals particularly women volunteer themselves to suffer the ordeal. The purpose of tattooing varies sometimes from tribe to tribe. Tattoo marks on women are believed to be necessary among certain tribes as absence of the same is considered sinful. It is also believed that if there is any thing that survives after death it is the tattoo marks. The soul also is identified by these marks. Though there are certain customary beliefs regarding tattooing which the elderly women know, the young girls have a very little idea about their sanctity. It is believed by the Mal Paharia that tattooing has some medical significance too. It keeps the bodily organs healthy and helps them function properly. Small dots of black pigment on the face are supposed to avert an evil eye, because they diminish the beauty. The Maler women are confident that the tattoo marks on the forehead help safe delivery in child-birth. But the most important purpose of tattooing is ornamentation. All this may be true in respect of other tribes in India, but surprisingly enough the Asur are an exception to it. The Asur differ very significantly from the other tribes so far as the necessity of tattooing and belief in it are concerned, which fact is also indicative of their distinct civilisation and culture. Instead of taking it as an ornamentation, tattooing is almost forbidden
Asur girl.
and considered a taboo. It is a strong belief among the Asur that deities and ancestral spirits will be angry if anybody from amongst their community is tattooed and will punish the wrong-doer by causing sickness, sending calamities, etc. They also believe that just as we come to this world without any mark on our body at the time of our birth, we have to restore it in the same form to Him at the time of death as He has made. We have no right to spoil it in any way and if we do, we shall be punished in a number of ways in this world and also in the other world after our death. The Asur boys are subjected to the Spartan treatment of having their arms burnt with a burning wick made of a twisted rag and soaked in oil, the peculiar marks being regarded as a decoration, but the custom is now falling into disuse.

The Asur have not as yet been the victims of disintegration in their economic and social life as in the case with the Oraon, Munda or Ho. Though agricultural operations are pursued individually, cooperation forms even today the salient feature of their daily life. It takes a form of voluntary association, a type of co-partnership by which the economic possibilities are better realised as for example, in hunting and fishing. This association helps at the same time in reducing the monotony and tedium of their daily routine.

In practice, the Asur men enjoy more leisure and one is tempted to call them idlers. The women toil hard from morning till night, gather fuel, clean the houses, collect mahua or other forest produce, go to a distant market for sale or barter, prepare rice beer, carry loads, work for wages and on return fulfil all the marital obligations. Of course, the men have certain busy seasons in the year, when they have to work in the fields, take part in collections of lac and in fishing and hunting. But there is no continuous programme of work for them, though there are plenty of diversions, such as music and dancing, visiting friends and gossiping in somebody’s house in the village. As regards division of labour all
tasks requiring strength and endurance are for the most part done by the men, while those involving patience and monotony are left to the women. In all economic pursuits men lead and women follow.

The basic diet of the Asur consisting of cereals like rice, maize, millets and vegetables and meat is much the same everywhere. They are also fond of pumpkins, brinjals, onions and mushrooms and use wide varieties of wild leafy vegetables, roots, tubers and fruits to supplement the cultivated edibles. Leaves of Koinar, Phutkal, Kalia, Zirhool, Kachnar trees and plants and their flowers and also mahua are added to every meal. Among the roots and tubers, Daru, Pitharu, Gaithi and Kashya are most common. The last two are bitter in taste. In order to remove bitterness of these tubers they are cut into pieces and kept in flowing water in a rivulet or spring for the whole night. In the morning these are boiled and eaten with salt. The Asur have usufructuary right over the mango trees in this area. This right has also been recorded in the records of rights. Under this right they collect mangoes. The mango seeds are put in a net and kept under water for a week or so and when the seeds decompose, the inside kernel is washed in water, dried in the sun and powdered into flour. Amongst fruits, Mahua, Bail, Amla, Karaula, Pyar, Jamun, Gullar, Porho, Tend, Kend, and Bhelwa which are available from time to time also add to their scanty food. Milk is tabooed by the majority of the Asur who in this respect resemble their tribal brethren in other parts of the world. They do not milk their cows, because they think that it would be cruel to deprive the calves of their mothers’ milk which is wholly theirs. Of course, they milk buffaloes, but milk is converted into curd which is relished by them. Sometimes young children are given some milk to drink if they ask for it. If a mother cannot feed her baby, she will give him rice softened in rice beer. The Asur are almost omnivorous in the matter of meat and fish. They eat anything from a rat
The Asur have practically nothing to spread for sleeping except date palm leaf mats. The women collect leaves from the forest and weave mats during their leisure hours. Surplus mats are also taken sometimes to a market for sale. Though the babies in baggy slings prove additional burden to the mothers in the load, still it gives psychological satisfaction that their dear ones are not separated even for a while.
to a cow. They do not, however, kill a cow or bullock for beef, but they have no scruples in eating carrion of these animals. Snakes and reptiles except the king cobra are a delicacy for the Asur. Though almost omnivorous, it cannot be said that they may not be sparing even a cat or a dog. Of course, cats and dogs are also eaten by some tribes in India. The Kukis of Assam relish dog’s meat and the Pamlukes and to some extent Kaikadis in Maharashtra have a special liking for cat’s meat which is a delicacy with them. The Asur have nothing by way of forbidden food, except the animals or birds or fruits which are the totems of the various clans among them. Of course, the Oraon who are well advanced in every respect still enjoy carrion like the Asur, while beef is a strict taboo among the Kharia.

Food is mostly boiled and made into curries, though meat may sometimes be roasted. Maize flour or millet is boiled with occasional addition of vegetables and flavoured with chillies and salt. A porridge of rice or maize flour and a kind of rice bread are popular. Maize or a millet is ground into powder which is mixed with hot water and made into a paste and spread on one leaf of a tree and covered with another and then baked on fire. On a festive occasion like Phagun, this paste is made sweet by adding jaggery to it. Ordinarily the paste is eaten with salt and chillies, vegetables or meat. In the past they rarely used oil in cooking though it is getting popular now-a-days. The main difficulty is that there is not sufficient food to go round.

Eating customs vary from one social group to another which depend in fact upon the availability of food. The elders and senior members, particularly the men folk along with the children, take precedence in society over the women in the matter of partaking food when there is plenty. This custom however, takes another form in a society where food is scanty. Among the Asur who may be said to be half-starved, the old
men get less solid food and they pretend to be contented with liquid food of rice beer. But it is a fact that whatever may be the quantity of cooked food, an Asur mother divides it in equal shares for all the members both young and old in the family. According to convenience they take the food together in the house.

Rice beer and mahua liquor are the two most important drinks of the Asur. Who first produced this drink called rice beer? The story of the creation of the world prevalent among the Ho throws some light on the origin of this important drink. 'Singbonga, the Supreme God of the Ho was offended by his creation, and he created an atmosphere of leaping flames which burnt to death every species of living organism including men. When Singbonga realised the consequences of his fury, he was sorry for what he had done and approached all the lesser spirits to ask them if they know of any living soul. It was Naga Era, the river goddess who said she could bring out two souls she had hidden under the sheet of water if Singbonga would promise not to do them any harm. When that was conceded, Naga Era produced a couple, a brother and a sister, and out of this primaeval pair, Singbonga wanted to repopulate the world. But it was soon discovered that they were not attracted to each other sexually, so what else could the High God do but to teach the couple the preparation of a kind of beer, known to-day as Illi. When they partook of this intoxicating liquor, they forgot their relationship and out of their union came forth the ancestors of man, of the races and castes that people the world'. A similar legend is also found among the Munda. One of the numerous legends about Baranda Bonga relates how Singbonga directed Baranda to teach the art to an old couple on the point of starvation. The Asur too have an interesting story about the creation which also indicates the origin of rice beer as we shall see in a following Chapter. From all these ancient legends it appears that the art of brewing rice beer dates back to a very high antiquity.
The Asur use the root of *Ranu* or *Charpandu* (*Ruellia suffruticosa*) in brewing rice beer. They sometimes add to it quite a good number of other roots and tubers which are more or less poisonous for the purpose of varying the taste of the beer and rendering it more intoxicating. These roots are pounded into a mortar, then dipped into water and the juice is squeezed out. This juice is mixed with rice flour. The dough resulting from this mixture is divided into small quantities and rolled into balls. The balls are put on a straw in a basket and covered with a cloth and kept inside the house for one day. Thereafter they are dried up in the sun till they become quite hard. If anybody does not want to take trouble of preparing these balls, he will purchase the same from a weekly market where they are sold in abundance. For brewing the beer three to ten pounds of rice are parboiled and husked. Then it is cooked. When it is cooked properly, it is taken out and spread out in a thick layer on a mat. Then the balls made of *Ruellia* are crushed and spread over the rice and mixed with it. After that the whole mass is placed in an earthen pot which must be so large that the rice does not fill more than two-thirds of it. The rice is covered inside by Sal leaves so as to keep it from direct contact with the air. In winter fermentation in the pot takes place in four or five days, while in summer it is complete within three days. At that time a light greenish liquid gathers on the surface which is highly intoxicating.

When the fermentation is complete, a certain amount of water is poured on the fermented mass and after a shake or two of the vessel, it is allowed to stand for a few minutes so that the greenish alcoholic liquor mixes well with the water. This mixture is poured out into another pot either through a plaited bamboo strainer or through a layer of clean straw. This is the first class beer which may be offered to only honoured guests. Ordinarily the drink is prepared by pouring water on the brew and turning the mixture by hand, and then a handful is
squeezed out between the two hands in the pot itself. Some more water is thrown on the dregs and left to stand for a while. This is the beer commonly used. The squeezed out pulp is utilised for further fermentation by addition of water. In a similar way the beer is also prepared from gondali, a kind of millet which is harvested earlier than paddy.

Rice beer is considered to be a life-giving juice by the Asur. It is human nature to offer to a protector, well-wisher or the closest relations what is dearest and best. Rice beer being the thing to be craved for by the Asur, becomes the object of such an offering to the supernatural beings and ancestors on several social as well as religious occasions. To understand the social aspect of Asur society, it is necessary to understand the role of rice beer. The Asur are considered to be a co-operative minded people and as observed earlier, they have not been victims of disintegration in their economic or social life. To a great extent it is rice beer that works as a binding force among them. As for example, when an Asur has to build a house, all the co-villagers will extend to him a helping hand. It is considered highly uncivil and unobliging to refuse a request for help in the construction of a house which is supposed to be given without any expectation of payment. Nobody even thinks of any payment either in cash or in kind except the drink of rice beer. The villagers sit together before the work starts and enjoy the drink. Similarly a poor Asur will command help from the villagers in his fields on a small offer of rice beer. All the feasts and festivals become insipid and lose their charm if there is no rice beer to drink. In fact it would simply be impossible to think of these occasions without rice beer.

Rice beer is not an intoxicant. Of course, it becomes extremely intoxicating when a light greenish liquid which gathers on the surface in the pot is taken without mixing it with water. But no Asur can afford such a kind of drink. Unfortunately, a tendency has been growing among the Asur for mahua or
jaggery liquor. Drunkenness from rice beer ordinarily does not make the Asur quarrelsome, but when there is too much of it, they do. Usually the first victim of such drunkenness is the wife.

'Sukhu Asur of village Polpol had too much of drink of rice beer on the occasion of the Sarhul Festival last year. He beat Ratni his wife severely for no fault of her. Wise men of the village, Madva Asur, Pahlu Asur, Birsa Asur and Fagu Asur came to his house and threatened him with punishment if ever he beat his wife in future. Ratni has been spared so far from beating since then.'

'Petla Asur and his brother Sukhu Asur of village Polpol quarrelled seriously among themselves some years ago on the Sarhul Festival when they were dead drunk. In the beginning they abused each other which was followed by exchange of blows among them. Wise men of the village intervened and pacified them. They found out the real cause of such unbrotherly behaviour. The fact was that elder brother was enjoying a bigger plot of agricultural land which was the cause of frequent heart burning and irritation which gave vent when they were in a state of drunkenness.'

'Jata Asur of Sakhuapani asked some money from his father a few days before the Karma Festival to buy a drum (Mandar) to which his elder brother Rasika objected. Anyhow Jata got the money and went with a group of his friends to the weekly market at Katkahi to purchase the drum. When he returned with the drum he was taunted and abused by Rasika, but their father pacified them. Soon the Karma Festival came in when both the brothers drank too much of rice beer. In this state of drunkenness they began to quarrel. Jata gave a severe blow by a stick to Rasika who dropped unconscious, but luckily the injury did not prove to be of a serious nature. In view of mal-adjustment and constant friction between these two brothers, the village people advised them for partition of the family property. Both are separated now. Rasika is passing through hard times, because it has been difficult for him to maintain himself with his small share of the partitioned property.'

It is an admitted fact that intoxication is brought on quickly by mahua or jaggery liquor and persons indulging in such drinks pick up quarrels easily and without any cause.

Soma Asur and Mangra Asur said. "We went to a weekly market at village Tendar which is at a distance of five miles from
our village Ramjharia. Having drunk a good quantity of mahua liquor we started for home in the afternoon in a complete state of intoxication. Soon we began to exchange hot words and came to blows and returned home, each swearing to kill the other. When we regained our senses, we were rebuked by the village people for such unruly behaviour. We simply laughed at our foolishness when we were told by Hudku Asur and Tuiulu Asur who saw us quarrelling for nothing. Quarrel had started between us when Soma asserted that he was better in position and more clever than Mangra which fact the latter was not prepared to accept. We felt ashamed when we were reprimanded by the village people”.

The Asur do not think that there is anything wrong or bad in having a drink. What they abhor is the quarrelsome nature of the individuals in a state of drunkenness. In fact they try to restrain themselves as much as they can from quarrelling. Even in a drunken state they behave most politely. They flare up only when an unpleasant thing is deliberately said to offend them. But it is a fact that mahua or jaggery liquor is ruining the Asur in a number of ways. It causes a severe drain on the pockets and health of the Asur. If this tendency is not checked, it is bound to keep them in a state of backwardness and the conception of a Welfare State will remain a myth so far the Asur are concerned.

The Asur have no specific idea about ceremonial purity in preparation of rice beer which is so very important among the Ho of Singhbhum. Of course, a bath by the Asur woman or a change of sari is a prerequisite when rice beer is to be prepared as an offering to the dead ancestors on three occasions in a year. She is at that time required to keep silent like her counterpart in Singhbhum during its preparation. Of course, the Asur observe a general taboo which is found all over northern India by not lending any beer to neighbours after dusk. The prohibition among the Asur is based perhaps on the fear that the family which lends it or the family who may share it afterwards, may be harmed by witches and sorcerers through the influence of beer,
Like other primitive tribes, the Asur who have taken to agriculture, even today derive much of their subsistence from the produce of the forests and the spoils of the chase. Before the forests were brought under the protective system of administration, every Asur had the right to fodder in the forest and follow the trail of animals, and such was his dexterity in the art of tracking game that he would always come back with a heavy bag. With the disappearance of hunting, many of the customary rites and practices associated with it have disappeared. But the spirit of co-operative activity has not died out, because the uncertainty of the chase as a means of food supply still necessitates the same. To-day the Asur look wistfully to the woods, and when they get permission to hunt which is very rare, they avail themselves of the opportunity with commendable enterprise. Occasionally they slyly enter the protected forests and stealthily carry home their much prized game. But they are easily detected and punished. Thus the possibility of a rich variety of animal food is disappearing rapidly and unless the Asur take to rearing animals for food and poultry breeding on a large scale, it will have an adverse effect upon their health.

The Netarhat plateau provides a negligible scope to the Asur for fishing as there are no rivers or ponds. Still it is resorted to in the rivulets and ditches which are there. Fishing is always done in groups. Men, women and children join in fishing. There is one important fact which requires mention in connection with fishing. Wives accompanying husbands on these fishing excursions and sisters accompanying brothers, do not as a rule assist one another alone, for the whole undertaking is jointly done, and the women help men irrespective of their relationship, though assistance is confined to the clan. Fishing provides great thrill for the Asur.

REFERENCE
1. Majumdar, D.N. (1950) .. The Affairs of a Tribe, pp. 75-76,
CHAPTER 3.
LAND AND LIVELIHOOD.

Beautiful as this land may be, it does not favour the survival of large numbers of people who have no technical skill worth the name and who remain isolated from the main arteries of commerce. Many of the residents of this plateau have not even seen a railway train. Of course, a major automobile highway fringes this land as well as passes through it. Still most of the areas remain inaccessible for want of communications. To gauge correctly the difficulties of travel, distances must be measured in terms of bad roads and intervening rivulets or other obstacles, rather than in terms of miles on a map.

As described earlier, iron-ore is found on this plateau and it used to be smelted by the Asur. In fact it was the principal means of their livelihood for several hundreds of years, "In 1827, 29 furnaces were being worked in this area". But iron-smelting is now a thing of the past. During my visit to Netarhat in December, 1960, I could see only one furnace working at village Ramjharria where only one Asur family was engaged in iron-smelting and eking out a scanty livelihood. It seems the head of the family has had to resort to this vocation, because he has no agricultural land of his own and has also no chance of finding out any other employment even as a day labourer.

With the death of the industry of iron-smelting, agriculture has now become the principal means of subsistence among the Asur. Agriculture is one of the main links between a human group and the landscape in which it lives and which it exploits. Through agriculture every environment has taught its inhabitants a certain way of life. The earlier pattern of agriculture among the Asur was shifting cultivation. Mr. L.R. Forbes in his Report on the Raiyatwarī
Settlement of the Government Farms in Palamau district has recorded a description of shifting cultivation known as 'Kurao' or 'Daha' method which was also practised by the primitive tribes in the Netarhat plateau. He says that 'the land selected is generally forest land. Large and valuable timber trees are ruthlessly cut down, the stumps alone being left standing. The whole field is then covered with a thick layer of brushwood and set on fire. Burning takes place in the hot weather during prevalence of the hot winds. The method has a two-fold object. Firstly, the strong fire completely burns up the roots of all grasses and weeds lying near the surface, thus effecting a great saving hereafter in weeding; secondly, the alkali contained in the ashes works as excellent manure. It is not, however, often that this latter advantage is secured as unless there is a shower immediately after the land has been fired, the strong west winds carry away all the ashes. Soon after the first showers, the cultivator ploughs up the land lightly once and sows seeds broadcast. When this is done, he proceeds to fence the field round to keep off the deer who are very fond of the crop. This indeed is the only expense he is put till the time comes to gather the crop. Weeding very seldom takes place, as the land hardly ever requires it. The practice of shifting cultivation served two purposes for them, firstly, they got some food crop which was required for subsistence and secondly, it provided charcoal for iron-smelting from trees which used to be cut down for such cultivation. The Asur used to grow crops like maize, millets, surguja; til, etc. on the fields thus prepared, spread over a period of three years by rotation. After three years, new fields were prepared by further clearing of the forests and the old ones were allowed to remain fallow for some time for recouping their fertility. The selection of new clearances was governed by their own belief according to which the new fields were to be selected outside the periphery of the smoke produced from the fire of wood burning in the previous neighbouring fields. This fact provided
a wider range of clearance far away from the existing ones which could remain fallow for 15 years within which period they were once again covered with sizable trees and vegetation.

Destruction of forests for preparing fields for cultivation and also for charcoal for iron-smelting was so much appalling that in the nineteenth century, Col. Dalton, then Commissioner of Chotanagpur Division has had to warn the Asur that 'if the Agharias (Asur) cannot continue their occupation as smeltors without destroying of Sal forests, they must change their occupation'\(^3\). Accordingly, certain forest areas were exclusively demarcated by the Government and in course of time, records of rights over the cultivated lands were also prepared and annual rents were levied with a view to discouraging shifting cultivation. The result was encouraging and this wasteful practice has been completely stopped now. Old persons among the Asur still recall of these happy days when they used to live without any restriction from any quarter in the matter of cultivation and iron-smelting. Today the Asur are settled agriculturists, but they are forced to keep a fairly large acreage of their holdings as current fallow by rotation so that it may recoup fertility.

Records of rights prepared during the closing years of the nineteenth century for the levy of rents would reveal that the holding of each Asur family ranged from 10 to 35 acres. Most of the lands under occupation are uplands locally known as *tanr*. There was good amount of soil no doubt on the top and slanting slopes in the area, but annual loosening of the soil by plough cultivation followed by heavy rains resulted in washing away of the valuable layer of the fertile soil. Soil-erosion has thus become a serious problem. The uplands in occupation of the Asur may be divided into three classes. Class I *tanr* land is in close proximity to the individual huts and which is cultivated annually as fertility is maintained therein by organic manure and compost. On this land the Asur raise their beautiful maize crop which is their staple
food. Class II and Class III tanr lands are not brought under cultivation every year, as they are allowed to remain fallow for 3 to 5 years by rotation. After cultivating these two classes of land for 3 to 5 years by rotation of crops they are allowed to remain fallow once again. In these lands the Asur raise their millets, surguja and til crops which form the food of people.

The cattle of the Asur are very small and undersized. In the adjoining forests, there is ample pasturage, but they do not seem to be making full use of the same. Two reasons can be attributed for this. Firstly, the breed of the cattle itself is such that the animals do not gain weight and size. Secondly, the Asur do not take as much care of their bovine stock as is necessary. The cattle are grazed on the waste lands of the village or on the fields after the harvest is over. They seldom feed their cattle in stalls, and only paddy and maize straw is stored for use as fodder. Cows are not kept for milk but for calves which are required for agricultural purposes after they grow up into bullocks. The Asur also keep buffaloes which are used for ploughing the fields.

In these isolated and precarious environments in this plateau the Asur have built up an agricultural economy. Though now primarily agriculturists, they also collect forest fruits, tubers and roots and hunt wild animals for food. They are frequently engaged as wage labourers either in forest coupes where they find employment in forest cutting or in earth work. Agriculture with maize and millets as the staple food is important in their subsistence economy as it has been for at least for more than a century. Almost every family raises some of its food which is also supplemented in the way described above. In recent years the Asur have taken to potato cultivation which has a great future among them in view of their habit of taking every kind of ligume.

Though the agricultural holdings of the Asur are fairly big, still they are not made to yield enough food crops to last
throughout the year, with the result that they have had to find out employment elsewhere to get some cash which is required for payment of land revenue and for other bare necessities of life. Emigration of the tribals in Assam, West Bengal or Bhutan as tea garden labourers may be attributed to three principal reasons, namely, they are multiplying, they pursue an uneconomic system of cultivation and they have thriftless habits. The Asur is not industrious and takes little thought for the morrow. What savings he makes in a good year are spent in feasting and merry-making and in times of acute distress he has little to fall back upon and is forced to seek remunerative employment even outside Bihar. In the past an emissary of the labour agents known as Arakati helped the Asur in recruiting them as coolies for tea gardens in Bengal, Assam and Bhutan. In the census of 1901 as many as 553 Asur were recorded as working in the tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district alone. These Arakatis who are often close relatives of village chaukidars duped the Asur in a number of ways by carrying on malpractices in the recruitment. To safeguard the liberty of the emigrant labourers, a law was enacted which required every emigrant recruited by the Arakati to be brought before a magistrate previous to his leaving his province. There he was asked whether he knew that he was on his way to the Assam tea gardens, and whether he went there of his own free will. In Assam a similar examination took place before they put their thumb mark to the contract by which they obliged themselves to work in a particular garden for a period of 5 years. These repeated official examinations coupled with the fact that all those who attempted to run away in order to get home again, were infallibly caught and then for a third time placed before a magistrate who, this time condemned them to jail for breach of contract, gave an official appearance to the whole business in the eyes of the the Asur. The Arakatis asserted before the Asur that the Assam tea gardens were Government concerns and they themselves
posed as Government officials. The amount advanced at that time by the labour agencies for a single emigrant labourer, averaged at Rs. 80. This amount destined chiefly for the family of the emigrant, was usually appropriated by the Arakati. There were in Ranchi and other centres depots (that is large shades) in which intending emigrants were kept at the expense of labour agencies until a sufficient number were got together to make up a transport. The depots of course, were subject to Government inspection, and moreover, any family, suspecting that one of its members has been decoyed by unfair means to such a depot, always got from the Government a search warrant on application. But these searches were of no avail, because doubtful recruits were made over to the depots mostly under false names. The agencies were, therefore, in a position to show from their registers that nobody bearing the name of the person searched for, had ever been in their depots. Over and above these public depots, there were other huts which were called Chortā or secret depots. Young people deluded by growing descriptions of the prosperous life awaiting them in Assam were kept in liquor and led to a Chortā depot. When an Asur youth falls in love with a girl and if there is no chance of marriage, he elopes with her to a secret place. These Chortā depots provided a good shelter for such youths or girls who readily offered themselves to work as labourers in the tea gardens. And once he reaches Assam with the eloped girl, he does not have any worry about his unsocial act and the couple leads an undisturbed life, as there is no chance for strictures of the tribal Panchayat to reach there. So even today, if a young girl is missing, the Asur parents move heaven and earth to see to it that she is not emigrated to Assam or Bhutan. Weekly markets in the various villages used to be the chief hunting grounds of these Arakatis and their accomplices.

*Petla Asur nephew of Manga Asur of village Sakhuapani fell in love with Aghni, daughter of Chidra Asur. Parents of both
were not in favour of marriage between the two. Petla and Aghni became so much infatuated of each other that they could not bear the torture of separation any longer. One night they fled to a secret place with a determination to be far away from the reach of their parents. As it happens, they did not find any difficulty in meeting an Aarakati at a weekly market who helped their emigration to Bhutan as tea garden labourers. The parents of the boy and girl made frantic searches for them but to no avail. Within a short time they learnt that they had reached already Bhutan with the help of the Aarakati. Petla and Aghni are now having a care free married life in Bhutan.

'Pancho Asur had returned to Sakhuapani a few months back from Assam almost after a decade. He had eloped to Assam with an Asur girl of the neighbouring village Navatoli with whom he had a love affair. He and his wife are working there as tea garden labourers. The couple has three children and is leading an unworried life. But as Pancho came back to his native village to meet his relatives, the Village Panchayat was prompt to take action against him for his unsocial act. As he and the girl were living as husband and wife for a long time, there was no point in restoration of the girl to her parents. The father of Pancho Asur was fined Rs. 5 by the Panchayat over and above the drink of rice beer as usual and the wedlock was regularised. Pancho stayed at Sakhuapani for a fortnight and went back again to Assam to join his wife and children.'

Atrocities perpetrated by the Aarakatis upon the tribals in the name of recruitment were really indescribable. 'Having got an insight into every kind and form of malpractice connected with the prevailing labour recruiting system, Sir J. Woodburn, the then Lieutenant-Governor took very energetic action and a new law was enacted by the Government of India by the year 1897. The result was that in the next year, the number of emigrants from Chotangpur dropped from over 36,000 to 6,000.' Since the new legislation also materially improved the situation for the labourers in the tea gardens, and guaranteed them liberty to return home after they had served the 5 years of contract, the number soon rose again, because under these conditions, the people raised the benefit of lucrative labour outside their provinces. Even today, the proprietors of the tea gardens send Sirdars who are their
reliable employees to Netarhat for recruitment of labourers from among the Asur who are in need of employment. These Sirdars who are drawn from the tribals themselves are able to recruit the labourers by providing one way rail fare to Assam and it is estimated that the average number from amongst the Asur for such employment is in the neighbourhood of 20 to 25 every year. Those who cannot get subsistence from agriculture—and their number is very large have to find out employment locally by working as daily labourers in some construction works or forest coups where they are either paid in cash or kind.

The basic economic problem which confronts the Asur today is that of making self-support possible in a region with fairly good agricultural lands. In the estimates of the Government the average Asur family income is less than Rs. 300 a year. If the Asur are to continue on this plateau with anywhere near a decent standard of living, their economy will have to be developed all round.

But why does the Asur tribe suffer from such critical economic conditions? It should be made clear that the Asur economic problem is nothing new. The fact is that they never enjoyed more than a bare subsistence of living since they were driven to this part of the country. Here they adopted that form of primitive agriculture known as shifting cultivation supplemented by the cottage industry of iron-smelting. Forests on this plateau supply to the Asur roots, tubers, wild fruits and leaves which supply their food which is, as said earlier, not sufficient. The problem is how to enable the Asur to have at least one square meal a day, if not two.

Several solutions to this economic problem have been proposed: the improvement of agriculture, the establishment of small industries and the organisation of co-operative societies. Solution of one or two will not be the answer. It seems certain that to provide sound economic support for the Asur there must be action on all these fronts at the same time.
Although most of the Asur have got lands, they are not enough, because there is no wet cultivation at present. Their traditional profession of iron-smelting has not much scope for revival and as such it is practically of no value to them. The Government has launched since 1955-56 a programme for the welfare of the Asur under a special scheme at a cost of Rs. 42,353 which covered activities like starting of 2 Residential Schools of Junior Basic type, 2 Graingolas, free distribution of medicines and one training-cum-production centre for beekeeping. We are concerned in this Chapter only with the graingolas and the training-cum-production centre which aim at the economic improvement of these people.

Luckily the Netarhat plateau falls within the Special Tribal Multipurpose Blocks of Bishunpur and Mahuadand, as such the Asur got added attention in the intensive and multipurpose development of the area. As the economy of the Asur is agriculture-based, the development of agriculture becomes the main economic programme. The programme can be best understood from the existing condition of agriculture as practised by the Asur. So far as the agricultural holding is concerned, it compares favourably with that of the advanced tribes like the Oraon and Munda. As said earlier, when the Asur were practising shifting cultivation, they were in the habit of clearing new patches from the forests every year. Restrictions on wanton cutting of the forests and levy of rent on the individual holding by the Government limited the size of their holdings. Table I will give us a fair idea about the size of the holdings of the Asur in some of the important villages in the Pat area.

The soil of these holdings is laterite and void of humus content. As such it cannot maintain its fertility without regular manuring. The gradient is steep and so the soil gets loosened with ploughing and is being washed away removing the little scantily soil that is there. Moreover a large portion of these
The Asur still press their oil with an indigenous method. A wicker bag containing steamed oil seeds is put between the two long stone slabs and pressed by means of a lever. This self-sufficiency of the daily requirement will be outlived shortly as the plateau is fast opening up with restoration of communications.
The economy of the Asur is now agriculture-based. The soil, however, is laterite and as such it cannot maintain its fertility without regular manuring. Hence the agricultural holdings though fairly big, a large portion of the same has to be kept as current fallow from one year to five years, so as to enrich fertility by growth of natural weeds and grass.
# LAND AND LIVELIHOOD

## Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of village</th>
<th>Total No. of families</th>
<th>Size of holding not exceeding (acres):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Jobhipat</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kujampat</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bahagara</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Polpolpat</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sakhupani</td>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Helta</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Barpat</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Chatasarai</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Kathopani</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holdings has to be kept current fallow for a period ranging from one to five years, so as to enrich its fertility by growth of natural weeds and grass which serve the purpose of green manure. Acreage of current fallow in 1960-61 can be seen from Table II:

## Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. number</th>
<th>Name of village</th>
<th>Total area under plough</th>
<th>Area kept as current fallow</th>
<th>Actual area under crops</th>
<th>Percentage of current fallow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Amtipani</td>
<td>3162·67</td>
<td>934·57</td>
<td>1228·13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ambakena</td>
<td>450·00</td>
<td>153·44</td>
<td>299·55</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Kuiam</td>
<td>1796·26</td>
<td>989·21</td>
<td>707·05</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Gurdari</td>
<td>4649·64</td>
<td>1700·25</td>
<td>2949·64</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Average yield for paddy and maize comes to 8 and 12 maunds per acre respectively provided that rains are fairly satisfactory. Fortunately for the Asur, the area in which they live is best suited to potato cultivation, particularly during the monsoon. Casually they used to grow this crop in the near past, but at present it has been taken up with full vigour. Efforts have been made by the Tribal Development Blocks to provide hybrid seeds of maize and potato to the Asur agriculturists, but much more remains to be done for greater agricultural production which is essential in order to provide food to the large number of the Asur who live at present on the brink of starvation. For improvement of agriculture in the Netarhat plateau, research in agronomy and sociology must go hand in hand. It is important to recognise that ‘tribal agriculture is both a way of life and an aspect of culture, for culture has been defined (in one of its aspects) as the force of adhesion between the people and their environment’. Keeping in view this fact, a programme should be prepared for full land utilisation by reducing progressively acreage under current fallow which can be done by increased use of fertilizers and green manure. All the cultivated area should be saturated with improved seeds which would increase the yield considerably. New agricultural crops like groundnut may be introduced which would also serve as a preventive against soil-erosion. Retention of moisture by constructing ridges in the fields should be ensured which would also help soil conservation. Construction of small bunds in depressions wherever possible should be taken up in order to provide much needed artificial irrigation. Where there is a facility for water supply, the Asur have adopted improved agricultural practices. They have started reclaiming waste lands and converting them into paddy fields wherever bunds and channels have been made. Some of the progressive Asur farmers have also taken to horticulture and vegetable gardening. Nature has provided the Pal area with a few perennial
After initial failure of the Bee-Keeping Centre at Jobhipat, it is now getting popular among the Asur. The Centre was started under the Special Welfare Scheme for economic uplift of the Asur. It is not yet certain as to how much subsidiary income will be earned by the Asur trainees. It should not be forgotten that extraction of honey is an adventure with the Asur rather than a craft for they show courage and enterprise in storming citadels of the bees in the most inaccessible places.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
The Asur are advanced loans of paddy from the Government graingola at Sakhuapani which are required by them for seeds and subsistence purposes. The loans are repayable in kind with 25 per cent interest. Of course money-lenders ordinarily charge 75 to 100 per cent interest on such loans. Advancing loans from the graingola is the simpler and straighter form of credit which has become popular and it is clearly understood by the tribals. This institution can be more useful if it is converted into a sale and purchase store on a cooperative basis. It would be the surest way to eliminate the money-lenders who are always prone to exploit them.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
sources of water supply. The river Sankh has its source in this plateau forming a beautiful fall at Sadni. There is a perennial supply of water also from the river Dharadhari in this area. Over and above, there are a few everflowing fountains and streams which, if harnessed and converted into reservoirs would provide adequate facilities for irrigation. And once some kind of irrigation is assured, the whole plateau will develop into a beautiful garden laden with fruits and vegetables which would not only fulfil the needs of the Asur, but also of the neighbouring cities of Dhanbad, Jamshedpur, Rourkella and Calcutta. Potentialities of agricultural development however, will not be exhausted with that. The occurrence of water on these Pats will give them great value as sites for tea plantation as the country is now opened up and has become fairly accessible.

Inspite of the full development of agriculture in this plateau, it will not provide full time employment to the Asur who will further need some subsidiary means of livelihood. It may be through daily wages by exploitation of forests, introduction of a few cottage industries or reviving their age-old industry of iron-smelting. Many of the Asur families still know this art and have preserved the necessary instruments for the purpose. These families prepare even at present their own plough-shares in their smithies having purchased iron from the weekly markets. They are not satisfied with the quality of this iron which is considered by them to be inferior to what they smelted in their indigenous way. A few small forest coupes should be ear marked for the Asur for the purpose of preparing charcoal required for iron-smelting if the economic problem is to be solved in one way or another. When the Government are wedded to the policy of doing the welfare work of the Scheduled Tribes, they should not grudge to forego a little income of the forest revenues. An experiment should also be made for starting a training-cum-production centre for black-smithy and tin-smithy in the Netaharhat plateau
which can be successful only when the Asur are helped to revive the industry of iron-smelting. A training-cum-production centre for bee-keeping has been started at Jobhipat for the Asur. The centre after initial failure has come to stay and got its roots now. But to the tribal mind 'extraction of honey is an adventure with them rather than a craft, for the people show courage and enterprise in storming the citadels of the bees in the most inaccessible places'.

The programme of full land utilisation and development of cottage industries will be of no avail in raising the standard of living of the Asur unless his indebtedness is restricted. It is interesting to study as to how the deficit economy of the Asur leads them to debt and taken advantage of by money-lenders. Most of the Asur families have to pass through a starvation period which ranges from two to six months in a year. When an Asur's stock of grains runs short, he borrows grains either from his tribesmen or from a money-lender to tide over the starvation period. He gets such grain on the condition that it will be returned at the next harvest. If such a borrowing is from the money-lender, the rate of interest will be 50 to 100 per cent. Sometimes he needs a small cash too for a festival or marriage in the family. This little money or grain he borrows starts growing in an embryonic manner. Every year he goes on paying the amount of interest and that too by the compound rate of interest the debt goes on mounting. The modus operandi of the money-lender is sometimes diabolic. Generally he lives either in a market village. He is not an ordinary money-lender. He is a trader too. As a trader of clothes, salt, bangles and trinkets, he encourages the Asur to buy on credit. As a money-lender he advances loans for an investment yielding highest dividends. His sole concern thereafter is to collect as much money as possible by way of interest in the shape of produce from the threshing floor at the harvest time. But he is much more interested in transactions in potato crop, because the trade in this crop is more
paying. He advances potato seeds to the Asur for cultivation charging higher rates than those prevailing ordinarily in the area as well as cheating them by giving less in weight. As per verbal agreement between them, the Asur are obliged to sell their potato crop to him only and that too at the rate dictated by him which is always lower than the market rate. The Asur are cheated once again at the time of making delivery of the crop and more quantity is recovered by this trader-cum-money-lender than what was agreed to be sold.

The State Government has adopted various measures to check this exploitation. Check on money lending in Bihar has been imposed under the Bihar Money Lenders Act, 1938. The Act provides for the registration of money-lenders who may be advancing cash loans exceeding Rs. 500. It is also enacted that no suit for recovery of a loan advanced by a money-lender may proceed until the court is satisfied that he holds a valid registration certificate. Unfortunately, the Act did not cover loans in grains which form the main business of supplying credit to the tribal people. The Act, however, failed completely to effect any check on money lending, particularly in the tribal areas. It has been rightly said that the Act has been observed more in its breach rather than execution in these areas. Another measure was the organisation of a multipurpose cooperative society at Gurdaripat since the inception of the Special Multipurpose Tribal Block at Bishunpur. The society tried to eliminate the money-lenders in this plateau by arranging supply of potato seeds to the Asur cultivators. As ill-luck would have it, some two years back the truck of the society which carried potato seeds met with an accident and turned turtle damaging a considerable quantity of the seeds. The balance was distributed to the Asur members who have had to pay a little more price for the same in order to defray the loss involved to the society due to the accident. The money-lenders were not slow in exploiting the situation and they created dissatisfaction among the Asur against the società
by misrepresenting the fact that they were deliberately charged a higher price for the potato seeds. Next year, for some reason or other, the society could not arrange the supply to the Asur who waited for the seeds for a pretty long time. The Asur thereupon felt convinced that the society would not be able to do any good to them and ultimately again took recourse to the money-lenders for their seed requirement. In the year 1960-61 the Block Development Authorities including the Deputy Commissioner, Ranchi took up the challenge once again and successfully arranged the supply inadequate quantity and also in time both to the members as well as others who were treated as prospective members. The society was very much helped by a subsidy of Rs. 12,293 from the Welfare Department in its attempt to eliminate the money-lenders. The following figures regarding the performance of the society would be interesting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Acreage under potato cultivation.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Potato seeds shown in mds.</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Yield of potato total in mds.</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Acreage of yield. per acre.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Value of potato crop in Rs.</td>
<td>9,600</td>
<td>16,800</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Less cost of potato seeds in Rs.</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gross income in Rs.</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>11,700</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>47,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is true that the money-lenders will not be vanquished so easily if sustained efforts are not continued by the Block Development Authorities who should maintain still closer contacts with the Asur and be eager to help them in every walk.
of life. It is by winning the confidence of these people and making them understand the evil designs of the money-lenders and helping them in getting free from clutches of the latter that the desired aim of economic uplift of the Asur can be achieved. I, however, offer my compliments to the Block Development Authorities and Deputy Commissioner, Ranchi in particular for the real good work they have done to make the Asur earn a fairly big income which they had never come across in the past. Potato cultivation has vast potentialities in this area and it will change the entire face of the plateau if exploitation of the Asur at the hand of the money-lenders, as has been done recently, is stopped.

Grain loans solve the food problem of nearly 40 to 50 per cent of the Asur families, particularly during the rainy season when there is a general scarcity of food grains and markets become inaccessible. The Government have stepped in also to provide some relief to the Asur agriculturists in the interest on grain loans. They took upon themselves the task of advancing loans of paddy or millets by starting two grain-golas under the Special Welfare Scheme for the Asur in the year 1956-57. A graingola is simply a grain store from which agriculturists are given loans of grains for seeds as well as consumption. Advancing grain loans from the graingolas is a simpler and straighter form of credit which has become popular and is clearly understood by the Asur. Though the grain loans are available to the Asur on easy terms say on 25 per cent of interest, the relief they get is negligible, because they do not get as much quantity of grains as required and so they have again to approach the money-lenders for the deficit. But the graingola after all, has a limited scope for its utility. Whatever scanty relief the Asur get from the graingolas is denied to them if they fail to repay the outstanding loans in case their crops fail due to draughts which are not rare in this part of the country. In the circumstances, it would be too much to think that the graingolas in its present form would do
something tangible by way of economic uplift of these people. I have suggested to the Government in the past to improve the scheme of the graingolas by converting them into grain banks. There are good many potentialities for this when we think of some other tribes in Bihar who may have some surplus grains for depositing in such grain banks. But so far as the Asur are concerned, their agricultural yield is at present so scanty that it would be futile to expect their grains to be kept in the grain banks as deposits to be withdrawn in lean months of summer and monsoon. Hence the graingolas may be useful to them after sometime when they begin to produce more grains in their farms with a vigorous programme for increased agricultural production as described earlier.

With the adoption of the economic programme as above, the importance of sociology should not be overlooked. Increased agricultural production or additional cash income from other sources in itself will not bring happiness to the Asur who are heavily addicted to drinks and are idlers. The potato crop this year has brought wealth to this plateau, but to a visitor no signs of improvement in the day to day life of the Asur are visible. They drink too much. Use of rice beer may be alright and can be tolerated; and it is resorted to by the Asur families as long as rice or gondli is available. Unfortunately, a tendency is found to be growing among the Asur for mahua of jaggery liquor. Introduction of cash crops has greatly increased the use of this kind of drink by the Asur which is a strong intoxicant and injurious to health. Persons dealing in this kind of liquor know the proverbial weakness of these people for such a drink. They are always present with their stock in all weekly markets. There was an instance in which an Asur wife gave her husband an eight-anna piece to purchase some essentials like salt, chillies etc. from the weekly market at Dumarpat to which he was going. The husband thought of selling some quantity of potato and so took about half a maund with him. He sold the potato and
spent the whole amount in drink of liquor and passed all his time in the market. He was sensible enough, however, not to spend the eight annas which appeared to him to be the hard earned income of his wife. He reached home quite safe with the articles indented by his wife. This is not a rare instance. It is only one out of many more startling and heart-rending cases. The nefarious activities of the liquor vendors are not confined to the weekly markets alone. They oblige the Asur by a regular supply of mahua or jaggery liquor at their very door-steps glaringly infringing the Excise Laws. If anybody like a missionary ventures to interfere in this immoral and illicit traffic of liquor, he is threatened with violence and even a Government servant like the Village Level Worker will not be spared if he dared to say anything against the sale of liquor. The supply of liquor outside the licensed shop is locally known as Parchunia. This Parchunia system must stop to prevent robbing of the Asur of their hard earned income.

Sociology should be brought into full play by inculcating temperance, if possible by Prohibition and creating consciousness among the Asur for a better life. Illiteracy, drink and idleness are the real enemies of the Asur which have kept them in a state of backwardness while their brethren elsewhere have advanced socially, economically and in a number of other ways. Spread of education among the Asur will be a long term programme. Idleness particularly among the men-folk appears to be a tribal trait and it will require a lot of persuasion to make them take interest in productive and fruitful activities. But the excessive use of liquor can be controlled. The Government may be unable to introduce Prohibition for obvious reasons, but they can stop the system of the Parchunia at least. The economic problem of the Asur will be simplified if we accept the following truth. Stop the Parchunia system and the Asur will take care of themselves. In conclusion, I would say, let not the efforts of the Government aiming at the welfare be stultified by allowing the Asur to indulge in
intoxicating drinks. They have still to cover vast ground combating ignorance, idleness and poverty in the march towards development.

REFERENCES.


2. **Forbes, L.R. (1872)** ... The Raiyatwary Settlement of the Government Farms in Palamu district.


5. **Verrier Elwin (1959)** ... A Philosophy for NEFA, p. 87.

CHAPTER 4.

FEATURES OF KINSHIP.

The Asur family is based on the integrative bond of kinship which extends in two directions, namely the direction of the father's family of origin and the mother's family of origin. Hence it can be called a bilateral group even though the practice of ignoring the clan of the mother is in vogue. But the lineage is recovered with all the probable blood relations of one side exclusively. This type of grouping is extending to include all those believed to be related through common descent and thus becomes a clan which may be traced to a mythical ancestor who may be a human, a human-like animal, a plant or even inanimate. This clan is an exogamous division of the Asur tribe, the members of which are tied together by a belief in common descent, common possession of a totem or habitation of a common territory. Exogamous clans have been reported from most of the Proto-Austroloid tribes of Middle India, in which they are correlated not only with exogamy, but also with totemism. The Santhal have more than a hundred clans all named after plants or animals or material objects. The Ho Kili is an exogamous clan and they have over fifty of them. The Oraon, Munda and Kharia clans are like-wise exogamous and totemistic. The emergence of totemistic groups is explained in detail by S.C. Roy with regard to the Oraon. He has cited 'fusion, fission and generalisation as grounds for the growth of totemistic clans. By fusion is meant coming together of several families and adopting one common name. Often a clan growing larger every day may split into smaller groups; that would be a process of fission. If the original clan had been called a tiger, the new clans may be given names like tiger's tail, tiger's head, tiger's claws and so
on. Or it may so happen that a person is protected or harmed by a tree or an animal on some occasion. Consequently he would develop a special attitude of friendly gratitude or awe and reverence towards the animal or tree involved, and later on, his descendants may continue the special relationship. Thus generalisation would explain the emergence of totemism.

The Asur village may be inhabited by members of a Killi (Gotra) or it may contain one or more Killis. The Asur society is divided into sixteen clans which take their names from some animal, plant or material object. They have been described as totemistic, but they themselves do not now remember the origin of these totems. Members of a totemistic sept cannot marry within the sept, but have to marry outside. Exogamy is a characteristic feature of the Asur social organisation. The most effective taboo, in respect of marriage is the rule of Killi exogamy and it is the principal feature of their marital organisation. Any liaison between a man and a woman of the same clan is severely punished and the family is branded as an outcaste. Like the Munda, there are no cases of splitting up of the clans into smaller fragments in view of the Asur’s small numerical strength. The following are the clan names of the Bir Asur.


The Asur are a patrilocal and patrilineal people. After marriage, the wife must come to live with the husband, residence being patrilocal. Women among the Asur do not inherit, they have the right to be maintained by the family of their birth or of adoption by marriage. They identify themselves with the interests of the family so long as they
live with their parents, and after marriage with the Killis of their husbands. The Asur family exists as a segregate unit today. They live in families—sometimes one man lives with his wife and children, and sometimes a group of brothers or agnates share the same house and participate in common economic interests. But the basis of social organisation is the Killi or sept. Hence it is natural that the interests of the family find their fulfilment in the larger interests of the Killi. The members of one generation in a Killi behave towards one another as brothers and sisters, while all men who are of the same generation as one's father are addressed as Bara and respected as such.

There is nothing new or interesting to be found when one tries to study features of kinship among the Asur. 'Kinship is merely... a structured system of relationship in which individuals are bound one to another by complex ramifying and interlocking ties. It refers to the relationship of an individual by affinity as well as works as 'a rod on which one leans throughout the life'. Fortunately, kinship ties among the Asur have their hold upon them, because inter-personal relationship is still restricted to the clansmen, the next house and the co-worker in the field on account of the primitive conditions in which they live and the small population of the tribe and the small size of their villages. These kinship ties have not yet started loosening their hold on the Asur as there has been no advance in culture and contacts with the outside world have not become more numerous². Let us now examine the pattern of kinship system among the Asur which is observed in the reciprocal behaviour of persons who are regarded as being related by kinship or affinity.

Parents and Children.

The normal pattern of relationship between father and son is that of superordination and subordination. The father hands own the family tradition and mores of the society to
his son by way of formal or informal instruction through the use of the authority he commands over and the obedience he demands from his son. It is the father who delegates to each of his sons his share of responsibility in day to day work. The father is also an affectionate elder for his son. The concern with which a suitable daughter-in-law is sought by a man and the munificence with which the son's affins are treated are but two instances of the many ways in which this affection is manifest. It is the son's duty to support his father in the latter's old age. This ideal is turned to actuality and only in cases where the father is physically incapable of doing any active work. Normally a man continues to lead an active life till the age of 60, by which time he also retains most of his prerogatives as the family head.

Relations between mother and son, though of the same general type as between father and son are characterised by more tenderness on the part of the mother and by grant of greater liberties to the son. When married, a son is expected to take sides with his mother than with his wife in case of a quarrel between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. But this is an ideal not always observed. The mother plays the same role in the life of her daughter as the father does in that of his son. She trains up a girl for tribal womanhood, while the father arranges a suitable match for his daughter.

**Grandparents and Grandchildren.**

A relationship of privileged familiarity obtains between both paternal and maternal grandparents and grandchildren. A grandfather would jokingly remind his granddaughter that he is still young in spirits and that he would not let his girl (granddaughter) be married to anyone other than to himself. In extreme hilarity, sometimes a grandchild besmears the clothes of his grandparents with food. A grandson would sometimes pour water in his grandfather's *Jhara* (rice-beer) and would put the blame on his grandmother when the
culprit is searched for. S.C. Roy has described in great detail the joking and hilarity between the grandparents and grandchildren among the Oraon.

Prof. Radcliff Brown has attempted to explain about joking relationship between the grandparents and grandchildren which he holds is a ‘method of ordering a relation which combines social conjunction and disjunction’. I myself fail to understand this joking relationship which unlike other kinship relationship is not going to end in marriage. It is natural that the relationship between the grandparents and grandchildren should be one of respect and reverence as has been observed among several other communities in India.

**Agnatic Relatives.**

Among the agnatic relatives the attitude of the ego towards his father’s elder brother is marked by a sense of respect, in some instances, more respect than one has for his own father. The father’s younger brother is also respected, although sometimes the attitude verges on comradeship especially when the difference in age between nephew and uncle is not very marked. At the time of marriage the paternal uncle’s wives are allotted duties as the needs of the hour demand. They pound rice in the *Dhenki* (wooden husking machine), prepare *Marua* (a cereal) paste from which dishes are to be cooked for the marriage feast and rub oil on the bridegroom’s body. So far as maternal relatives are concerned, the frequency of social intercourse between the mother’s brother and his nephew is much curtailed, because the mother usually belongs to another village and always to a different clan. Marriage provides an occasion for the meeting of all relatives and a mother’s brother attends his niece’s marriage with a pitcherful of *Jhara* and 4 seers of rice. The maternal uncle is not called upon to perform any special task for his nephews and nieces. The ego does not show any special or distinctive feature to his behaviour towards the mother’s sisters.
Siblings and Cousins.

As children, the brothers are playmates and co-herdsmen. There is a close and constant companionship between the two. When they grow up and get married and build separate houses, even this relationship normally remains unaltered. The elder brother acts in place of his father after the latter's death or when he is senile. The elder sister is respected by the younger brothers; she carries the latter in infancy in a baggy sling on her back if the mother is busy doing household work. The younger sister, on the other hand, bows down to touch the feet of her elder siblings on the occasion on her visit to or return from the affine's place. As between the sisters, they sleep in the Giti-ora and the elder sister takes pains to decorate and dress up her younger sister on the occasion of a dance, for example. The latter learns many things by emulating and imitating the example of her elder sister. Marriage between cousins, cross as well as parallel, is unknown to the Bir Asur. Professor R.K. Jain sees in this fact a sharp contrast with the very wide prevalence of cross-cousin marriages among the neighbouring tribes of the region. My inquiries among the Munda, Oraon and Kharia who are neighbours of the Asur reveal that marriages between a son with one's sister's daughter and of a son with his maternal uncle's daughter are avoided as far as possible. If there is an instance of such a marriage, it may be considered as a rare and exceptional case.

Spouses.

Although the male of the mates enjoys a higher status among the patrilineal Asur, behaviour patterns and attitudes characterising spouse relationship indicate equality among the two. Each partner has equally important duties to fulfil in accordance with the traditional division of labour. The freedom with which a woman talks to a third person in her husband's presence is remarkable.

The son-in-law treats his father-in-law as his own father. Mother-in-law and son-in-law avoidance is unknown among the Asur. They sit together and drink Jhara in each other's company. Similar is the case with the daughter-in-law who is usually observed chatting most informally with her father-in-law as a daughter would chat with her father. She even suckles her baby without being in the least conscious of her father-in-law's presence or in fact even talking to him at the same time.

siblings-in-law.

A relationship of mutual joking obtains between a man and his wife's younger brother, although the extent of privileged familiarity is somewhat attenuated on the side of the younger relative. The wife's younger brother's wife is treated as one's own younger sister. Behaviour with the wife's elder brother's wife is similar to that towards one's own elder sister. With the wife's younger sister or sari a man enjoys privileged familiarity and the jokes range from vocal to physical ones and may even verge on vulgarity.

Ideally a woman should avoid her husband's elder brother. The pattern of reciprocal avoidance between these relatives finds manifestation into the non-acceptance of food hand to hand and in the non-utterance of each other's name. Only at the time of a person's younger brother's marriage and at one of the two juars of marriage these restrictions are relaxed and a woman is even asked to sit in the lap of her husband's elder brother. The husband's younger brother stands in a relationship of patterned joking with her husband's elder brother's wife. No cases of junior levirate came to notice. The wives of the husband's elder and younger brothers are treated very much like one's own sisters. Relations with the husband's elder and younger sisters are those of respect and comradeship respectively,
Asur Kinship Terminology.

The Asur kinship terminology like that of the neighbouring Munda, Oraon and Kharia is characterised by a preponderance of classificatory terms. The kinsmen among the Asur have been grouped in the categories of (i) paternal and maternal kins (ii) paternal kins younger than the ego (iii) relatives in husband’s father’s house and (iv) relatives in wife’s father’s house. The kinship terminology has been given below:—

(1) Paternal and Maternal Kins.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baba</td>
<td>Father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aya</td>
<td>Mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dada</td>
<td>Brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhouji</td>
<td>Brother’s wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhatu</td>
<td>Sister’s husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bara</td>
<td>(1) Father’s elder brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Father’s father’s father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Father’s mother’s father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Mother’s elder sister’s husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Mother’s father’s father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) Mother’s mother’s father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bari</td>
<td>(1) Father’s elder brother’s wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Father’s father’s mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Father’s mother’s mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Mother’s elder sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Mother’s father’s mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaka</td>
<td>Father’s younger brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaki</td>
<td>(1) Father’s younger brother’s wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Mother’s younger sister.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mama</td>
<td>(1) Father’s sister’s husband.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Mother’s brother—elder or younger.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mami</td>
<td>(1) Father's sister—elder or younger.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Mother's brother's wife.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aja</td>
<td>(1) Father’s father.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Father's father's brother.</td>
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<td>(3) Father's mother's brother.</td>
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<td>(4) Mother's father's brother.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aji</td>
<td>(1) Father's mother.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Father’s father's sister.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) Father's mother's sister.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(4) Mother’s mother.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Mother's father's sister.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(2) *Paternal Kin Younger to the Ego.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhai</td>
<td>Brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhava or Bahuria</td>
<td>Younger brother's wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahn or Mai</td>
<td>Younger sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahnoi</td>
<td>Younger sister's husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta or Babu</td>
<td>Son.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahuria</td>
<td>Son’s wife.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beti or Mai</td>
<td>Daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damad</td>
<td>Daughter's husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhatij</td>
<td>Elder brother's son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagina or Bhacha</td>
<td>Elder sister's son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagini or Bhachi</td>
<td>Sister's daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nati</td>
<td>Son’s son.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natin</td>
<td>Son’s daughter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nati</td>
<td>Daughter's son.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natin</td>
<td>Daughter's daughter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bara</td>
<td>(1) Younger brother’s son.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Son’s son’s son.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Son’s daughter’s son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bari</td>
<td>(1) Younger brother’s daughter.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Son’s son’s daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Son’s daughter’s daughter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) *Relatives in husband’s father’s house.*

Gumke ... Husband.
Sasur (Baba) ... Husband’s father.
Sais (Aya) ... Husband’s mother.
Sasur (Bara) ... Husband’s father’s elder brother.
Sais (Bari) ... Husband’s father’s elder brother’s wife.
Sasur (Kaka) ... Husband’s father’s younger brother.
Sais (Kaki) ... Husband’s father’s younger brother’s wife.
Sais (Mami) ... Husband’s father’s younger or elder sister.
Sasur (Mama) ... Husband’s father’s sister’s husband.
Bhasur (Jethasur) ... Husband’s elder brother.
Jeth Sais ... Husband’s elder sister.
Gotani ... Husband’s elder or younger brother’s wife.
Dada ... Husband’s elder sister’s husband.
Devar ... Husband’s younger brother.
Nanad ... Husband’s younger sister.
Damad ... Husband’s younger sister’s husband.

(4) *Relatives in wife’s father’s house.*

Gumkain ... Wife.
Sasur ... Wife’s father.
Sais ... Wife’s mother.
Jeth Sais ... Wife’s elder sister.
Jethiasasur ... Wife’s elder brother.
Didi ... Wife’s elder brother’s wife.
Sahru ... Wife’s elder sister’s husband.
Sara ... Wife’s brother.
Sari ... Wife’s younger sister.
FEATURES OF KINSHIP

Bahuriya ... Wife’s younger brother’s wife.
Sahru ... Wife’s younger sister’s husband.

REFERENCES.

The material used in this Chapter is mostly based on the Paper “Features of Kinship among the Asur”, by Prof. R.K. Jain.

1. Majumdar and Madan (1957) ... An Introduction to Social Anthropology, p. 125.

CHAPTER 5.
SOCIAL LIFE.

Daily routine.

The Asur gets up very early and after performing his morning duties, proceeds to his field where he has a number of jobs to do. He does not use water for washing after evacuation. He works in the field till noon and returns home, takes up a twig in his mouth and uses it as a tooth brush for cleaning his teeth. After washing his mouth, he takes his scanty meal prepared by his wife. Thereafter he takes rest or gossips with others. While gossiping he opens his chunauti, a metal box containing lime. Most of the Asur chew tobacco. A small bit is broken up from the pieces of dried tobacco leaves 2” or 3” long which they carry about tied up in their loin-cloth. This is put in the palm of the left hand and then crushed into powder with the thumb of the right hand. To this is added a proportionate part of slaked lime, still damp, having the consistency of a pretty thick paste. The paste is thoroughly mixed with the tobacco dust giving it a pleasant taste. The mixture thus prepared is passed around among those present. It keeps them in good spirits.

Somebody in the company takes out a chungi which is also called a fica and lights it. After a few pulls, the fica makes the round of the whole company. The fica is nothing but a rolled cigarette which is generally smoked by the Asur. It is made with a sal leaf. Some tobacco is broken into bits (not rubbed to dust as is done for chewing) and then rolled into a green leaf which is slightly folded in at either end to keep the tobacco in position. The leaf has been allowed to dry as far as is compatible with the flexibility required for rolling it. The Asur never smoke much at a time. After a
Open shed by the side of the house is used for multifarious purposes. It is a meeting place of other village people who gossip and enjoy the company. Tobacco powder mixed with lime keeps them in wits.

(Photograph: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
Though there are no rivers or ponds worth the name, the Asur try to catch whatever fish available in streams or ditches. Fishing helps them in supplementing their scanty food.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
few pulls, they extinguish the cigarette by rubbing it against a stone or anything hard and stick it behind the ear like a writer's pen, till they want another few pulls so that one cigarette lasts them a long time. In a company it is a sort of obligation; at least an act of common civility to share one's chewing as well as one's smoking tobacco. That is why the cigarette is never taken between the teeth or the lips. It is held between the thumb and the hand. When the thumb closes on the cigarette, a little ring is formed. To this the smoker applies his lips and pulls in the smoke without touching the cigarette at all with the lips. After sometime, he rises to go to the field once again if it is necessary to finish the job there. Or he goes to the forests for collection of dry wood for fuel. If otherwise free, he takes his cattle for grazing in the open spaces of the village.

The Asur woman also gets up very early. After washing her mouth, she sweeps the house and the courtyard and unleashes the cattle for grazing in the open. She fetches water which is a pleasant job for her, because it provides an opportunity to talk to other women at the well or the spring. The source of water supply is sometimes situated at a long distance which is in the form of a natural spring in a depression in this plateau. It is a strenuous task for her, yet as noted earlier, this strain is converted into a pleasure in the company of other companions who go there in a body sometimes singing, joking and merry-making. After that she thinks of the meal to be prepared for the noon. If paddy is available she takes it out in a certain measure and husks it in a Dhenki. If there is no rice, she takes either maize or gondali and grinds it into powder with the help of a mortar and pestle and prepares the meal. In the afternoon she accompanies her husband to help in the fields if necessary; otherwise she goes to the nearby forests to collect leaves, roots and tubers which add to the scanty food of the Asur family.
Division of labour.

There is nothing particularly noteworthy regarding division of labour between the Asur men and women according to the seasons. In summer the menfolk engage themselves in preparation of their fields and keep them ready before the rainy season sets in. At the same time, they collect fuel from the adjoining forests in this season as would last throughout the year. In a later part of this season they sow maize in the agricultural plots adjacent to their houses which always increase in fertility by the use of organic manure like cowdung. The women occupy themselves with collecting fuel and other edibles from the forests like wild fruits, leaves roots and tubers and store them for use in the rainy season. If need be, they help the menfolk particularly in raising ridges in the fields for retention of rain water.

During monsoon the Asur are heavily occupied in agricultural operations. In the latter part of this season, they harvest their beautiful maize crop which is ready by that time. Maize is the principal staple food crop of the Asur and as such they take particular interest in its growing and preserving its seeds after harvest. The women have a number of jobs to do in the fields, the principal one being transplantation of paddy over and above attending to every household duty. By the time winter sets in, the paddy crop for which the Asur were anxiously waiting is ready. In the early part of this season, the crop ripens and they preoccupy themselves for harvesting and thrashing and bringing it to their homes. Soon a period of rejoicing starts with a number of festivals and social occasions like marriage, etc. Except touching a plough which is considered a strict taboo, the Asur women participate in all economic activities of the tribe.

Weekly markets.

What D.N. Majumdar has observed about the attraction of the Ho of Singhbhum to weekly markets is equally
Natural springs oozing out in depressions of the plateau are the only sources of water supply. For a pitcherful of water for drinking the Asur women have to go a considerable distance several hundreds feet below their habitations. It is surprising as to how the Asur could survive with such a scanty supply of water in this inhospitable habitat. Digging of a well has almost been an impossibility in this plateau.
The pool which is full of water during the rainy season is used by the Asur for watering their cattle who sometimes do not get enough water for drinking during summer when it dries up.
applicable to the Asur also. The Asur women and youths anxiously look forward to the market day and make the necessary preparations for personal decoration to attend it. The women boil their sari and other garments in wood ashes a day before and wash them clean to be worn when they proceed to the market. Though they have not much to sell or buy, still they do not mind walking even ten to fifteen miles to reach there. Weekly markets break the monotony in the Asur life as they provide a sort of recreation to them in a number of ways. 'Whoever loved that loved not at first sight' becomes true in the market place. These markets also serve as centres for matrimonial negotiations and many marriage partnerships are planned and effected there. 'The chief attraction in these markets besides the buying and selling of agricultural and forest produce and the petty needs of the rural life are the liquor booths which sell cheap intoxicants'. In case there is no booth in any market, say for example at Dumarpat, still the liquor sellers have always been found obliging who are there with bottles of liquors for sale defying all rules and regulations of the Excise Department. They have a roaring business of selling liquor to the Asur who have a special liking or say weakness for this drink. Here in the weekly market the men and women from different villages meet one another and drink until they become intoxicated. Old people come there to meet their friends and acquaintances and discuss important events and exchange news. Elders decide cases of social lapses. In the past a health visitor used to carry out his health programme in the weekly market vaccinating the people against smallpox without taking the trouble to visit the individual villages. The village postman even today does not fail to attend it because he finds it convenient to sit in a corner and dispose of his bag of letters. In short, the markets play a vital role in culture contacts among the Asur with the outside world.
Youth's dormitory.

The institution of youth's dormitory known as Giti-ore is still alive among the Asur. It has been observed that the system of youths' dormitories and community houses existed in a number of societies spread over a very wide area of the world. 'There is no doubt', writes Prof. C. Von Furer Haimendorf that the men's house system is a very ancient institution. The role which the Morung plays in the village of the Konyak Nagas shows how deeply it is rooted in their social organisation. The Morung is a centre of village life and the pillar of Konyak social and political organisation. It regulates the relation of every man and woman with the members of the community and forms a framework for the numerous obligations between individuals and groups. It strengthens the sense of social unity developing in the boys of the Morung a strong esprit de corps and at the same time encourages competition between the Morungs thus stimulating the activities of the whole village. The dhunkuria or the boy's dormitory has attracted the attention of Anthropologists ever since S.C. Roy gave an interesting account in his work on the Oraon in the year 1915. The dhunkuria, however, at present does not exist in all the Oraon villages, but is found in some form or other in certain areas. 'The dhunkuria is the only seminary for formal instruction among the Oraon. Its main social function is the training of youth in music and dancing and in the traditional lore of the Oraons'. The youth's dormitory of the Munda also known as Giti-Ora is no more in existence. In the past Mundari children having attained the age of puberty were not allowed to sleep in their parents' huts. No sensible man will deny that the removal of the young people from the parental huts, which generally contain but one room besides the cattle pen is a very wise measure.

Unlike the dhunkuria of the Oraon, the youth's dormitory of the Asur has not yet lost the vitality and vigour that it had in the past. Still it continues to maintain its importance
Paddy husking with the help of a Dhenki is one of the important household duties for the Asur women. It provides good exercise to various parts of the body. Particularly feet get sturdy. Paddy husking is followed by removing chaff from the grains with the help of a winnowing basket.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
Visit to a weekly market is always anxiously awaited by the Asur who do not mind walking 10-15 miles for going there, though they have to sell or buy very few articles. The visit to the hat breaks monotony in the dull life in the village. It provides a meeting place for relatives, friends and lovers. It is the main centre for culture contacts. The Asur exchange here news, discuss some important events, keep an eye on boys and girls for marriage with their daughters and sons. Girls wash their sari in wood ashes a day earlier, dress their hair artistically and wear some ornaments for personal decoration when they proceed to the hat.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
in one form or another in cementing inter-village alliances of friendship. The boys and girls go to other villages in a body and receive similar visits from other dormitories. They exchange greetings, feast and dance together and individual boys enter ceremonial friendship pacts with the dormitory boys of other villages. In the dormitories, the young Asur girls always appear on most friendly terms with each other. A custom also obtains among them by which the ties of friendship are made almost as binding as those of marriage. It is not exclusively an Asur practice, but it is generally resorted to by the girls of that tribe. They work together, sing together and strive to be always together till they grow so fond, that a sudden thought strikes one or the other of them to say "let us swear eternal friendship". Then each other plucks flowers and neatly arranges them in the other's hair. They exchange necklaces and contribute afterwards from their own means and jointly prepare a little feast to which they invite the friends of their own sex who are made witnesses to the contract. After partaking of the feast the ceremony is considered completed. From that hour they must not address or speak to each other by name. They are as particular about this as are the Hindu women who do not mention the names of their husbands. Usually they address each other by the name of certain flowers which are agreed to for the purpose.

"Budhni Asurin and Chamri Asurin while attending the girl's dormitory in their childhood were in close friendship. They lived together, worked together and strived to be always together. They grew so fond of each other that they swore eternal friendship. The Asur girls ordinarily choose for such occasion objects like flowers or necklaces for exchange. But Budhni and Chamri selected a queer object for the purpose which they called 'ban'. Ban is a bunch of newly grown sprouts of paddy from which roots are removed. They exchanged the bunch five times among them, saying, "Le Ban, De Ban" meaning 'take the bunch, give me the bunch.' Thenceforward they decided to address each other not by name but by the 'ban'. In no time, the news of this eternal friendship reached their parents who encouraged
them to hold a small feast to solemnise it. At this occasion they also exchanged their saris to make the friendship firm."

"Parvati Asurin and Kalavati Asurin who are attending the girl's dormitory at village Sakhuapani have decided to swear eternal friendship. It seems the girls have got the refined names while attending the local primary school at the village. They have exchanged Gulaichi flowers among them and have started addressing each other by the name of the flower. Parents of both the girls have come to know about this eternal friendship. The parents of Parvati treat Kalavati as if their real daughter who is also addressed by them not by her name but by the name of the Gulaichi flower. The parents of Kalavati do likewise for Parvati."

'Through all these acts this institution of the Asur knits the villages into one social unit as against the Naga Morungs which are instrumental in fostering a spirit of rivalry between themselves and sometimes this may lead to hostilities'. For the Asur, life in the youth's dormitory is considered the best period of their life and the elders recollect these memories with emotion when narrating how happy they were in their youth. As we shall see later, the institution of the youth's dormitory still continues to provide a mechanism for initiating the growing generations of the Asur into their cultural heritage and use thereof according to their traditional methods.

Life Cycle.

The life cycle from conception to marriage among the Asur is most interesting, because it contains certain important features which distinguish the tribe from its neighbours like the Munda, Oraon and Kharia. The normal attitude of the Asur towards pregnancy is that of rejoicing. For the Asur women it is also a matter of pride. When a woman misses her periods and some other minor signs indicate conception, she has to take care about certain things. She must not be present at a burial, nor even touch a dead body. She must not remain outside her house when lighting flashes in the sky and the sound of thunder is heard. While going out of her house, she must cover herself completely with her sari-cloth, lest
enemies or persons with evil eyes should come to know of her delicate condition and do her some harm. Very simple food is given to the pregnant woman and she is looked after well particularly by her mother-in-law or any other elderly woman in the family. If pregnancy does not take place within two or three years, normal relations in the family are sometimes estranged and a diviner's help is sought to know the cause of her barrenness. He prescribes some rites to be performed and if he knows something about medicinal herbs he recommends their administration. If even after adoption of all these measures pregnancy does not take place, the Asur resign themselves to the will of God who did not seem to favour them with the gift of a child. They hardly think of having another wife when one is living. Polygamy is almost non-existent among the Asur.

But a daughter-in-law is greatly loved if pregnancy takes place early and the whole family awaits eagerly a new member with all hopes and aspirations. Would the parents be satisfied if the first born is a female? What would the mother aspire for, a son or a daughter? The Asur believe that it all depends upon God whether the first issue is a male or a female. But he would welcome more a female as the first issue unlike many other tribes and non-tribal societies in the country. I was surprised at this peculiar belief. I explained to the Asur who were present that the son is the hope of the parents since upon him devolves the duty to support them in their old age and offer ancestor worship after their death. Compared to all this, the daughter is of no value to the family as such. Whatever it may be, the Asur strongly believe that if the first issue is a boy, either of the parents will not live to see his marriage. On the contrary, a daughter as the first issue brings all prosperity and long life for the parents who would be able to see the marriages not only of their sons and daughters but also of their grandsons and grand daughters. Love and respect for women among the Asur remind me of the fact that the Asur
were once a matriarchal society which changed into patriarchy when they came to live among social groups which were patriarchal.

Pregnancy among the unmarried causes concern for the Asur parents who unlike the non-tribals, however, are not horrified. The tribal institution of youth's dormitory provides an opportunity to boys and girls of marriageable age to mix freely. Their values of life as regards chastity among the women are quite different from that of the non-tribals. Premarital chastity is not insisted upon and nobody bothers whether the girl had a love affair and sexual relations before her marriage. An unmarried tribal girl knows that stoppage of menstruation will be a matter of concern to herself as well as to her parents. But she is fully prepared to meet the eventuality. By simply taking a handful of kitchen salt dissolved in a glass of water, she would start menstruating. If kitchen salt fails, the mother helps her in a number of ways. There are a number of poisonous herbs, leaves and roots which are used for medicinal purposes among the tribes. Most of the drugs prepared out of these are used for curing pain in the stomach and they also work as laxative. If any of these drugs is given in a larger dose it causes severe diarrhoea resulting in abortion. In case abortion does not take place by any method, the girl names the person who is responsible for her pregnancy. He is given charge (jima) of the girl by the tribal Panchayat.

Birth normally takes place in the house wherein the family lives. The Asur do not consider it necessary to erect a separate house or structure to be used as a lying room. Those families having more than one room in their houses, find it much more convenient to assign one room for the purpose. When an expectant mother feels the pangs of birth she withdraws into an out-house if such is available or into a corner of her house taking with her an old quilt (Ledra). From the moment of birth, she may not touch the hearth
or any cooking utensils. If she disregards it, the chulah will be broken up and the vessels will be sprinkled with a purifying mixture. Should the father have to cook for his wife during her confinement, he himself is forbidden to touch either the hearth or the cooking utensils. Generally a woman, an acquaintance of the family assists the mother in her needs and cooks for her.

Among the Asur, social uncleanness starts at the birth of a child and ends with completion of the chati rites. Purification takes place eight days after birth. But if it is foreseen that pressure of work or some other obstacle will come in the way of keeping the eighth day, the ceremony may take place on the fifth day after birth. The father is expected to go round the village and invite all to the chati, even those belonging to a clan different from his own. On the morning of the chati day the guests gather in front of the house. Some hair is shaved off the baby's head. The Asur unlike the Munda, however, are not particular about disposal of the hair of the child shaved at the time of the chati ceremony. The Munda throw the hair in a river or a stream in the belief that the hair will meet in the sea with the hair of his or her future partner of life. The baby is anointed with oil and it is offered to all present to anoint their faces and heads with and then the male guests take their leave. Some women boil with ashes the birth-soiled clothes and then all the women go to the nearest stream but not to the one from which drinking water is taken. The mother carries the birth quilt, and her friends the boiled clothes. On reaching the stream or river the clothes are washed and all bathe.

On returning home, the mother stops in front of her house and sits on a little wooden stool as planned before. Then every one of the women present washes her feet. This is meant as congratulation for having passed safely through the dangers of child-birth. Then follows the purificatory sprinkling with a certain mixture kept ready for the purpose. The mixture
consists of either rice-beer or of water into which some fermenting rice or turmeric has been put. After footwashing the mother followed by all the women enters the house and the oldest woman present sprinkles her and also the place where she had been lying since the day of her delivery.

Then the baby is washed and anointed with turmeric water and oil which had been prepared for the men in the naming. A sufficient quantity is left over. After that all the inmates of the house and the women guests sprinkle themselves with the same mixture, thus completing the ceremony of purification.

So far the mother has had a full day; and if she is the only female in the house able to cook, there is no dinner ready. Neighbourly kindness, however, prevailing in Asur villages solves this difficulty. Friendly families which can afford it, bring a roasted fowl with cooked rice, so that the inmates that day have first class food. Besides, all the women who are invited bring some oil with them as a contribution required for the occasion. Again there is rice beer to enjoy on the occasion.

Now after hearing the wish of the father they express their opinion on the question of a name for the child. Naming of the child takes place thereafter. The person after whom the child is named among the Asur is called Ganon while among the Munda, he is called Saki. Naming of the child takes place after either the name of the day on which he or she is born, or after the time at which the birth has taken place. Thus a child born on a Sunday is named Etwa if a male, and Etwari if a female. A child born on a Monday is called Somra or Soma if a male, and Somri if a female. Similarly the Mangra and Mangri are given respectively to a male and a female child born on a Tuesday and so on for all the days of the week. If the baby is born on a festival day it is usually named after that particular festival. Thus a child born during
the Karma festival, is named Karma. If it is a female child she is named Karmi. She may be named Bhinsaria if her birth took place at early dawn. Sentiment often decides the choice. But if all the former children in the family have died in infancy, visitation of death is ascribed to the ill-will of some ancestors. Sometimes newly born children cry continuously without any probable cause. In such cases the only way to preserve the child or stop its crying is to name it after that particular ancestor since he, of course, will never harm his namesake.

Thutha Asur of Sakhuapani said, "When a son was born to my wife sixteen years ago, we kept his name as Somra, because the day of his birth was Monday, after the chati ceremony was over. Soon he began to cry and would not stop with any effort. On account of his continuous crying without any visible cause, we apprehended that some of our ancestors might be thinking to have his name given to the child. The ancestor was found out by divination and we changed the name Somra to Zirga. Now Zirga has grown up into a youth and is quite healthy".

Paklu Asur of village Navatoli said "We named our son as Mangra because he was born on Tuesday. After naming he began to cry and would not stop. Soon we took recourse to divination to find out whether any of our ancestors was the cause for crying of the son. Divination revealed that Kandra my deceased father would like to have his name perpetuated and so we immediately changed the name of the son from Mangra to Kandra. He is now reading in the school at Sakhuapani".

It is also interesting to know how the name in such cases is found out by divination. Mangra an elderly Asur of Sakhuapani demonstrated before me how two paddy grains were dropped for the purpose of such divination. He took up in one hand a few grains of paddy and dropped two grains one after the other into the water in a leaf cup while naming a particular deceased ancestor of the child on the father's or on the mother's side. Should these two grains remain floating on the water and touch each other by their pointed ends, the child is named after the ancestor in whose name the grains were dropped. If these two grains sink in water, two other grains are similarly dropped again into the cup in the name
of some other dead ancestor to see if the grains float and touch each other by the ends. It is not improbable that this practice was originally meant either as a means of divination to discover which of the deceased ancestors was reborn in the person of the infant, or as a means of securing for the child the protection of the spirit of the deceased ancestor whose name was thus appropriated.

In order to prevent death from laying its hands on a newly-born child, the Asur will sometimes take it to a dung-hill for some time pretending that it is dead. Thereafter it is taken back by a relative to the mother with a request that she should now take great care of the baby. The child thus named is called Gandur.

Rode Asur of village Sakhuapani said to me, "Three of my children had died soon after their birth. When my wife was pregnant again, old people of the village, out of sympathy to me, had already decided to perform a ceremony to prevent death from laying its hand on the baby which would be born to my wife. She gave birth to a son and as arranged beforehand, the baby was taken to a dung-pit nearby my house by one of the old women where it was kept about half a minute. Then five of the old women visited five houses one by one and begged of life for the baby which was supposed to be dead in the dung-pit. One of the old women carried the baby now supposed to be alive to my wife and said to her, "Will you accept the baby or not, we have begged of his life and now it is alive". My wife was very much eager to take the baby in her arms, but the old woman would not part with it. She said, "I would not give you until you pay me two copper pice". On payment, the old woman handed over the baby to my wife and cautioned her saying, "take great care for it, it was a job for me to beg of its life." As the life of my son was begged of in this manner, we named him as Bhikha, meaning one whose life was restored by way of begging."

The Asur have also another method to deceive death. When all or nearly all the first children in a family have died in infancy, the next baby gets a namesake, a Ghasi or Dom. The namesake is called upon to tie a necklace of braided leather strips called cham around its neck, so that spirits may
mistake it for a child of another caste and let it alone. The *cham* is removed before his or her marriage.

Thutha Asur of Sakhuapani said, "I tied a necklace of braided leather strip round the neck of a boy with a regular ceremony in my village in whose family all the first born children had died. I gave him a namesake 'chama'". Now he is quite alright.

Ghasi Asur of village Gora Pahar said, "I bear my name Ghasi even now, because a Ghasi (a person of low caste) in my village had given it to me having tied a leather strip round my neck. The strip was removed at the time of my marriage".

*Marriage.*

As I was leading a party of polling officers to village Sakhuapani, on the morning of the General Elections in the year 1957, I heard a noise of drums and trumpets, songs and merry-making which indicated that some important Asur ceremony was in progress. I alighted from the vehicle amidst the group of houses and asked it to proceed ahead. I went as an uninvited guest to a marriage ceremony which was on. I was offered a string cot and I observed what was going in the *mandwa*, an improvised structure raised on nine poles of bamboo and Sal wood. Girls and elderly women with their babies in slings on their backs were busy dancing amidst loud noises of drums and various other tribal musical instruments. Rows of persons who were relatives of the bride and bridegroom were coming from the adjoining villages to participate in the marriage. Asur women among them also carried pots over their heads containing rice-beer.

I enquired from somebody by my side as to what these men, both old and young, who were sitting quite close to me were singing about. One of them was singing a line which was repeated by the others intermittently. Singing of marriage songs is the monopoly of females only among the non-tribals. My informant told me that these Asur men were themselves singing marriage songs which are not considered as the exclusive right of the women among them. I requested an
elderly Asur to bring before me the bridegroom and the bride for a snap. He immediately got up and went inside the house while I began to talk with the others about their marriage customs, but nobody informed me that the couple was ready for the snap. After 15 to 20 minutes, I enquired about the delay, but to my surprise I was told that the couple was already standing before me ready for the purpose which could hardly be distinguished from other Asur males and females present on the occasion. I looked at the bride whose age appeared to be about 40 years with her four other children standing by her side and a month old baby in her arms who was sucking her breast. The bridegroom who appeared to be 45 years old was also standing by her. Only the colour of turmeric on their clothes, enabled me to differentiate the married couple from the rest of the Asur. It seems the married couple was not lucky enough even to afford a new piece of cloth at their marriage ceremony which is one of the important events in the life of a human being. The upper ends of the poles of the mandwa had over them broken winnowing bamboo baskets, earthen pots and worn out pieces of brooms which did not provide an auspicious sight at the time of a religious ceremony like marriage. Nobody could explain why such things were exhibited like that. An elderly Asur told me that the young boys have done it simply by way of fun or mischief. But it cannot be the fun alone. The custom of keeping such things on poles of the mandwa may have its roots in the belief that they would ward off the evil spirits which are bound to do some sort of mischief either to the couple or its relatives on the auspicious occasion.

This couple had started living together as man and wife some twenty five years ago, but could hardly find circumstances favourable for the marriage ceremony even after the lapse of so many years. It is of course, the longing of such a couple for the regular marriage ceremony and it anxiously awaits for an opportune moment to solemnise it. But sometimes the Asur have to face a lot of complications in this matter. This
ceremony cannot be performed for the man unless his parents have been married in a regular ceremony beforehand. How can he come to this world without actual marriage of his parents? It, therefore, so happens that the father and the mother, and the son and the daughter-in-law who have had married life for a considerable number of years have a happy co-incidence of having their marriage ceremony performed in the same mandwa. So the parents get themselves married first and then the turn of his son and daughter-in-law comes. It may also happen that one of the parents who has not performed the regular marriage ceremony dies before the marriage of his son. In such a critical situation, some symbolic marriage of his parents ought to have been performed. But no such symbolic marriage takes place and the Asur with a heavy heart rests content that it was predestined that his mother or father was to die dinda, bachelor or virgin as the case may be. Why is this important ceremony which is considered so vital before regular cohabitation deferred for such an indefinite period? Some say that due to abject poverty of the Asur, the ceremony is postponed till they get enough wherewithal, rice or cash for its performance. Economic condition alone, in my view, cannot be the only reason for its postponement, because there are a number of other tribes in the country who are poorer than the Asur, yet consider it essential to perform some ceremony in one form or another before cohabitation. Pre-marital intercourse is recognised by the Rajbansis in Purnea, among whom it is due to the expenses involved in a marriage ceremony. A feast to the caste brethren is an essential feature of marriage. Unless and until a feast is given, the marriage ceremony is void. If the man wishing to marry has not been able to save enough to provide a feast he simply sprinkles water on the girl, and they are thereby united. The performance of a marriage ceremony is recognised as a necessary rite even by prostitutes whose life is the negation of marriage. In Bengal, a girl who is intended for a life of shame goes
through a form of marriage before or as soon as she reaches puberty. She is married either to a man, or to a plant or to a sword or a knife. A sword or knife is invariably selected by Mohomedan prostitutes while a plant is preferred by Hindus. Whatever the ceremony, the underlying idea is that a form of marriage is essential to remove shame of remaining unwed when puberty is once attained. I inquired to know the principal reason for overlooking this important ceremony from a number of the Asur who could not enlighten me on the subject and still the same has remained a riddle for the sociologists.

The Asur have a term to denote the married life for which no essential marriage ceremony has taken place. It is called Idi-Me. It means to lead the girl from her parents' house to the boy's for the purpose of cohabitation. It is my estimate that the married life among the Asur starts with Idi-Me in as many as 80 per cent of the cases. The Asur take it for granted that all young people must marry as soon as mind and body have reached that maturity which enables them to bear the responsibilities and fulfil all the duties of a married life. Regularised and socially sanctioned sex-gratification may be the basic reason for the formation of the family and the institution of marriage, yet it is not the only nor the final cause. 'The manner in which this satisfaction takes place is decided by the cultural traditions of a people. Marriage, therefore, ensures a biological satisfaction (that of sex) and psychological satisfaction (that of having children) on the individual plane; on the wider collective plane, it ensures a twofold survival, viz. that of the group and its culture'.

Marriage has been defined as 'a union between a man and woman such that children born to the woman are the recognised legitimate off-spring of both partners'. It is generally regarded as a civil contract and not always a religious sacrament, and therefore, religious solemnisation does not take place everywhere. For the Asur however, the marriage has
both the above purposes, of course, religious solemnisation is deferred to an indefinite period. 'There are eight important ways of acquiring a mate in tribal India, namely (1) Probationary marriage, (2) Marriage by capture, (3) Marriage by trial, (4) Marriage by mutual consent and elopement, (5) Marriage by purchase, (6) Marriage by service, (7) Marriage by exchange and (8) Marriage by intrusion'. Can this *Idi-Me* be included in or indentified with any of these eight ways? I think this is a unique institution of the Asur. I have no knowledge about such an institution among the other tribes of India except the Birhor who are a nomadic tribe in Chotanagpur. *Idi-Me* cannot be called a Probationary marriage, because unlike the Kuki, the Asur young man does not go to live with his sweet-heart for weeks together with a desire for wedlock. Marriage by capture is rare among the Asur, because it is not difficult for the Asur boy or girl to get his or her selected partner with the consent of the parents. 'Trial marriage is the recognition of personal courage and bravery and considered highly desirable trait in a young man. The Bhil tribe even now requires a young man to prove his prowess before he can claim the hand of any girl in marriage'. No such bravery or recognition of personal courage is necessary for the *Idi-Me*. The bride price of Rs. 3 is only a known payment among the Asur for the purpose of marriage which is delayed for a number of years. Hence it has not got any significance as is among the Ho of Singhbhum who find it difficult to pay the exorbitant rate of bride price for the marriage of their sons, which often leads them to adopt the form of marriage by elopement which may be pre-arranged. There is a practice of *Ghar-Damad* among the Asur. It takes place not because the young man is not in a position to pay the bride price, but the girl's parents having no male issue would like to make their daughter the heir of their property. Instances of elopement of a girl with a boy are also rare among the Asur. The Asur institution of the youth's
dormitory allows free scope to the individuals in the choice of his or her mate, and it is not difficult to get the parents' consent as mentioned earlier.

Rituals for the the real marriage ceremony among the Asur are practically the same as those of the Munda, Oraon and Sadan (local non-tribal) with whom they have lived for several centuries. The non-tribals also live in the midst of the tribals with the result that the Asur have also adopted Hindi names for several marriage ceremonies.

Sexual intercourse between a young man and girl is tolerated even before the actual social sanction for cohabitation as husband and wife. Virginity of the girl is not necessarily a virtue among the Asur. They have free mixing before marriage and this is the happiest time of their life. The only restriction is that such couple should not belong to the same totemic clan or gotra. Such intercourse between the boys and girls of the same gotra is punished with a fine sufficient to provide for a feast to the villagers or at least the sacrifice of a white cock to Bhagwan. Marriage in the same totemic clan is regarded as a sin which would bring in its train dire calamity to the tribe and is on no account permitted.

When the Asur think their son has grown and attained marriageable age, they start talking to their relatives and enquiring about a suitable girl. When the girl attains puberty and the boy is of 18 or 19 years of age, it is considered to be a proper age for marriage. When a young man desires to have a girl as his partner whom he may have met in the village Akhara or in other villages or in the weekly markets and fairs, he communicates his wishes to his friends who inform his parents. Even when the son has made no definite choice, the parents engage a go-between (Agua) to undertake the negotiations. The go-between may have in view a few families having a girl of suitable age. Such a girl if available in the village itself or in a village in close proximity
is preferred. The reasons are obvious. She may be fully known to the boy and there may be familiarities between the families. It may also be possible that the boy may have a love affair or courting with her during their life in the youth's dormitory. But the most important reason for the preference for such a girl is that chances for ill-omens are less as the go-between has not to traverse a long distance for settlement of the marriage. It is a strong belief among the Asur that the couple would not be happy if a marriage takes place ignoring omens which are considered bad. Before he proceeds to the village of the girl, he has to observe very carefully omens met with which will decide the course of his efforts. At the time of his visit to the intended village, if he sees a jackal crossing the road, a deer or person carrying an empty water pot, he has to give up his efforts, because these are bad omens, and the parents of the girl are informed accordingly.

Lucas Asur of Sakhuapani said, "I along with Chamfa Asur and two others were going to village Sanai Tangar for settlement of marriage of my sister's son Paklu who lives at village Lodapat. While going we were observing omens carefully. To our bad luck we came across a partridge which is considered as a bad omen. We returned and intimated the parents of the girl that in view of the bad omen, the idea of marriage of the girl with my sister's son had been dropped for ever.

But it seemed, the girl was in love with Paklu. She came to him of her own accord to live as wife. Both of them were warned by the elderly persons of the village about dreadful consequences that would follow, but they did not mind it. They had a married life for about six years during which period the couple had three issues. Then Paklu's wife died and thereafter he repented very much for his act as it was a job for him to look after three young children. Being exasperated thoroughly, he married again".

Manjhi Asur and Dibku Asur of Sakhuapani said, "We and two other persons were going to village to settle marriage for Dasma Asur of Sakhuapani. We came across a deer which is considered as a bad omen. Some of us maintained that it was a good omen. As we could not decide positively, we proceeded ahead and settled the marriage. At the time of Nawakhani Festival the girl was brought to Dasma and they lived happily for four months. Thereafter the girl's father and her relatives came to Sakhuapani
to invite his daughter and son-in-law to their village. Dasma went merrily with his wife to his father-in-law's house. But God knows how did it happen? The girl died all of a sudden after three days at her father's house and Dasma returned home bewailing. This incident of death proved that the omen of deer is a bad omen”.

On the contrary, if a go-between and his companions hear crowing of a crow, or meet a tiger or a snake, they feel sure that their mission will be fulfilled as these are considered good omens. After reaching the village, the party meets the parents of the girl for whom a marriage proposal is brought. The girl's parents pretend non-acquaintance with the party and ask, "Well, brothers, where do you come from and why?" The go-between replies, "We have come here finding a beautiful creeper of gourd in your house. We want to see it. We would like to take, of course, with your permission, the creeper with us for multiplying seeds in our place". If the girl's parents feel that the proposal is worth consideration, they call their relatives for discussion and consultation regarding omens. If the omens prove favourable and the marriage proposal agreeable, the first ceremony of foot washing of the go-between and his companions takes place known as Kata-abun. This ceremony is a mark of civility to the visiting guests. It is not confined to this occasion only. It occurs in nearly everyone of numerous ceremonies which precede the marriage. The go-between reports back to the boy's parents about the success of his mission. Then on an appointed day, the girl’s father with a few other near relatives pay a visit to the boy's parents with a view to seeing the boy with whom his daughter is to be married. Here they avail of an opportunity to 'see him' when he serves rice-beer to the guests. Having enjoyed a good feast and a lot of rice-beer, the girl’s father and the relatives return to their homes duly satisfied with the proposed relationship. Now the betrothal has to take place. The boy's father with his near relatives now come to 'see the house' of the girl's parents. In fact the purpose is to 'see the
girl' rather than the house before the betrothal. After washing
the feet of the bridegroom's party and declaring that the
omens they met on their way were favourable the betrothal or
ceremony of Pan-partei takes place.

The guests are seated on mats, the father of the groom
or his representative occupying the first place to the right.
The girl in the company of her friends serves rice-beer to the
guests. After this one of the leading Panchas or village elders
who have been called to remain present at the time of
betrothal addresses them as follows. "I think you have seen
our child, here she served you rice-beer. Now tell us whether
she has any defect in foot, hand, eye, ear or anywhere. Should
you later on send her away from your house even as one
throws aside a worn-out hoe or sickle, saying, 'we had not
seen her properly,' then know that we will not accept that as
right on your part". The groom's party then categorically
replies that they have seen the girl properly and they are
pleased to have her as daughter-in-law in the family.

On this occasion a very important ceremony known as
'Lota Pani' takes place among the Munda and the Oraon. The
ceremony provides a last opportunity to the girl to give her
consent or not for the proposed marriage. Among the Munda,
a member of the village council wearing a turban for the
occasion, takes a bowl of fresh water and pouring some of the
water into a small leaf-cup, presents it to the bride and says,
'give it to them'. Then if the girl agrees to the marriage she
presents the water to her future father-in-law. After that she
presents a cup of water to the relatives of the bridegroom by
which she will always acknowledge them as her real relatives.
Some of this water is also given to all those of her village who
are present. By accepting water they declare themselves
witnesses that the girl has freely given her consent to the
marriage and that in consequence they oblige themselves to
see to it that later on the girl's parents do not break the
contract on any insufficient grounds. Then a pot of beer is
presented to the girl who offers it to the groom’s father; this one fills a leaf-cup. The groom’s father drops some coins and offers it to the bride who drinks beer and takes out the coins and gives two pice to her friend. The rest of beer is then given to the groom’s party. After all this they are served with a meal of rice and pulse. I enquired whether there was a similar ceremony of ‘Lota Pani’ among the Asur or whether an opportunity was given to the girl to express publicly her consent for the marriage or not. I am informed that no such ‘Lota Pani’ ceremony takes place among the Asur, but the girl is always persuaded lovingly by her parents and near relatives to agree to the proposal and it is only after obtaining her specific consent, the betrothal or Pan-parthi ceremony is allowed to take place. After the Pan-parthi ceremony, the father of the boy and the father of the girl along with other relatives discuss the marriage. If the circumstances are unfavourable they agree not to perform the regular marriage ceremony, but decide to bring the girl to the boy’s house by way of the Idi-Me for cohabitation.

Bride price plays a vital role in marriage among the tribes all over India. It may be paid in cash or kind. Lowie has emphasised that although the economic nature of the bride price cannot be minimised, it nevertheless would be wrong to regard the payment of bride price as indicating sale or purchase. “The Rengma Naga pay a bride price but no economic significance is attached to it. To emphasise the non-economic nature and moral significance of the practice they pay ten rupees less than the settled bride price. ... But among the Chotanagpur tribes, the bride price has none of these moral virtues. In Chotanagpur the bride price is meant to be a stabilising and useful factor”. In the Mundari language the bride price is denoted by the word Gonong having a root which means barter. It really means barter par excellence. The usual bride price among the Munda in the past was three bullocks. ‘The introduction of money as
bride price amongst the Munda is comparatively recent. It is only of late that some Christians have started paying the whole bride price in cash. The bride price among the Asur is only symbolic of the utility of a woman. Acceptance of the bride price, however, has not resulted in a low status for the Asur women as in the case among the Ao and the Rengma Naga.

It must be remembered that the marriage, most likely the barter of the girl, existed among the Munda when they lived solely on the chase and the products of the jungle. When they learnt agriculture from the Aryans, their pattern of economy changed and consequently the bride price came to be calculated in terms of bullocks. With the introduction of money economy, the bride price is steadily taking the form of cash. But among the Asur the symbolic bride price has remained in the form of cash for the past several hundred years. It has almost remained constant at Rs. 3/-.

As we know, iron-smelting being the only occupation of the Asur, they have had nothing to barter with. Lumps of iron being sold in markets for cash, it was convenient for the Asur to determine the price in terms of cash. But as described elsewhere, the Asur are a very conservative people and are not prepared to change their customs and beliefs almost neglecting the repercussions of time. With the adoption of agriculture, the Munda calculated the bride price in terms of corns and bullocks. The Asur took to agriculture a couple of centuries back but they do not feel even today the necessity of converting the cash amount in terms of cows or bullocks which are essential for agriculture. There is no scope for its conversion because no animal can be purchased now-a-days with an insignificant amount of Rs. 3/-. The fact is that this amount can hardly be called the bride price, because it is simply a token for stabilisation of the marriage.

There are a number of ceremonies both minor and important to be performed at the time of regular marriage
The first one is ceremonial removal of a bridegroom’s bachelorhood and the bride’s maidenhood. The ceremony seems to have lost its significance as the parties may have already lost their bachelorhood and maidenhood by living as husband and wife with the sanction of the *Ide-Me*. In a regular marriage, the bridegroom goes to the house of the bride with a marriage party. All details about the reception of the party and the various rites concerning the marriage need not be described here, because they are common among the other tribes almost everywhere in Chotanagpur. But the Asur differ from his neighbours in having one of the important marriage rites known as Banhjori. As said earlier, a woman should avoid her husband’s elder brother, but in the Banhjori rite, the bride is made to sit in the lap of the elder brother of the bridegroom. A question would arise as to why the elder brother is singled out for the rite instead of his father who seems to be the proper person for taking his son’s wife in his lap. A woman would ordinarily avoid the presence of her husband’s elder brother. It seems the rite is provided in order to forbid all approaches of the husband’s elder brother towards her and he should be careful to avoid a touch of her even in a state of drunkenness. It is quite likely that the husband’s elder brother may have in view the same girl who is being married to his younger brother. As such he may have some attraction for her. But once it is decided that she is to marry his younger brother, he has to treat her as his own daughter by making her sit in his lap in the presence of the village elders and others at the time of the Banhjori rite. The principal marriage ceremony takes place inside the house and not in the open *mandwa*. No outsider is allowed access to the house when the ceremony is going on. No priest is required for the purpose and any one from among the Asur who know something about the ceremony performs it in the presence of relatives and other members of the tribe. A new piece of cloth measuring about two yards is given by the bridegroom’s
father to the bride and also a couple of annas for her girl friends. This amount is called 'Sang Chutauni' that is compensation for separation of the bride from their company.

After the principal marriage ceremony is over, the relatives and friends who have been invited to the marriage assemble in the mandwa where an important ceremony called chumaun is held. Here also the Asur differ from the Oraon and Munda. Among the Munda the bridegroom and the bride are brought out and are made to sit on the nuptial mat facing east. A brass plate with a lighted oil lamp in it and some pearl rice and a leaf containing mustard seeds are brought and placed in front of the bride and the groom. Then the mother starts the chumaun with the bride. She takes up the plate, touches it with the feet of the bride, then her knee, then her forehead, then she makes with it a circular motion over her head, and having touched her right shoulder describes there also a similar circle. She does the same over her left shoulder, then she takes a pinch of pearl rice from the plate, joins her hands and makes the same movements touching her feet, knee, forehead and shoulders describing a circle over her head and shoulders. She ends by throwing the rice over her head where the maidens who helped in the erection of the mandwa catch it up on a cloth and put it back in the plate. Both these performances are done a second and a third time. Then she warms up the palms of her hands over the oil lamp, passes them caressingly over her cheeks and bringing them back to her lips, and kisses the tips of her fingers. When she has done so three times, the ceremony is finished as far as it concerns the bride. But she has to repeat the same with the bride-groom. When this is finished she puts some money in the plate. She is followed by as many women of the village as wish to do so. Each of these winds up her chumaun by putting some money in the plate. While among the Asur the chumaun ceremony is quite different. Neither the presence of the bride and the groom is necessary
in the mandwa. The relatives and friends sit in the mandwa and a brass jug with water and a mango twig inserted in it is kept in the middle. A drummer sits in one corner with his kettle-drum. Then a relative or friend gets up and sprinkles water from the brass jug with the mango twig on those present in the mandwa and puts some money in a leaf plate kept ready for the purpose. Somebody in the mandwa announces loudly amidst loud beating of the kettle-drum that such and such gentleman or lady has contributed so many companies and so many bhainsas. Company and bhainsa are code words. Company means a rupee and bhainsa means two pice. All those who are present at the marriage come one by one in the mandwa and offer some money in the cup. The money is intended as a help for the parents of the bride to cover the expenses of the festivities. The total of the money is announced at the end and the leaf plate with the cash is shown round by two men who then take it to their own house. Next morning, they will bring it back and present it in the presence of leading men to the parents of the bride with a little speech and the father of the bride will thank them by giving a pot of rice beer. The same ceremony is repeated at the bride-groom’s house when the marriage party returns.

I have tried to point out at various places in this book that there are certain important features in the social life of the Asur that distinguish it from the other tribes in India. Divorce is the common feature of the marital life in human societies all over the world with a few exceptions here and there. Surprisingly enough, the Asur tribe aligns with those societies in which divorce is not permitted. Dissolution of marriage may be difficult if it is regarded as a religious sacrament which is not the case with Indian tribes. Consequently we find that it is usually obtained by one of the parties refusing to continue to live in wedlock and abandoning the spouse. But this is not the case with the Asur. Marriage among them is considered to be an indissoluble tie and come
what may, he has to live up to the Asur tradition by treating his wife as an honourable partner even if she remains sick or barren. This indissolubility of marriage among the Asur sometimes creates a very queer situation as can be seen from the following instance.

'Etva Asur of village Jobhipat had married a girl at village Lupungpat about two years ago. The girl has not yet gone to her father-in-law's house, neither she wants. Her parents requested Etva's parents to take her to their village. But Etva also refuses to bring her. The parents at either side are not at fault. If anybody is at fault, it is Etva as well as his wife. The marriage being indissoluble, the Asur Panchayat has not been able to find a way out of this impasse.'

There is the ancient tradition under which bringing of another wife is forbidden. Sometimes the wife instigates her husband to remarry so that they may have a child in the family. In a rare instance the Asur tries to revolt against the tradition at the bidding or instigation of the existing wife. But when a new wife is brought life becomes none too happy. It becomes a constant source of irritation and friction in the family and the Asur severely exasperated begins to curse himself as to why he could not foresee the wisdom of the ancient traditions by following which he could have avoided all such unhappy consequences. The Asur woman house enjoys more freedom as compared to man. She sometimes elopes with somebody if she feels the life is not going to be happy with the person to whom she is married. The relatives and even the Panchayat would try to persuade her to live with her husband, but after waiting for a considerable time they regard this unsocial act as inevitable and acquiesce in it by arranging compensation to the husband. As we have seen, marriage does not seem to be a religious sacrament among the Asur and so it remains almost a riddle as to why divorce has no social sanction in this tribe.

Disposal of the dead

The Asur also differ from their other tribal neighbours
in this part of the country in the matter of disposal of the dead. The disposal of the corpses of deceased relatives is an important ceremony. This practice is a mark of respect to the dead body as the former dwelling place of the soul belonging in the same way to the family tribe or the race. 'The idea of a soul distinct from the body, especially of a soul surviving the body could have arisen only a very long time after the evolution of man from the mere animal state. First of all, the Primitives considered the corpse a 'Living corpse'. From certain excavations, it is assumed that the first mode of disposing of the dead was to bury them slightly either under or at the side of the hearth in a cave or hut in which the family lived. When they lay directly under the cooking place, a small hole was made, through which food and drink could be passed to the mouth of the deceased. This practice rested on the belief that the deceased was not really and finally dead but his ego remained still in the dead body. The second mode of disposing of the corpses is the grave that is, a dwelling place outside the family's hut or cave. The third one is that of burning them or cutting them to pieces before provisional or definitive inhumation. This mode rests on the belief that the soul is forced to hover over the body as long as there remains any flesh attached to the bones. When the last shred of flesh has disappeared from all the bones, only then can the poor soul start on its journey towards the land of the souls. The bones then are enclosed in stone sepulchres of various descriptions.'

The Ho of Singhbhum burn their dead in front of their huts, and the next day the remaining larger bones are placed in an earthen vessel which is hung under the roof at the back of the house. It is long ago that probably under the influence of Christianity, the Mundas have stopped burning their dead, except such as have been killed by a tiger and whose bones are never buried under the Sasandiri (Stone slab). The custom has been replaced by that of burying the dead and digging out, after a year or so, a piece of skull to be put under the family
burial stone. Though it is claimed by eminent Anthropologists that the Asur are a branch of the Munda, it is surprising that the former differ distinctly in the matter of the disposal of their dead by burying in the grave in a yard specially assigned for the purpose.

The Chhandogya Upanishad (Chapter VII, p. 7-11) describes the efforts of Virochana, the Asura and Indra the Arya to realise the Atman. After a preliminary training of full thirty two years, both approached the Preceptor Prajapati. 'The Self you see reflected in the eye, that is Atman', sayeth the Master. Virochana unsheathed his shining sword, saw his well-fed, well-clad image and went out to advise his people to bury the dead supplied with clothing and food. Indra had his doubts and persisted for many more years till the answer came. So even today the Asur bury their dead with a supply of food, clothing and even money and ornaments. Some ancient remains of the Asur in Khunti Sub-division in Ranchi district as noticed by S.C. Roy will indicate to us the mode of disposal of the dead by the Asur. At village Khuntitol two miles south west of Khunti there are a large number of graves. Huge stone slabs make the burial sites under which three or four cinerary urns, and water pots, big and small were found placed one above the other. These water pots contained the mortal remains of the Asur. Inside the water pots there was an earthen lamp to illuminate the dark underground. A small jug for oil was also kept inside the grave. Another jug what we call lota contained copper ornaments like ear-rings, bracelets, necklets and rings. A string of stone beads was also there. The urns containing the bones of small children had ornaments or other articles in the grave. At village Pokla there is another grave yard of the Asur having seventeen graves and one sepulchral pillar. Stones at this village were erected with their broad faces to the east and the west and the urns in every case lay to the east of them. Copper and iron implements and ornaments were also found in these graves,
The mode of disposal of the dead among the Asur was verified by me by interrogating a number of the elderly Asur of villages Sakhuapani, Kujam and Nawatoli. The Asur never cremate their dead. When a person dies, the dead body is washed and anointed with oil and wrapped up in a new piece of cloth. If the family is poor, an old piece would do. They take the body to the grave yard and bury it with the feet towards the south. Among the Munda the feet are kept towards the north under the belief that it would be nearer for the soul to reach its place which supposedly lay in the north. Both men and women accompany the dead body to the graveyard. Relatives who are present at the graveyard contribute each a coin or two which are tied at the end of the cloth covering the dead body in a knot and are kept under the head. If the knot becomes too big to be kept under the head, they are placed in a copper _lota_ along with a few ornaments. The _lota_ is placed in a hole dug in the bottom of the grave in the middle and then the dead body is placed over it. Bows and arrows and other articles loved by the dead during his life time are also kept inside the grave. The Asur did not confirm about the keeping of an earthen lamp and oil inside the grave to light the underworld as was found in the ancient remains of the Asur at village Khuntitoli. Then all those who are present pour water in the mouth of the dead person as their last offering. After the grave is filled, some paddy and other food grains are placed over it supposedly to provide food for the journey of the soul. The graveyard of the Asur is meant only for those persons who have met a natural death. Those who are killed by a tiger or bear or are bitten by a snake or die in an accident or epidemic are buried in a separate place at a distance from the existing burial place. The Asur take particular care about burying a pregnant woman who dies in labour. She is buried separately from the others far away on the outskirts of the village so that her spirit may not trouble
the village people. After the burial is over the Asur go to the river, stream or any other watering place before returning home.

After the dead body is removed from the house, the Asur try to ascertain whether the person had died of a natural cause or death was due to machinations of some evil spirit. A woman spreads ashes through a cloth sieve. The usual practice is to scatter ashes from the farthest end, the woman walking backwards while doing so, so that she may not tread on it. Then the room is carefully bolted. When the people return from burial, the room is opened and the members put their heads together to discern an impression on the floor on which ashes are spread. If the impression on the ashes resembles a long line made by dragging a thread or a rope, it is believed that the person has died a natural death and he has secured a safe place in the other world. If the traces resemble the footprints of a cat, tiger or of any other animal, it is believed that the person had died of witchcraft. In that case, the family members of the deceased will try to protect themselves against the evil designs of some witches or wizards who will be found out by divination and adopt measures for their exorcism and expulsion through magic.

Two days after the death a ceremony of Chai Bhitar takes place, when they invite the spirit of the dead to the house. A small straw hut between the village and the burial ground is prepared in which an effigy of the dead person made of clay is placed. The hut is set on fire and the relatives present shout, "Come oh, you so and so, your house is burning". Immediately one of the relatives covering himself with a scarf walks towards the house of the dead person where he knocks at the door which is kept closed from inside for the ceremony. One of the relatives who has remained in the house questions the one who knocks the door. He gets a reply that he is so and so, and a request to please open the door. Then the spirit of the dead gets a place in the house among the former dead. After ten days a dinner in honour of the deceased is
given to the relatives at the ceremony called Daskarma. If the family is poor it is helped by the relatives as well as local village people with foodgrains and other eatables in order to lessen the burden on the family of the deceased. This help does not involve any obligation on the part of the recipient family. The Asur also practise ancestor worship in one form or another. Of course, they do not collect the bones by opening the grave and keep in the back room of the house the ancestral spirits and offer them daily food and drink as in the case of the Oraon. Neither do they bury the bones of the ancestors under the Bid-diri after having performed the Jantopa ceremony like the Mundas. The Asur simply remember and pray to their ancestors by performing a simple ceremony of offering a drink and sacrifice of a fowl on three occasions in a year. The first one takes place in Aswin when it is called Rajkarma. The second one takes place in the month of Kartic which is called Sohrai. The third one is Holi in the month of Fagun. The ancestors are fed on these occasions and prayed to so that they may bestow favours upon the family and protect the members from trouble.

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CHAPTER 6

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The Asur tribe as mentioned earlier, has not yet been the victim of disintegration. The society is still attached to its solitude and ancient traditions. The Asur have not lost their simplicity and honesty. Simple, socially significant and widely understood ceremonies like that of marriage have still place in their life. The institution of the youth's dormitory, though not forceful as in the past, still continues to provide training to the youths suited to the local needs with play, dance, music etc. They have full faith in their religion and have not started entertaining distrust in magic with the result that the religious sanction behind cultural norms has not vanished and hence there is no breaking down of the social structure. Let us see how this social structure has been maintained through the political organisation of the Asur society.

In the Asur society, as among others, the relations between the members of the tribe are regulated by a body of observations, traditions, rules and accepted religious and moral standards. We have seen the normal pattern of relationship between the father and the son which is of superordination and subordination. We have also seen that it is a tradition among the Asur that no member is allowed a divorce in a marriage wedlock. These standards of behaviour are not codified, but merely inherent in the Asur culture as manners and customs. All these rules of behaviour have grown up within the tribe in a slow and spontaneous process of usages and customs which have been given the sanction of time and force. These customs and usages were not specifically declared by some influential individuals in the society. Compliance of these rules and norms of social standards are secured through informal social pressure by the Panchayat. There
are certain other norms which are supposed to have some supernatural sanctions, and their violation is followed automatically by evil results without any overt interference on the part of the Asur. Sexual intercourse with a daughter-in-law is considered one of such acts which is followed by horrible consequences not only to the individual himself, but to the community as a whole. These may be in the form of the most contemptuous death of the wrong-doer and other natural calamities causing suffering to other co-villagers.

The basis of unity and the institutions by which law and order are maintained are available from the authority pattern of an Asur village. The Asur village is a political unit in itself. According to the traditional political system, every Asur village has a traditional Panchayat under a headman who is called Mahto in whom vests this political leadership. The office of the Mahto in the Asur village is hereditary. However, according to the village people of Sakhuapani, the Mahto may have been selected in the distant past informally by men of status and responsibility. Kaloo Mahto, the present headman of this village, is in the fourth generation of the family as remembered by the village people which held this office. Of course, the headman among the Asur is not considered to belong to a lineage with some historical or mythological connection with the chiefly line. It is generally the personal qualification and popularity which determine such a selection. Unlike chiefs in other tribal societies, the Mahto in the Asur village does not enjoy any economic prerogatives such as monopoly rights to fruit-bearing trees or to certain kinds of game or the right to command communal labour. Kaloo Mahto told me that the only privilege he enjoys at present is that he can frown at or use harsh words to any one who misbehaves and thus tries to maintain law and order in the village. Another important function of the Mahto is to act as a spokesman of the village before outsiders and Government officials,
The village headman is usually assisted in his secular and judicial functions by other village elders in a Panchayat. Authority naturally devolves upon men of age and experience. Therefore, the elders of the tribe are regarded as guardians of its law and order. They are both interpreters of the tribal code and adjudicators of disputes. In a small society as that of the Asur each is known to every one. It is a well-integrated homogenous group. Public opinion in such a society, therefore, becomes a very powerful influence in the life of its individual member. The public opinion in the Asur society is one, exclusive and compelling. It acts as a deterrent effectively to any violation of customary laws and traditions which are so much valued by the Asur society. Customary laws, though unwritten, are well known opinions of the community as to the social right or wrong. The Asur have much fear from these laws. They obey them, because they were obeyed by their ancestors and also because of the strong public opinion which is expressed through the authority of the Panchayat. Violations of these laws are regarded as sins which are to be expiated in the most cases by giving a tribal feast and paying a fine.

The Panchayat really means meeting of at least five men to discuss some point of common interest or some course of action to be taken, to settle a dispute amicably or to try, judge and punish an offender privately. In the Panchayat of the Asur, any men present are counted amongst the Panchas and are asked their opinion, except the complainant, the accused and their witnesses. The Panchas must at least be five, otherwise there is no Panchayat, but it is always desired that they may be as numerous as possible. No women are allowed to assist, if called to witness, they retire at once after doing it. The Panchayat does not meet to settle all disputes or award punishment for every single breach of the tribal laws. In many cases social disapproval expressed by the elders of the local groups is generally enough. The Panchayat assembles and
takes into consideration only the comparatively more serious breaches of tribal laws and customs. The decisions arrived at in the Panchayat are generally unanimous. Of course, the people assembled can air their views, but their opinions are not counted statistically in order to arrive at decisions by the Panchayat.

Proceedings before the Asur Panchayat are quite simple. The aggrieved person verbally complains to the village Mahto. The elders of the village assemble in a Panchayat at the village dancing arena or some other appointed place. The Mahto summons the disputing parties before the Panchayat. He informs the accused of the substance of the complaint against him and hears his answer, if necessary takes his evidence. The Panchayat hears both the sides, eye-witnesses are specially relied upon, concealment of offences or suppression of evidence is rarely attempted before the Asur Panchayat. If the accused does not plead guilty inspite of satisfactory evidence against him, he is threatened with dire consequences that would follow from his denial. Sometimes the proceedings become very complicated also. Prolonged deliberations take place in all cases connected with marriage, an abandoned wife, an abandoned husband or adultery of a man with another's wife. But the same become still more complicated in cases of lechery within the clan for which the Asur society takes a very serious view. A woman is represented at the proceedings before the Panchayat by her family and she also herself is present for her examination. Prolonged deliberations, however, are hardly necessary for offences like quarrelling, beating one's wife, letting one's animals graze on another's crop etc. Such offences are common, but cannot be said to be of every day occurrence. In the instances of beating the wife, she herself lodges a complaint before the Panchayat which imposes a fine of a pitcher of rice beer on the accused and warns him to stop this behaviour towards his partner. Inspite of this warning and fine if the beating is repeated, the Panchayat takes cognizance of the offence, even
though the victim herself may not complain. The authority of the Panchayat is highly respected and there are hardly cases of its violation. Occurrences of letting one's animals graze on another's crop do take place, but these are all accidental and not deliberate. If the fact of damage done to the crop comes to notice, the owner of the animals of his own accord approaches the person whose crop has been damaged with a proposal to compensate the loss. This high sense of respect for the personal relations with the members of the community leaves nothing much ordinarily to be done by the Panchayat in its judicial functions. Observance of this social standard on the part of the members in this manner makes the society free from acrimony.

This, however, does not mean that there are no violations of the social standards or breaches of customary codes of conduct or belief at all. The breaches of these norms involve organised sanctions like threat of ridicule, contempt, scorn or ostracism. Neglect of family duties and obligations, desertions of dependents, refusal to entertain guests, repudiation of debts, adultery etc. are actions which are viewed with contempt and scorn. But ostracism is one of the most effective forms of punishment. Ostracism is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the Asur Panchayat with which it secures compliance and observance of the social standards even by an unmanageable member of the community. Its mention alone is enough to cow down even the most hardened culprit. Ostracism is essential in cases when a person transgresses the limits of consanguity (incest within the family), or when a man is guilty of liaison within the Killi or when a girl is guilty of liaison with a non-Asur.

A large number of offences can be expiated by giving penal feasts. A very heavy fine is imposed on those who are guilty of the offences like lechery which is sometimes as high as Rs. 60. Disposal of money realised from fines in the Asur
society is quite noteworthy. It is not distributed among the
Mahto or a few elders of the village. The money is spent in
purchasing fowls, a goat or a pig and meat is distributed in
every household in the village. A few small shares of meat are
also set apart for distribution in the adjoining villages. When
such a share of meat is brought to an adjoining village, the
Mahto and other village elders of the village would naturally
inquire about the details of the fine, nature of the offence and
the parties involved. The persons who bring meat will narrate
the whole account to the elders who will thereupon warn the
village people to beware of committing such acts, lest they will
have to face the same consequences.

The Asur panchayat has to discuss sometimes some
points of common interest. It raises contributions from the
villagers for periodical public worship and religious feast, and
for propitiatory sacrifices to the spirits in times of epidemics
among men and cattle. The most important point of
common interest is a case of witchcraft. If there is sickness
or there are cases of deaths which cannot be explained in an
ordinary manner, the same are ascribed to witchcraft. The
Asur Panchayat deals with the cases of witchcraft with a strong
hand. Before a member of a particular house-hold is held
responsible for witchcraft, it should be confirmed by a sooth-
sayer. The Panchayat is called to secure promise from every
man in the village to defray the expenses necessary for sacrifice,
pay the fees of the soothsayer etc. If any one refuses
to make such a promise, he is at once suspected as a wizard.
Thereafter they in a body go to the soothsayer who will by
divination point out a member of a particular household to be
a witch or wizard. When they come back there is again a
Panchayat in which the culprit revealed by divination is asked
to make good his promise. If he refuses, the Panchas from
other villages, who are sometimes present on this occasion, try
to reason with him, but if he remains obstinate, they will not
save him from thrashing which he is sure to get.
It may also happen that a complainant resides in one village while the accused or defendant lives in the other. Let us take a concrete case for example. A boy in one village has a love affair with a girl in another village with the result that the latter becomes pregnant. It becomes a serious matter if the boy evades the responsibility for his act. In such a case, the parents of the girl complain to the Mahto of their village who informs the Mahto of the village in which the parents of the boy reside about the complaint. Here also the Mahto consults the village elders and agrees to hold a common Panchayat at a suitable date in the village of the accused. After prolonged deliberations, the matter is decided according to the customary laws and precedents. But in cases of minor offences, say for example, letting loose the animals to graze on crops of a neighbouring village, the common Panchayat of the two villages meet at a place between the two villages.

There is no Supreme Panchayat as such among the Asur. But sometimes, the elders of the Asur society assemble at the initiative of some enlightened member for discussion of some vital matter affecting the Asur society as a whole. As for example, it was a matter of heart-burning among the Asur when a few selected elders usurped a proportionately large share of meat for themselves leaving small bits for others for distribution when a goat was killed in a marriage feast. This discrimination became the cause of holding the assembly of the Asur recently as it affected the society as a whole. As it was difficult to check such discrimination, the assembly resolved that the custom of killing a goat and distribution of its meat at the marriage feast should be stopped. Though the absence of meat has deprived the taste in the feast, the Asur felt satisfied at the idea that they were no more to be discriminated by the village elders. The assembly of the Asur can in this way be utilised to introduce certain reforms in the society. This may be harnessed without much difficulty in leading the Asur in the march towards development and progress.
As we have seen earlier that the history of the Asura in India is also the history of racial assimilation and cultural synthesis with diverse ethnic groups in this sub-content. This process slowed down considerably when a small population of this tribe sought its habitat in the mountain fastnesses of Netarhat which kept its members segregated for several centuries. Since then there has been no extended contacts with the non-tribals, and therefore there was no question of ‘tribal resistance’ among the Asur. They were able to maintain to some extent their independence in this plateau from the wider society around them. Of course, in pursuit of their economic activities they have had to come in contacts with the Munda, Oraon and Kharia in the plains to whom they used to sell ploughshares, axes, sickles and other iron articles which they prepared in their smithies. Extended contacts with the Hindus and other non-tribals developed ‘tribal resistance’ among the Munda which ultimately led to the Sardar Larai. The Sardars who were political leaders of the Munda attempted to organise during the 1870’s an active movement aimed at redressing the wrongs which had been inflicted upon the Munda tribe by the Hindu Zamindars. Within twenty years of the Sardar Movement, there came on the scene Birsa, an unusual youth of intense magnetic personality. Movement started by Birsa who was also called Dharti Aba or Bhagwan was ‘a revitalisation movement combined of ‘nativistic’ and ‘reformative’ elements’. Among the Oraon, ‘the first revitalisation movements of any importance were a series of religious activities known as Bhagat Movements. These were highly religious in nature and characterised by a combination of Hindu and tribal beliefs’. Tana Bhagat Movement was begun in 1914 by a young Oraon called Jatra Bhagat. No such movements either of ‘nativistic’ or ‘reformative’ character are discernible among the Asur which were at the root of all the tribal uprisings against the Government in the past. It does not mean that they have not been victims of injustice and social exploitation. Anyhow the
Asur have not been dispossessed of their lands as yet. Because if they are dispossessed no one would like to cultivate these lands by settling himself in this inaccessible and difficult terrain. Interests of the exploiting classes, it was obvious, could be better served by allowing the Asur to remain in possession of these lands and make them cultivate the same. They have numerous tricks to deprive of the agricultural produce of the Asur. Culture contacts with the outside world were negligible since they came to settle in the Netarhat plateau and hence there was no occasion for the Asur to be dissatisfied with their ancient religious practices and beliefs which continued to provide them that psychological satisfaction necessary for sustenance of the human life. They did not think it necessary to raise their status adopting the social and religious practices of other non-tribal groups who live in the plains, because they do not feel ashamed of their own values of life and culture which may appear quaint and primitive to others.

Discontent towards the present way of living is bound to manifest as this inaccessible plateau is opened up with restoration of communication. Contacts with the outside world are growing at a rapid pace. Development activities in the area are put to full gear. The Asur boys have started learning in the Residential Schools. In view of this development the Asur society will not be able to keep itself aloof for long from changes that are inevitable. Within a decade it will convert itself from a simple society to a complex one with evolution of a new leadership depriving it from the traditional Mahto and his band of so-called village elders.

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CHAPTER 7

EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

This school is one of the most impressive and inspiring things I have seen in the world. I shall never forget the expressions on the faces of the children, nor their singing of the evening prayer. May the school's work prosper and increase.

Dr. Clyde Kluckhohn, the world famous Anthropologist and former Advisor to Mr. Harry Truman, Ex-president of the United States of America on tribal affairs made the above remarks in the visitor's book which was presented to him by the teacher of the Residential School at Sakhuapani which is being run by the Adimjati Seva Mandal, Ranchi under the Special Welfare Scheme for the Asur. It was a cold wintry night on the 6th November, 1957 when the whole village was being wrapped up in complete darkness and the august visitor.
was little bit handicapped in writing his impressions. Not a 
dibri—a kerosene lamp without chimney—was available readily 
for the purpose, not to talk of a lantern. At my instance, 
the driver of the jeep put on the head lights of the vehicle with 
the help of which Dr. Kluckhohn put down his remarks having 
kept his right leg on the bumper.

Our visit to the Residential School at Sakhuaapani was a 
surprise visit as I was prompted to show Dr. Kluckhohn in 
the most natural form the life led by the Asur inmates, leaving 
no chance for the local officials for window dressing. Deviating 
from our original programme of visiting the Residential School 
at Jobhipat, I led the Doctor to the forest-clad depression at 
Sukhuapani where the Adimjati Seva Mandal had thought it 
fit to construct the Residential School for the Asur. The 
inmates had finished their evening meal by that time and were 
returning to the dormitory after washing their utensils. On 
seeing us they formed a line in the compound and after a few 
questions about their daily activities, they sang a prayer 
‘Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram, Patit Pawan Sita Ram’ which 
is now assuming the position of a national prayer. It was 
this meeting with the Asur boys which made him express in 
brief his reaction as above.

Next day Dr. Kluckhohn came to me for afternoon tea 
while on his way to Calcutta. All of a sudden, he left the tea
cup and went to the car and returned with a cheque book. He donated 25 dollars to the Adimjati Seva Mandal for a purpose which I should designate. As the Asur boys in the school were getting all sorts of facilities of lodging and boarding, clothing etc. from the Government, it was a little bit difficult for me and Mr. Narainji, Secretary of the Mandal to decide how best could it be utilised. Ultimately, it was decided to take the inmates along with a few of their parents on an excursion to Ranchi. The Asur, particularly the children, were thrilled to see a railway train for the first time.

The educational problem of the Asur has not yet assumed that seriousness which would cause concern to the Government. Today there are about 750 Asur children of school age in the Pat area and this number hardly increased by more than a hundred each year. It seems the Asur still does not realise the importance of education, because it is beyond his comprehension that by education he can understand to some extent the evil designs of others who exploit him. Education still remains with him more or less an abstract thing and therefore it may not be surprising if he is reluctant to send his children to school. This does not mean that the Asur do not get any training in their life for discharge of adulthood roles. Whether an individual Asur knows or not, his ‘society has provided a mechanism of initiating the growing generation into their cultural heritage and use thereof according to traditional methods’². Of course, this sort of education is not confined to reading and writing within the four walls of a school. The Asur child gets the first lesson in role-taking in the family itself. Thereafter training takes place outside the home. The youth’s dormitory is still alive among the Asur and as such the Asur child even before he attains the age of ten begins to get training in this institution through stories, riddles, attending festivals and religious ceremonies. Luckily for this training he has not to experience rigours of strict discipline and strangling controls which are a standing fear to him when it is
A new recruit to the residential school is brought. That warning from the Asur to their children that “if you don’t behave, Sirkar will come along, take you off to school, and you will never come back home” a technique to create a basic fear of outsiders is not heard so frequently as in the past.

(Photograph: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
In the residential schools they are provided wooden cots, blankets, carpets for sleeping. In their homes they have nothing to spread except date-palm leaf mats. They crouch around a burning fire which keep them warm throughout the night in winter and as such they hardly need blankets there.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
imparted within the school. In the youth's dormitory, his behaviour is also patterned after the fellow-members of various age grades. The Asur seem to have attached not much importance to education in its narrowed-down meaning of reading and writing by attending the institution like a school. Aversion of the Asur to school-room education also stems from a number of social and economic factors. In most of the Asur families, the job of herding the goats, bullocks and cows falls upon the small children of school age, so by sending their children to school they are losing shepherds and also their opportunity to train the children in a way of life in which livestock plays an important part in their agricultural economy.

The burning problem of the Tribal India at present is that of assimilation with the general body politic. Assimilation by the tribal folk of the better elements in the culture of their advanced neighbours should be encouraged while helping them to retain the good elements in their own. 'Since adults are more likely to be strongly conditioned socially, and therefore less likely to change, introduction of new concepts, habits and technical processes can be more easily accomplished among the children and grown-ups. The best means of acculturation, therefore, will be through education. While thinking of education of the tribals if we overlook the basic features of their traditional method of education as noted above and impose upon them the methods and contents suited to a different type of culture straightway, we shall face a good deal of wastage in our effort. In view of this fact it would be desirable if the content of education is linked to a greater extent with the life of the community'. I agree with Verrier Elwin when he says that 'the aim of education should be two-fold and emphasis in its two aspects will obviously be somewhat different. We have first to discover and develop boys and girls of exceptional promise and train them up to the highest standard possible so that they can in time take their place as leaders
and administrators of their own people. But this can apply to a very small population, for the great mass of the tribal people who will remain peasants, a very simple and elementary type of schooling is required and we hope that this will be supplied by a combination of ordinary and basic education suitably adjusted to tribal needs. It is, therefore, essential that the schools must be integrated with the life of the people so that they become real tribal institutions.

Mr. L.M. Shrikant, former Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes after his visit to Netarhat in the year 1954 had suggested to the Government of Bihar to pay special attention to the welfare of the Asur as they were far more backward in comparison with other tribes like the Munda, Oraon, Santhal, Kharia and Ho in Bihar. The Government of Bihar were prompt in accepting the suggestion and accordingly a moderate scheme was drawn up at an estimated cost of Rs. 32,512 in the year 1955-56. The Government selected rightly the Adimjati Seva Mandal, a non-official agency of repute for execution of the scheme. Under the scheme, it was decided to start two Residential Schools of junior basic type with 30 inmates in each with free lodging and boarding and other amenities. The Government of Bihar is well aware of the importance of the part played by children in tribal life, hence it was thought wise to introduce education among the Asur through the Residential Schools which compensate the parents in an indirect manner for the loss of work which was rendered by the children. That warning from the Asur to their children that ‘if you don’t behave, Sirkar will come along, take you off to school, and you will never come back home’—a technique that helps create a basic fear of outsiders—is not heard so frequently as in the past. On the contrary, the Asur parents show greater inclination for admission for their boys in the Residential School, not in ordinary day schools, because they get full meal every day which is ordinarily not dreamt of in their homes in view of their poverty.
It does not seem necessary to teach the Asur boys anything like dignity of labour. They are bred and brought up doing everything themselves in their struggle for existence. This tribal trait lightens the burden of the headmaster who gets willing cooperation from his inmates for gardening, tree planting, watering them etc.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
The boys in the residential school are habituated to take a daily bath. The Asur take bath rarely, firstly it is not considered so essential, secondly there is dearth of water even for drinking. After all it will be a good habit with them as it will keep them free from certain skin diseases which are prevalent among the Asur at present.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
Even the most conservative Asur are now heard talking about education for their children. Some of the families who formerly refused to send their children to school are coming forward voluntarily to provide labour for construction of a school house, even though it could not be spared in view of their hand to mouth living conditions. In the beginning, the Asur were attracted to the schools not for the sake of learning, but for food which their sons would get at the time of learning. This attraction is now being imperceptibly transformed into a genuine urge for education. Still more persuasion, even compulsion will be necessary to make the Asur realise that education is the only panacea for the end of all their agonies and strife in life which have ground them mercilessly through several generations in the past. In view of the abject poverty of the Asur, no method of spreading education among them other than through the Residential Schools would, in my opinion serve the purpose. For the time being at least, it is essential. The Residential School which is also called an Ashram School will make the students self-reliant, mould their character and train them in leadership. Ultimately, it is the Asur who have to manage their own affairs, their own institutions and develop their own culture. It is in such schools they can develop their mind and instinct for improving their society and culture. Here they will learn the value of coming into contact with the neighbouring people and non-tribals and imbibe from them modern scientific ideas, habits of cleanliness, learn the principles of sanitation and solve the food problem. The Ashram School will broaden their outlook and create consciousness among them of their rights and privileges as citizens of India. Hence there should be no delay in expanding the above two schools by providing for 20 new more admissions each year till the strength is raised to 100 inmates at the end of the Third Five Year Plan. I shall be the happiest man if I see a couple of the Asur boys competing for admission in the Netarhat Public School and getting equipped to
become administrators, engineers or doctors like other citizens of the country. Let these two schools be developed also as feeder schools for the Government Public School at Netarhat.

India on the threshold of introduction of compulsory primary education for all children within the age group of 6 to 11 years in pursuance of the Directive Principle embodied in her Constitution. It is apprehended by some that compulsion would create an adverse effect upon the tribal people who will be harassed by the Government officials on the plea of enforcement of the Compulsory Primary Education Act. Hence time, according to them, is not ripe as yet for introduction of compulsion which may be withheld for a period of five years. Introduction of compulsion is not favoured all at once, because it would deprive the Asur as described earlier of the job of herding the goats and cattle and other assistance rendered by the children of school age. To put it in a more simple way, the children are earning members in the tribal family which being poor already should not be made poorer by compelling them to send their wards to school. Otherwise also, it is considered quite difficult to enforce the Act in the tribal areas most of which still remain inaccessible. I am, however, quite certain and totally in favour of introduction of the Compulsory Primary Education Act without any reservation in the tribal areas, even though I do not underestimate the difficulties enumerated above. Blind enforcement of the Act, of course, will be a one sided affair and it will be cruel to penalise the tribal parents without making them understand the nature of offence that may be committed by them under the Act. Again at the time of introduction of compulsion, respect will have to be given to the tribal culture. Tribal people love their children very much more than many other people, because I have never heard or seen a tribal parent beating his child. They give so much freedom to their children that it sometimes goes against their own interest.
What a marvellous change? The boys recite, "Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram Patit Pawan Sita Ram" which is assuming the place of a National Prayer, before the class room teaching starts.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
The teacher tries to explain but the boy does not grasp the point. Because it is difficult for the Asur to learn through the medium of Hindi. Education can be made interesting by teaching the tribal children in their mother-tongue. But it is very difficult to get teachers from amongst the tribals themselves. It will be advisable to appoint the teachers from the non-tribals of the area who know some tribal dialects.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
In order to make compulsory education successful three things will have to be taken into consideration. Education that will be imparted in the school room will have to be made interesting for the children. It is everybody's experience that when a new school is opened, a large number of tribal children crowd to it, because they think that 'scribbling on their little black-boards is far more amusing than the tedious work on the fields or tending the cattle. But soon the scribbling loses its charm, and they find it still more amusing to play the truant running about in the forests and snaring birds while their parents thought them in school'. Education can be made interesting by teaching the tribal children in their mother-tongue. It would be an ideal thing if this could be arranged, but it has been very difficult to find out teachers in adequate numbers from amongst the tribals themselves. Till we get the same it is advisable to appoint teachers from among the non-tribals of the area who may be knowing some tribal dialects.

Secondly teaching in the school can be made more interesting by taking into consideration some of the important traits of the tribal children. It is a fact that children learn better and are more interested if they are taught through activities. They are able to reproduce interesting stories if they are told to them. The children love action songs and dramatisation. They are ready to do any amount of manual work such as gardening, fencing and work of an agricultural type. If such activities are included judiciously in the educational programme the result will be more satisfactory. After all much of the work in these schools has to be of an informal nature. There is a great need for teachers to use special teaching aids, charts, posters, visual aids, musical instruments and articles of plays and games. Thirdly the text books will have to be written anew. 'At the present moment text-books taught in schools in the tribal areas deal either with culture contents of more advanced neighbours mainly, or partly with distorted views of the culture of neighbours. The first defect can be seen in the text-books
approved by the Education Department of the Government of many States. The second fault can be found in some of the text-books written by the Christian missionaries. They disparage the culture of neighbouring Indians in the interest of their evangelical work. Hence the text-books to be taught in the tribal areas should incorporate the relevant details of the culture of the principal tribes along with different traits of the culture of the people with whom they are living. As regards irregular attendance of the tribal children in schools, it will not be the whole truth to say that all children are earning members in the tribal family. I can say with a large measure of certainty that quite a big number of them loiter about in village lanes and open spaces while their parents are away in the fields or forests. These children can be brought to schools without much inconvenience to parents by adjusting school hours according to the needs of the people. Again there should be no objection if the children attend the schools along with their young brothers or sisters who have been left to their care when their parents are away in the fields.

But it hardly needs any mention that the economic conditions of the tribals affect the education of their children. In December and January when harvesting is over the economic condition of these people improves and as such they can easily think of sending their children to schools. But July is a period of scarcity as well as heavy agricultural engagements. 'The tribal parents and landless labourers do not find it possible to spare their children for the schools as they are needed in the fields. During the rainy season the children have to do odd jobs. Hence the school hours and vacations should be so adjusted that these children would be able to help their parents in household duties as well as in agricultural operations and at the same time attend the schools'.

But all this still would not be enough for our purpose. The tribal parents will also have to be tackled. It is every body's experience that when a school master talks to parents
See the contrast on the faces of the Asur boys during play time after the school hours. They always look for this hour which is the most interesting time in the school life.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
After going through various activities both physical and intellectual, the inmates enjoy a hearty meal. The Asur parents showed greater inclination for admission of their boys in the residential schools—not in ordinary day schools, because they get full meals every day which are not dreamt of in their homes on account of their poverty.

(Photograph: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
of the runaways, they swear a sacred oath that they will send
their children to school. They swear but the boys do not
come. The poor school-master tries seriously once more by
enumerating to the fathers in the most glowing terms the advan-
tages of learning, but all this is of no avail. Their answer is
‘Well, we have told the boys they should go to school, but if
they don’t go, what can we do?’ In view of this tribal trait, it
is necessary to undertake simultaneously a vast programme of
social education to overcome as fast as we can the deficiencies
created by the lack of educational facilities. It may also be
added that ‘any programme of compulsory universal education
would be impossible of achievement without the support of
the adults. A State may pass laws of compulsion, but unless
the people voluntarily accept such laws, no State can enforce
them by military or police measures. Fortunately in India,
the social climate is favourable to education, for even the illite-
rate among the adults are hungry for education for their
children and for themselves’.

But what about the fundamental issue, namely, what are
the Asur children to be taught? Would it be an attempt to
inculcate a different culture and system of values as rapidly
and as systematically as possible? Or is it sufficient if they are
taught to learn Hindi, do arithmetic and other basic subjects
and trained as good farmers and then allowed to work out
their own more basic patterns of social and religious life
in their own way and at their own pace? Dr. Clyde Kluckhohn
has observed in respect of the Navaho tribe in the United
States of America that ‘a very crucial problem for the world
to-day is at a stake here, for it might be maintained that it
is more ‘democratic’ to allow the backward peoples of the
of the world to work out their own destinies—after they have
reached an acceptable material standard of living—than it is
to ‘cram’ over particular forms of social and religious life and
values of system down their throats. Probably the soundest
position from the point of view of both practical necessities
of current economic problems and broad humanitarian interest lies somewhere between the two extremes, namely in attempting to make the tribes change as far as possible and maintain their quaint customs. This is true in the case of the Asur also. Resistance to change in the Asur is very strong and Christian missionaries have found it difficult to proselytise a large number of them rapidly. But the Asur are not going to stay as they are. The educational programme should, therefore, be adjusted in such a way that they can compete with the outside world, but in view of the mighty forces that are in operation in the realm of culture contact, it would be idle to think that they will be able to adjust their social and religious life in the Indian scene at a pace that will not wholly disrupt the delicate balance of their culture.

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CHAPTER 8

MAGIC, MYTHS AND TECHNOLOGY

We, the twelve brothers of Asur and thirteen brothers of Lodha offer you worship on this day once in twelve months. We are following the practice of offering you worship as our ancestors had been doing in the past.

Since the beginning of the creation till today, we have worshipped you. Lo and behold, we today offer you worship in the same manner. Henceforward, let there be no wounds or scars on our persons. Let not our iron be brittle. Let not iron scatter around the stone anvil (while it is hammered). Let it settle down (in the furnace) in a perfect lump."

This prayer is offered to the Asur Raja and Asur Rani, Pala Pahar and Loha Pahar and the ancestors of the Asur on the full moon night in the month of Fagun (February-March) every year by the Asur in the Netarhat plateau. Who are the Lodha whom we come across frequently in myths and legends of the Asur? The Asur believe that the Lodha are a people who were born just after them in this universe. They are not other than the Oraon who are their neighbours in the Netarhat plateau. The words ‘Asur and Lodha’ appear to refer to one and the same people according to Sarat Chandra

*Bahar Bhaiya Asur Terah Bhaiya Lodha,
Barah Mahiname Pooja Path Hove The.
Pahle Se Ma Bap Chala Le En,
Se Ke Hame Karte Dharte Ja Thi.
Barah Bhaiya Asur Eden Leya,
Terah Bhaiya Lodha Je Hila Janam Avatar
Se Din Tara Manta Danta Pooja Path Em Dale.
Ghav Na Gadah Alum Laugon Ko,
Mendhen Ting Sun Alum Tola Me,
Bhango Ko Pakar Ke Le Tuluke
Loha Luvi Ke Garaing Achase Padi Jano.

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Roy, who have introduced the art of iron-smelting in Chotanagpur. The numbers 'twelve' and 'thirteen' have been used in the sense of 'many'. This interpretation seems to me more plausible.

The above prayer is sung by the Asur on the occasion of Sansi-Kutasi Worship. All the implements required for iron-smelting and blacksmithy are collected in a verandah of the house. A cock and a hen both of red colour are sacrificed during the worship. The offering is said to be accepted if the birds partake some of the rice from the small heap which is kept there. The cock is caught by the neck with a pair of pincers (sansi) and its head is crushed with a hammer (kutasi) by keeping it on a stone-anvil. The hen is also sacrificed in the same manner. Some offering of rice is also made to the deities and ancestors to whom the worship is addressed and offered. The ritual is followed by dance and drinks.

It would be interesting to know why the cock and the hen are not killed with a knife as in other rituals of the Asur. Here is an instance of magic which is resorted to by the Asur for securing good iron in his productive activities. In nutrition, technology, economic, law and the activities of family and kinship, we have seen the Asur as a reasonable being. But when his desires are projected into the external world on a theory of human control, to some practical end, with the help of a right and a verbal formula, he seems to be somewhat irrational, because in this act he is not practising anything other than magic which is based on false premises. It is well known that in all the major aspects of primitive activity, beliefs in the supernatural play a large part and the Asur are not an exception to it. When we study the magical act of the Asur minutely certain characteristics will be noticed. 'In the practice of magic there are normally three elements: the things used, the things done and the things spoken.' These have been seen in Sansi-Kutasi Worship wherein the hammer, the pair of
pincers and the stone-anvil are the instruments of a technical kind. The rite of killing the fowl with the help of the hammer and the pair of pincers brings the magic and its object into contact. The formula uttered in the form of prayer is considered to be the source of magical power. In fact this is a translation of the urge of human desire into words, and the rite and spell are the spur of the hand and voice.

On a deep study of the Asur life, it will be observed that he has lived every moment of his life by magic. Magic as practised by him on different occasions, reveals the fundamental ideas underlying the Asur life. We have already seen one of the broad classifications of magic in terms of practical ends in the use of Sansi-Kutasi Worship which may be called productive magic, as it is aimed at securing good iron while smelting.

If we analyse the principles of thought on which Asur magic is based, they will probably be found to resolve themselves into two which, in the words of James Fraser, are that ‘like produces like or that an effect resembles its cause and secondly that things which have been once in contact with each other will continue to act on each other at a distance even after the contact is severed’. As for example, there were two or three deaths and sickness in village Sakhuapani all of a sudden for which the Asur could find no reasonable cause. But when they learned that one old Sal tree of the village Sacred Grove had fallen down, it appeared to them to be the main cause of all the deaths and sickness. This was confirmed with the help of a diviner locally known as Baiga who coerced the spirit residing in the tree to withdraw its wrath with the help of a magic formula. There was an epidemic of Khurha (foot and mouth disease) among cattle in village Kujam in August, 1960 which was stopped as claimed by Makdu Asur of Kujam who is himself a diviner by means of Imitative Magic. The village people had gathered together at one place. Cow-dung was taken in a basket and made into liquid by adding water to
it. The liquid was sprinkled by the diviner in all directions in the village by means of a worn-out broom. Then a wooden bell which is usually tied round the neck of a cow was placed on the ground. It was beaten and pushed out with the help of small sticks till it was taken to distant outskirts of the village where sacrifices of chickens were made, followed by drinks of rice beer. Here is an instance of magic being used for exercising an evil spirit which was embodied in the wooden bell. This classification may be termed as protective magic. The Asur also believe that human being is sure to die, if his clay model is pierced with a magical rite which is generally preferred by a witch or wizard. This type of magic may be called destructive magic.

The Asur believe that whenever magic is practised in its undiluted form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. The Asur practitioner does not doubt that the same cause will always produce the same effects and if the ceremony is performed properly accompanied by appropriate spells, the desired result will inevitably follow, unless his incantations are by chance thwarted by a more potent charm of another sorcerer. This magic seems analogous to scientific conceptions in which also the succession of events is assured to be perfectly regular, predictable and certain. But the fatal flaw of such magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of particular laws which govern that sequence. As observed by Fraser, 'a mistaken association of similar ideas produces imitative magic, a mistaken association of contagious ideas produces contagious magic. The principles of association are excellent in themselves and indeed absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied, they yield science, illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science'. It will take several decades for the Asur to realise that all his magic is
nothing but false and barren and it will take still a longer time for his domain of magic to shrink and that of science to widen. This will, however, depend upon the pace of culture contacts with the outside world which are developing very fast.

As we have been earlier in the instance of the deaths and sickness at village Sakhuapani, magic dealt with a spirit which seems to be a personal agent of the kind assumed by religion. But as magic was practised in its proper manner it treated the evil spirit exactly in the same manner as it treated an inanimate agent, that is, it constrained or coerced it instead of conciliating or propitiating it as religion would do. Magic, however, is not considered by the Asur an end in itself. In fact they have already advanced to the stage of magico-religion as we shall see in the next chapter.

The present day Asur seem to have forgotten myths and legends about the creation of the universe, but these do contain an account of their bravery and magical power. One of the myths also provides a clue to the origin of evil spirits among them. Some of the stories also support their claim of belonging to a powerful race. And we also come across a myth in which Hanuman, the notable character of the Ramayana, is punished by the Asur for his rash act of snatching and eating up molten iron. The central theme that runs in these myths and legends is that they are a powerful people practising iron-smelting who afterwards switched over to agriculture.

The Origin of Mankind.

'There was no human life in the beginning of this creation. Once Lord Mahadeo accompanied by his hounds named Chaura-Bhavra and Lili-Bhuli went on a hunting expedition in Gangala Khai and Bijwan (names of forests). He had in his hand Sona Tandi (golden staff) and Rupa Dhonti (silvery basket). The hounds attracted by smell of a human being ran ahead to be followed by Lord Mahadeo. The
hounds stopped at Khakhra Lata (a hole of a crab) from which Lord Mahadeo recovered two small human beings, one male and one female. They were brother and sister. Lord Mahadeo kept them in the Rupa Dhonti which hung on his shoulder and returned to his house. On arriving at the house, he asked Parwati, his consort, “Look here, I have brought some strange things this time from my hunt.” Parwati became curious to know and enquired about the strange things, but Mahadeo would not disclose them unless he was given a hearty drink of rice beer. Parwati arranged for the drink and requested her husband to show what he had brought. Mahadeo brought out the small human beings from his Dhonti. Parwati was very much surprised and overjoyed at the sight of two human figures. Mahadeo told her to bathe them after anointing with oil. Thereafter they were fed with all motherly love by Parwati. They were, however, made to sleep apart by keeping Dhengra (a round piece of wood) in between them. When they attained adulthood, Lord Mahadeo thought to populate the Creation with human beings. He wished that these two should co-habit, but they would not in the usual course. Ultimately, Lord Mahadeo taught them to prepare rice beer which they took in a large quantity. They forgot their relationship in intoxication and in such a state had a sexual intercourse. From the union sprang the humanity. These two are looked upon as the first ancestors of the Asur tribe.

The Fall of the Angels

The Asur relate a version of The Fall of the Angels. Somra Asur of Sakhuapani narrated to me the same as shown below.

‘Once upon a time, heaven was peopled by a race of divinities who were attendants on Bhagwan. But one day they happened to come across a mirror, and seeing their faces for the first time, found that they were made in God’s image. Inflated with pride at this newly acquired knowledge, they
refused further service, declaring that they were the equals of God himself. (But the sin of Lucifer, Son of the Morning, as in the Biblical story, met with speedy punishment). They were promptly expelled from heaven and cast into a place known as \textit{Ekasi Piri} and \textit{Terasi Badi}. In these lower regions they came across large quantities of iron-ore, and at once made furnaces and started work of smelting it. They like fallen angels are commonly designated as Asur and they have taken kindly to that name.'

\textbf{Asur Kahani}

Among the mythological legends heard among the Asur, the most important one is \textit{Asur Kahani} as it contains an account of the struggle that took place between the Asur and the Munda. It proves once again that the mighty Asur could be vanquished only by artifice. The legend is also heard almost in the similar strain among the Munda, Oraon, Birhor and other tribes. The following version of the legend among the Munda brings out clearly the artifice employed by Sing Bonga for immolation of the Asur tribe.

*"It was long long before the dawn of human history. The earth was yet in its infancy. Sing Bonga was seated on his golden throne engaged in happy converse with his heavenly consort. But the heavenly pair had not long been thus agreeably occupied, when they were disturbed in their dalliance by an intolerable heat which suddenly surcharged the thin atmosphere of heaven. And just at that moment, there went up from the beasts that roamed the earth below piteous complaints to Sing Bonga's throne on high. "The heat emanating from the furnaces of the Asur," so ran the complaints, "this unearthly heat is drying up the streams, the tanks and the pools, and scorching up all vegetation. We are dying of hunger and of thirst. Nor do the birds of the air nor

* English translation based on "The Mundas and their country" by S C. Roy and Encyclopaedia Mundarica, Vols. I & VI.
the worms that crawl on the earth find any food to eat or water to drink”.

At this, the enraged Sing Bonga armed himself with his sword and his shield, and fiercely exclaimed, “These Asur, I will slay and hack them into pieces.” But his wife protested. “Alone,” said she, “thou art no match for the whole host of the Asur. Rather employ state-craft and artifice.” And to this he agreed. Then Sing Bonga sent the fearless king-crow and the watchful shrike as messengers to the Asur who apprised the later about the catastrophe beset on the earth and in heaven due to continuous working of the furnaces for iron-smelting. The two said, “Listen, we have brought you a message, we have come with a request. If you blow the bellows by night, then do not blow them by day, and if you blow them by day, do not blow them by night. You see, in heaven even Sing Bonga feels the heat and gets scorched.” The Asur replied, “We ourselves are Sing Bonga, we ourselves are the great deity. We obey no orders. No body is greater than we are”. Having said this they strew charcoal dust on the king-crow and ore dust on the shrike. The birds went back and complained to Sing Bonga that they would now be outcasts due to their changed colour. Sing Bonga said, “Go back each to your own caste, you will all look alike.” Since then all the king-crows are black and all the shrikes grey.

Now, Sing Bonga selected the golden vulture (Sonadidi) and the silvery vulture (Rupadidi) for the same errand. And forthwith the vultures ‘plied their pinions-bold’ and sought the Asur village. But no sooner had they delivered their message than the Asur struck them with a hammer and poked them with iron pincers. And thus were they both driven away. Fresh messenger birds like Lipi, Kauwa, Lang and Bocho were deputed thereafter who also met the same fate as their predecessors at the hands of the Asur. Now at length Sing Bonga himself had to stoop down from his aerial heights, and had to
resort to artifice and cunning. He came down flying a golden hawk and alighted at Ekasi Piri and Terasi Badi, the land of eighty one uplands and eighty three elevated rice fields. Here he saw a boy working in one of the fields who was all covered with itch. Sing Bonga seized him by the hair and gave him such a vigorous shaking as served to peel off the latter's skin. And now Sing Bonga put on the boy's cast-off itch-covered skin, and personating a boy affected with itch, went about in search of the Asur.

Arriving at the place where the Asur lived, he moved about from door to door offering his services as servant-boy. "I shall guard your grains against the ravages of the fowls," he went about saying, "Food and shelter only do I want for my service". But the Asur dreaded the contagion of his loathsome itch and would not have him for a servant. To the next village then he went. There too at first none would have his services. But some kind people of this place directed him to a miserable hut at one end of the village where lived an aged Munda couple called Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria who took pity on him and offered protection.

One day this itch-covered boy asked for some eggs from the old couple and went to play marbles with the Asur boys. They mischievously accepted the challenge feeling sure of breaking the eggs with their iron marbles. But the contrary happened. Out of spite, they reported to Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria that their servant-boy had abandoned the paddy to the fowls and pigs and had played marbles with them. But in the meantime he having picked up a few grains left over and put some of them on the mat, some in the husking hole and some in a basket thereby miraculously filled all with rice. Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Buria reprimanded him thinking that he stole somebody's rice. But he told them not to fear anything since it was Sing Bonga himself who had given this abundance to them. The same wonders happened a second
time when he smashed the Asur boys' iron marbles with balls made of cooked rice husk.

Shortly after this the Asur's iron-ore gave out, and as they had seen the wonders wrought by the itch-covered boy, they applied to him to find out by divination what kind of sacrifice was necessary to obtain the ore again. He ordered a white cock to be sacrificed and the ore was found again. The next time when the ore ran short, he ordered a white he-goat to be sacrificed and the third time a white sheep. But the ore would last no more. So the fourth time he ordered a human sacrifice. From this the Asur shrunk back, unwilling to give one of their own race. Then he told them to go to the Doisa* country to ask for a human being for the sacrifice. But from there too they were ignominiously expelled. As no human being could be got, the itch-covered boy offered himself to be burnt to death in one of their furnaces as sacrifice.

Then he prescribed the ritual details for the sacrifice. A new furnace had to be built, new bellows had to be made out of the skin of a white he-goat, new bellows-pipes had to be used; two maidens had to tread the bellows for three days whilst he was buried in the burning furnace, and then, to extinguish the fire, they had to bring water in new earthen vessels, resting on head cushions made of new white cotton thread. When all this was done, the furnace was opened and behold, the itch-covered boy arose in surpassing beauty loaded with treasures of gold and precious stones. The greedy Asur asked where he had found all these. "In the furnace", he answered. And on the question whether they too would find such treasures, he said that they being so many would find so much more if they observed all the rites. When all the Asur men have taken in the bait and entered the furnace, Sing Bonga ordered the women to plaster up the furnace, and kindle the fire and

*Sijssai Police Station in Ranchi District.
work the bellows, and right away the women worked the bellows hard.

But, hark! What betokens that faint murmuring sound, the women fancy, issuing out of the furnace? Can those be the groans of their husbands, sons and brothers? The women startle in fear and horror at the very idea. But now, the confused inaudible sounds gradually develop into distinct howls. A cold shiver runs through the Asur women from head to foot. And the women now vehemently accuse Sing Bonga of having played them false. "Ah, no! affrighted ones", says he, "No harm to your men. Every one of them perchance has not yet had enough, and so they are all quarrelling over the division of the spoils. Work the bellows faster still." And faster still the women worked away.

But horror of horrors! What is this, again? This horrid sight is enough to curdle weak women's blood. Appalled at the sight of the stream of bloody liquid that now begins to ooze out through the air passage of the bellows and through the outlet for molten dross, the women wax still more clamorous in their accusations against the mysterious boy. "A murrain on the eyes"! they exclaim, "Do not see how blood streams out of the furnace?" "Deluded women", replies Sing Bonga, "They are chewing pan* and Kasaili† and that, is why they are spitting red saliva. Quick! quick! Blow away my girls, and ere long you will have cause to rejoice". And with misgivings at heart, and cold sweat covering their limbs in clammy drops, the timid women obeyed. A little while later, Sing Bonga perceiving that his foul purpose has been accomplished, ordered the furnace to be opened up. This done what did the unhappy women discover? They stood aghast at the sight of the charred bones and ashes of their unfortunate husbands, sons and brothers. Long and piteously did the poor women weep. And they tore their hair and they beat their

*Betel leaves †Betel nuts.
breasts and cursed him. Alas! alas! at length they cried out, "Who could have suspected this of thee? Thou hast made us put our men to death with our own hands".

At this, Sing Bonga thundered out, "Well! well! messenger after messenger I had sent to you. But you heeded them not. Will you henceforward obey me in all my behests?" "Yes, yes, we will", answered the Asur women all in one voice and entreated him to provide subsistence. Thereupon Sing Bonga said "Under a tree in the middle of the village shall henceforth dwell a Munda as sacrificer, and he shall be called the Pahan and shall make offerings to you".

When Sing Bonga rose to heaven the Asur women clung to the seams of his garment. With a mighty jerk, he shook them off and they were thus spread over the Munda country and converted themselves into tutelary spirits. Those falling on hills became Marang Bongas, those falling on high mountains became Marang Buru Bongas, those falling into deep waters became Ikir Bongas, those falling on a wooded spot became Desauli Bongas, those falling on the open fields or on high ground became Chandi Bongas."

The Asur's version of the Asur Kahani.

Somra Asur of Sakhuapani narrated to me the Asur Kahani with a considerable variation. According to him Dharam Raja-Saikh Raja was distressed in heaven on account of heat emanating from the furnaces of the Asur. He could see that his beloved horse, Hansraj-Pankhraj too did not get his feed and water to drink: When his messages through Dhenchua-Mahru and Kerketta-Jagru and also a couple of other birds failed to persuade the Asur to limit their iron-smelting either to day time or night time, he made through fraud, all the Asur men and women enter a big furnace promising them enormous wealth to be found therein, After that Dharam
Raja found two Asur, a brother and a sister who did not enter the furnace. He made these two blow the bellows when the furnace was lighted. After blowing for some time, a thick red-coloured liquid flowed out from the outlet of the furnace below.

"Is this blood?" the brother and sister inquire. "No no," Dharam Raja replies, "It is simply a slag of gold. Blow hard, soon your kinsmen will come out with a large quantity of gold, silver and other jewellery". They blew the bellows vigorously, but they were stunned to see rattling bones of the Asur when the furnace was broken open with pestles. Seeing his mission of immolating the Asur tribe fulfilled, Dharam Raja tried to flee from the scene, but the Asur brother soon overtook him and his sister also caught his loin-cloth from behind. Both of them pressed Dharam Raja and demanded, "How do we live now? We have nothing to subsist."

Dharam Raja thereupon taught them Daha, the slash and burn method of cultivation. The brother and sister cleared a vast patch of forest, and brought all wood, twigs and leaves in a central place and set fire. When all was burnt to ashes, it was about to rain. Dharam Raja gave them one seed of bottle-gourd (tumba). They planted the seed into the ashes. It grew into a big creeper and put forth flowers. But the creeper was gnawed by Ergat (a kind of field rat) whereupon Dharam Raja prescribed a ritual to be called Danda Kata to ward off the rat. Thereafter the creeper bore fruits, and the fruits ripened. Dharam Raja asked the brother and sister to prepare a threshing floor where gourds were brought. They were thrashed from which all types of corns like Madua (Eluisine Corocana), Gondli (Panicum Miliare), Maize, Urid (Phaseolus Roxburghii), Masur (Lentils), Sarso (Mustards), Surguja (Niger Oil Seed), Bodi (Vigna Catiang), Kurthi (Dolichos Biflorus), Rahar, (Cajanus Indicus) and so on came out,
Now let us compare the above two versions. In the Mundari version, the Heavenly Lord is Sing Bonga, while in the Asuri version it is Dharam Raja-Saikh Raja. When the liquid of red colour comes out from the furnace, it is recognised as blood by the Asur women who blow the bellows, while Sing Bonga describes it as red saliva due to chewing of betel leaves by the Asur in the furnace. It is obvious that the red substance that came out from the furnace was neither blood nor red saliva, because it could not be blood when there was such intensive heat. Here the Asuri version seems to be more appropriate, because the substance is rightly described as the slag of gold by Dharam Raja. It is quite natural for the Asur to disclaim the charge of being responsible for the origin of evil spirits among the Munda. Hence they adopted the version of the Kahani which ends with the art of cultivation of food crops as has been noticed among the Oraon.

Habitat in the Dhaulgir and the Mainagir.

W.H.P. Driver has also recorded one such myth which describes the former history of the Asur.

‘In ancient times, as the legend runs, the Asur were a great people and inhabited in the Dhaulgir and Mainagir Hills on which there were two large lakes. They were clever artisans, travelled about in palanquins and used to eat red-hot iron. They did not cultivate the land, but had large herds of cattle. Then the Oraon called Lodha appeared and took their cattle, and the former had to go into the jungles. This drove them to desperation and they took to cattle-lifting and preying on the Oraon. The mythology of the various Kolarian tribes always refers to the Asur as robbers and fire-eaters. The Oraon unable to attack them in the jungles, called in the assistance of Bhagwan, who built a great fort and invited all the Asur to attend. Being afraid to refuse they all came at the summons and were told to enter the fort by Bhagwan, who to allay their fears went in first. After they were all in, Bhagwan
shut the gate and disappeared from the top. He then filled the fort up with charcoal. When he got outside he found two Asur (a brother and a sister) who had not gone in with the rest, and he made these to fix up bellows (such as the Asur use for smelting iron) and immolate the whole tribe. These two were then carried away by the Oraon and left in the jungles where their descendants are now found being condemned for ever to use the bellows. The Asur say that the Oraon brought their two ancestors in palanquins from the far east, but they have not the slightest idea how far, nor where the Dhaulgir or the Mainagir Hills are situated.

The Asur lived in Asurgarh

Here is another story which indicates that the Asur came to this plateau from a place called Asurgarh. The story was told to me by Kaloo Mahto and other Asur of Sakhuapani.

"The twelve brothers of Asur and thirteen brothers of Lodha lived in Asurgarh in the past. From there they came to this place and settled here. Both the Asur and Lodha lived in harmony and peace in this area. The Asur uprooted the trees and cleared the forests for burning charcoal and smelted iron. The Lodha cultivated the patches of the forests cleared by the Asur and raised rice and millets on them. The Asur bartered their iron with the Lodha for rice which was two to four times in weight of the former. In course of time the Asur gave up iron-smelting and took to cultivation."

The Asur are really Bir Asur

The following two stories describe the Asur as heroes and kings with mighty traditions. Mangra Asur of Jobhipat and Somra Asur of Sakhuapani told me these stories.

"The Asur were really Bir Asur. In fact they were heroes and kings. In the beginning they did not smelt iron. Once upon a time a Bir Asur king and his wife were being carried in
a palanquin by the Oraon who did not know about the identity of the royal couple. They never imagined that the couple belonged to an Asur tribe. As they were passing through a Sal forest, the Bir Asur king exclaimed, "What a beautiful Sal forest! What fine charcoal would be burnt out of these trees?" The king hardly knew that his instinctive exclamation would align himself to an iron-smelting tribe which was considered of low origin. The palanquin-bearers dropped the palanquin and left the king and queen to roam in the jungle.

Being unable to find a way home from these dense forests, the couple decided to settle there. They raised a small hut and began to live upon Sal fruits. The king used to go in the forests and cut down Sal trees and burn them into charcoal. With the charcoal he smelted iron from iron-ore which was available here in plenty. The king was so much engrossed in iron-smelting that he sometimes forgot to return home. He absented from his home for several days together. His wife became quite angry for his absence, because it happened so often. She was after all not an ordinary woman. She could do miracles. She thought that her husband liked sweet Sal fruits and so he did not care to come home. By magical words she rendered all the Sal fruits bitter which obliged him to come back home. And that is why the Sal fruits are bitter today. The king and his wife thereafter lived together and ate molten iron. The king pursued the occupation of iron-smelting and began to prepare iron ploughshares which he sold to the Oraon against rice and millets. When the food grains were available, the couple gave up the habit of eating molten iron. The king grew old and was also tired of working in iron. He wanted now to settle on agriculture. The Oraon helped him in the beginning in learning cultivation. The old man worked in the fields of the Oraon for four days who in a group worked in the fields in return and taught him agricultural practices. He
realised that agriculture was less tedious. In this way slowly and slowly the Asur gave up iron-smelting and became agriculturists”.

The Asur have magical power.

“Once upon a time a Bir Asur with a horde of servants went on a hunting expedition in a far-flung forest. The people living in this area were over-awed by his personality and his huge army of servants and thought he would perhaps kill them and plunder their lands. The people decided to put up a resistance to his march and organised a regular attack on the hunter from various directions. The first attack was planned from the east by the people who formed into a regular army. The Bir Asur came to know about the attack and so he prepared himself to meet the same. He smelted iron and prepared an arrow made of twelve maunds of iron and a bow of thirteen maunds. He charged the arrow at Dhanupat towards the east. The arrow fell close to Lohar dahar (near Ghaghra). It also pierced down a big Semar tree. The army which was proceeding from that direction for the attack on the Bir Asur was very much astonished to see such a gigantic arrow and so the men thought that it was useless to fight with him as they would not be a match for such a powerful man. So the army retreated and fled. Then the attack came from the west. The Bir Asur had, over and above his inhuman physical prowess, magical power too. He simply ordered a swarm of bees to attack the army that was coming from the west. Stung by the bees, the men fled helter-skelter. The servants who accompanied the Bir Asur in the hunt were awestricken at the physical and miraculous power of their master and thought them to be unsafe under him. So, while the hunting party was proceeding towards the forest, all his servants left stealthily leaving the Bir Asur alone in the forest”.
Burning of Lanka

The Asur do not seem to be quite ignorant of the Ramayana and other mythological accounts of the Hindus. Hanuman has had his face changed to that of a monkey when he was struck with a thunder-bolt by Indra in his attempt to devour the rising sun who appeared to him like some tasteful fruit of red colour. The Asur have their own version about liking of Hanuman for a red fruit. Somra Asur and Manga Asur of Sakhuapani told me the following story.

"Hanuman once saw an Asur couple smelting iron in a forest. When the Asur was tapping the lower portion of the furnace Hanuman noticed a red-hot molten slag flowing out of it. Hanuman thought that there might be some tasteful fruit of red colour inside the furnace. He jumped on the bellows and operated them vigorously for some time. Then he broke open the furnace and took out the red-hot lump of iron and ate it. The Asur couple was very much annoyed at the act of Hanuman. In order to deter him from such depredation again, the couple with the help of other Asur men caught hold of him. His tail was wrapped with rags soaked in oil and was lighted. Being pained by burns Hanuman began to jump here and there burning every thing that came in his way. Then he made a big jump that took him to Lanka. He set fire to this great city of Ravana. Afterwards he got fires extinguished by having a dip in the sea".

Origin of Evil Spirits

A story of vultures with different versions is heard in two different villages of Sakhuapani and Kujam in the Netarhat plateau. Makdu Asur of Kujam and Somra Asur of Sakhuapani knew about the story. If these two versions are pieced together, we get an idea about the origin of evil spirits among the Asur. The story is as follows:—

"There lived on a Semar tree two vultures, Raigidh and
Zatagidni. They had built a gigantic nest of ploughshares on this tree. The female bird Zatagidni laid several eggs in it. After hatching the eggs for six months young ones came out from them. Raigidh and Zatagidni started taking away children of the Asur from the nearby villages to feed their young ones. The Asur were very much grieved at the depredation of the vultures and so they thought of a plan to kill them. The Bir Asur burnt charcoal in twelve jungles and brought iron-ores from sixteen jungles. They smelted the ores into a big lump of iron. Twelve maunds of iron was taken from this lump and the Bir Asur prepared a big arrow and from sixteen maunds of iron, they made a gigantic bow. With these bow and arrow the vultures were shot and killed by the Bir Asur and the Semar tree was also knocked down and thrown away. But it was a magic tree, so it started growing again. In order to prevent its growth, the Asur once again smelted iron and manufactured a big pan with which they covered the stump of the tree. The Asur believe that the rock locally known as Saru Pahar which is two to four miles long between Tongo and Gumla villages is no other than the Semar tree which was knocked down when the vultures were shot by the gigantic arrow. The children of the vultures were converted into evil spirits like Khunt Bhut, Dharha, Dakin, Mua, Sat-Bahini, Algi, Phalgi, etc."

'Iron was also known to certain prehistoric peoples in the world. It is quite interesting to know how these people used to prepare it. It is more probable that iron was first found in the ashes of a big fire built near some red paint rock than that the first tools were made from meteorites. When paint rock and fire came to be associated with iron as cause and effect, the next step was to produce it intentionally in fires built against a bank exposed to prevailing winds, or in pits or rude rock furnaces where the fires were fanned by bellows, one of the earliest mechanical devices'*. Iron was certainly known
in Vedic times*. A passage in the Krishna Yajurveda suggests that an iron engine of war was in use between 2000 and 1000 B.C. In the Mahabhartita, there are many references to iron-weapons, the most famous is Bhima’s mace, and there was his life-size iron statue which Dhritaraschtra broke to pieces. Manu speaks of iron household utensils and gives elaborate instructions for the equipment of forts with iron swords and engines of war. In the words of Sushrutsa (third or fourth century B.C.) nearly a hundred different surgical instruments, presumably of steel are mentioned. In his Arthashasthtra, Chanakya speaks of the duties of a Superintendent of Mines and the iron-ores to be obtained; they should be orange, faint red or vermilion in colour, an obvious reference to the brown and red haematites’.

For iron-smelting plenty of iron-ore should be available. The face of Netarhat on the north is principally formed of a massive felspathic granite in which foliation is either very obscure or wholly non-existent. The laterite varies much in character. Sometimes it is pisolithic and agrillaceous containing but a small quantity of iron. Occasionally it is cellular with a large percentage of ferruginous matter passing thence into a remarkably brown ore called limonite which contains 45-5 per cent of iron. V. Ball had observed in the middle of the last century, ‘though the plateau is rich in excellent iron-ores, its position at an elevation in the laterite renders them absolutely valueless’. Since then no effort has been made for successful utilisation of this gift of nature. In this plateau

* There is a word ayas which occurs in the Rigveda. The exact metal denoted by this word when used by itself is however uncertain. As favouring the sense of bronze rather than that of iron may perhaps be cited. The fact that Agni is called Ayodnamastrī with teeth of ayas, with reference to the colour of his flames and that the car seat of Mitra-varuna is called Ayosthuna, with pillars of ayas at the setting of the sun. In one passage of Atharvaveda, the sense of iron seems certain. Possibly too, the arrow of the Rigveda which had a tip of ayas (Yas ayo mukham) was pivoted with iron.
three varieties of ore are recognised by the Asur. One is magnitite which is called *Pola* by the Asur. The other one is haematites from coal measures known as *Bichi* and the third one is haematites from laterite known as *Gata*. These ores are broken up into small fragments by pounding before they are put in the furnace for smelting.

How do the Asur locate the site for digging iron-ore? Verrier Elvin has mentioned that 'sometimes Lohasur sends them (Agaria) a dream. In the old days he used to come as a little child and indicate the place just as he shows them where to build a new smithy. Then they go to find the place, and in the old days some one used to shoot a red arrow through the air. Where it fell, they used to dig'. He had, however, never actually seen this done, and he is not sure whether the red arrow is still used today. The Asur told me that by observation and experience they were able to locate a site for the ores. They discover the ore by observing some of it on the surface, and then follow veins or beds which seem to be nearly horizontal. The veins are from one to five cubits thick, and never seem to extend in one direction. Sometimes they are crooked, but often send off branches. The Asur need not feel to be guided for location of the ore by a dream. It is quite natural that every human being feels worried if his economic activities do not produce the desired result. It is, therefore, not surprising if the Asur get a dream here and there about locations of the ores as their mind is preoccupied and feeling tension due to shortage of this raw material. Shortage of the ores has resulted in closing down their furnaces in the past also and how worried they felt on account of this could be seen from the *Asur Kahani* when they went to the extent of purchasing human being for sacrifice so that there might be abundance of the ores.

The next important requirement for the craft of iron-smelting is charcoal. At present the Asur are not satisfied with the quality of iron which they purchase from the market. They
used to smelt iron without any impurity with the help of charcoal. In fact, the products of the simple primitive furnaces however, had a good reputation. 'Iron shaped on a stone anvil did not rust easily, possibly because the use of stone siliconizes its skin'. As charcoal works as flux during smelting, impurities of iron are removed automatically, while that is not the case if the iron-ore is smelted either with coke or coal. Moreover, charcoal gives more severe blast in the furnace than coke or coal. In the preparation of charcoal, where Sal is abundant, nothing else is used all over the country. Rude and wasteful are the processes adopted by the Asur who appear to excel all others, that I have heard of, in the ingenuity with which they seem to have adopted a process for obtaining the very smallest possible amount of useful fuel from the largest amount of timber. In the past, only logs of one size were employed namely about 12" to 18" in diameter. Trees of large dimensions cannot be broken up by the tools the Asur possess, and the trunks were left to rot in the forests. The smaller branches were used for firewood, they were never used for making charcoal. The logs were cut into pieces about 5 or 6 ft. long which were filed each one after another in layers crosswise and then the small stock of logs without any preparation was set fire to. When well lighted, water was thrown upon it and the crusts of charcoal thus formed were knocked off each log. Manga Asur told me that this process is adopted even at present, but only in exceptional cases, particularly when charcoal is required immediately. Otherwise they allow the logs to burn fully in the pit and embers are covered with Sal leaves and immediately earth and sand are thrown upon it. Charcoal thus prepared is required for running their smithies for preparing plough-shares from iron purchased from the markets and also sharpening edges of other iron articles like axes, spades, etc.

Among the apparatus used by the Asur for iron-smelting the most important one is foot bellows. The bellows of the Asur are quite different from the triangular single-nozzled hand
Apparatus for iron-smelting and furnace
The primitive furnace of the Asur for iron-smelting.
Asur woman operating the foot-bellows at the time of iron-smelting.
bellows used by the Hindu blacksmith called Lohar. They are ingenious and have the greatest advantage of giving brisk uninterrupted blast which smelts the iron-ore in a comparatively short time. A pair of bellows has three essential parts, a very solid wooden bowl, two bamboo blow-pipes which are fitted to the earthen nozzle in actual contact with the fire place and the raw cowhide covering for the wooden bowl. The extremities inserted into the nozzle are always knots in the bamboo. This serves a double purpose, it gives additional strength and allows of a bore much smaller than the natural bamboo cavity. The blast forced through this tiny aperture is thus considerably increased. To keep the blow-pipes steady whilst the bellows are working a stone is placed on them. The cow-hide is fastened on the wooden bowl firmly round the outer rim, and yet given free play for an up and down movement. In the centre of this covering there is a round aperture just over one inch in diameter serving as a valve. Through this passes a string tied to a flat piece of wood. This piece is destined to raise the hide again after it has driven the air into the pipe. To the other end of the string a rope is fixed, the string and rope together measuring 27". The free end of this rope joins a slanting bamboo firmly embedded in the ground so as to have, over the centre of the bowl, a height of 27" plus 5½" i.e. 32½" above ground. The bamboo measures 5'-8" from the issuing point to the rope. Thus the piece of wood always presses against the inner side of the hide cover. Hence, as soon as the operator's heel, closing the valve and treading the hide, has emptied the bellows, the bamboo springs up again lifting the hide cover. The withdrawal of the heel naturally causes an instant influx of fresh air. Another difficulty had to be overcome by the inventor viz. since the heel of the operator must hermetically close the valve it was necessary that the string should not impede the heel and moreover there should be no
loss of air between the heel and the string. The latter effect is obtained by the constant pressure of the piece of wood against the air hole. The removal of the string to the rim of the aperture is effected by means as ingenious as it is simple; the bamboo springs instead of being parallel to each other, slightly diverge. Hence the end to which the strings are attached are not exactly above the two apertures, but far enough on their right and left to keep the strings and obstructors tight against the opening unoccupied by the operator's heel. A little water is kept at the bottom of the bowl to keep the covering cow-hide moist and supple. The inventor of this apparatus is a member of the Asur who were highly advanced in material civilisation. 'It is from these people that the present aboriginal blacksmiths or baraes, inherited the present notions of their art of iron-smelting and blacksmithy.'

Prof. Ball has given a very good account of the primitive and practically extinct method of smelting published in 'Memoirs of Geological Survey of India'. I would, however, like to describe the method by which Sukra Asur smelted iron in my presence. He had erected his furnace under an improvised structure near a shady mango tree not far from the hamlet of Ramjharia. The furnace was built of mud which was three feet high, tapering from below upwards, from a diameter of rather more than two feet at base to eighteen inches and top, with an internal diameter of about six inches, the hearth being somewhat wider. He had dug out and brought all the three varieties of the iron-ores from a hill at a distance of about a mile from his residence. Two large baskets of charcoal prepared earlier by him were also ready. Then he fastened the raw cow-hide covering on the wooden bowls which worked as bellows in a manner which was quite ingenious.

A bed of charcoal having been placed in the hearth Sukra filled the furnace with charcoal and then lighted it. The draught was produced by the pair of foot bellows. The blast was
conveyed to the furnace by a pair of bamboo-twyers and it was kept up steadily without intermission for more than five hours. From time to time either Sukra or his wife sprinkled on the top the ores and fuel, the proportions used not being measured. Probably Sukra was guided by experience as to the quantities of each which produced the best result. Sukra told me that the ores were sprinkled in this way ten to eleven times during the process. The bellows were worked by turn by Sukra and his wife. They were helped in working the bellows by girls with babies in their slings who came there out of curiosity. From time to time, the slag was tapped off by a hole pierced a few inches above the base of the hearth. He had lighted his furnace a little before seven o’clock in the morning. At about twelve o’clock he thought smelting of the ores was complete. He stopped the supply of the ores and fuel from above and worked the bellows with extra vigour for ten minutes before conclusion of the process. The clay luting of the hearth was then broken down and he took out the ball or _giri_ consisting of semi-molten iron, slag and charcoal. The ball was quite large from which two ploughshares could be made. So he cut it into two with several vigorous strokes of an axe and then hammered them in order to squeeze-out a considerable portion of the included slag which was still in a state of fusion.

Sukra continued the process further, until after various reheating in the open furnace and hammerings, he produced clean iron. In the past the Asur’s work used to cease with the production of the _giri_ which passed into the hands of blacksmith. Sometimes they also worked on themselves and made some iron articles like axes, sickles, etc. Here Sukra worked it out into a beautiful ploughshare whose price according to him would be in the neighbourhood of Rs. 1.50. He told me that he did not sell iron in the market, but worked upon it to prepare the ploughshare. At a time, he is able to smelt that
much quantity of iron from which he can make at least two ploughshares.

'As showing how very much similar these processes are to those formerly in use in some of the richest iron districts of England, the words of Dr. Plot, in his Natural History of Straffordshire, published in the year 1636, are interesting. He was writing not long after the first successful attempts to make iron with pit coal and the introduction of machinery for "Slitting" and rolling. But speaking of the general improvements in smelting, he says "We shall find it very great, if we look back upon the methods of our ancestors who made iron in foot blasts or bloomeries, by men treading the bellows, by which they could make but one little lump or bloom of iron in a day, not 100 weight, leaving as much iron in the slag as they brought out".

What is the economic side of this iron? In those days four annas was a common price paid for an ordinary sized girl and as only two of these could be made in a very hard day's work of fifteen hours' duration, and a considerable time had also to be spent on the preparation of the ore and charcoal, the profits were negligible. Although the actual price which the iron fetched in the market was quite high, the profits made by money-lenders and the immense disproportion between the time and labour expended and the output both combined to leave the Asur in a miserable state of poverty. The forest policy of the Government imposing restrictions on wanton cutting of forests gave a final death blow to the industry of iron-smelting in this plateau. Iron-smelting has now become a thing of the past.

Can this industry of iron-smelting be revived? Will it be too much to suggest that a few forest coupes should be earmarked for the Asur for the purpose of preparing charcoal required for iron-smelting? The times have changed. Iron-ores located in the elevation of the Netarhat plateau should
not now be considered valueless, because the country has opened up remarkably well. Mechanised transport with motor trucks is possible today and it has started already to have its impact upon the people living in this area. The Geological Survey of India should not delay in resurveying the plateau in view of the changed conditions to estimate the mineral wealth which should be exploited in the interests of the country and particularly for the well-being of the Asur.

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CHAPTER 9

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES.

Every human activity is motivated and aimed at the attainment of happiness and prevention of misery. It is everyone's experience in the world that a human being continues to face a cycle of happiness and misery every now and then throughout his life. The human mind, though frail, has tried to perceive the causes of such happiness or misery. From the earliest times, man has engaged himself in a search for some general rules whereby, he would be able to turn the order of natural phenomena to his own advantage. In his pursuit of knowledge of cause and effect, he has resorted to magic, as we have seen in the case of the Asur, which has proved to be a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide.

It has been realised by the Asur that however effectively he may deal with the problems of life through adoption of practical measures, there is always a margin of uncertainty and anxiety. Still it is too difficult for the Asur to recognise the inherent falsehood and barrenness of magic with which they live. How many of the so-called civilised human societies can claim to have reached this truth about magic? Every society entertains some beliefs in one form or another in the efficacy of magic and, therefore, one should not pity the Asur when he leans so much on it while he finds himself in difficult circumstances. After all the difference is only one of degree.

The slow discovery regarding the inefficacy of magic has brought about a radical, though gradual, revolution in the minds of those who had the wisdom to make it. This discovery amounted to a confession of human ignorance and weakness,
'Man saw that he had taken for causes what were not causes and that all his efforts to work by means of those imaginary causes had been in vain......If the great world went on its way without the help of him or his fellows, it must surely be, because there were other beings, like himself, but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed its course and brought about all the varied series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent upon his own magic'. This fact has led the peoples all over the world to entertain a belief in supernatural powers of some kind which control the destinies of man. The Asur is not an exception to it and he joins with others in the propitiation of these powers which is resorted to both in public and private worship. Hence it can be said that the Asur system of beliefs and practices has also been evolved and organised to face the unknown supernatural world.

The Asur mind has classified these supernatural powers into two: those who cause evil and those who do good to man. 'For the irrational animal, evil does not and cannot exist. But of man, gifted with intelligence and free will, evil is one of the principal questions agitating his restless brain. In a true sense, it is the question that overshadows all others. What is this evil, this mysterious something from which we are trying to escape and from which we can never keep ourselves entirely free in this life? Like good, it is a living eternal principle ever at war with the principle of good'. This we call *Deva-Asur Sangram*. Does the principle of good possess the power of overcoming the principle of evil or not? The Asur believe that both the principles are of equal strength and are, therefore, tempted to buy deliverance or at least diminution of suffering from the principle of evil by a kind of compromise or by capitulation, pure and simple.

The attitude of the Asur towards the supernatural powers which are supposed to be the cause of evil or good is one of reverential fear. It manifests itself in conciliation of
and prayerful submission to these supernatural powers with the hope to ward off their ill-will and secure the good will, so that they may live in peace and happiness. The Asur believe that the principle of evil can be made to withdraw its ill-will by sacrifices in harmony with its nature. As we have seen already in the Asur Kahani, they had gone to the length of finding out a human being to be offered as sacrifice when their iron-ore ran short in the past. But at the same time it cannot be said that they have no belief in the principle of good. Hence they have also invented a system of rites to move the principle of good so that it may triumph over the principle of evil.

The Asur stands in constant dread of the mysterious powers which afflict pain on mankind in a number of ways. Affliction may be caused by magic. Imitative magic, working by means of images, has commonly been practised by the Asur like his counterpart in the whole world for the spiteful purpose of getting obnoxious people out of the world. Harm to a person or property can also be caused by casting an evil eye. It may also be caused by the mysterious power manifested in praises. There are certain spirits who by their nature are evil and prone to cause harm without any rhyme or reason. And lastly come witches and wizards. The Asur feel themselves surrounded by evil spirits and bad people like witches and wizards. The evil eye and the malice of a witch or a wizard are today of greater concern to the Asur than even gods or evil spirits.

'Witches and wizards are believed to have formulae or occult power to make certain evil spirits subservient to their own evil purposes'\(^3\). This is what the Asur understand by real witchcraft. They believe that the witches and wizards can accomplish their evil purposes immediately by the sole act of their will. For that they require both a material means and a spiritual agent. The material means is a mixture of poison which the witches and wizards try to mix into food or drink of
their victims by themselves or through others unobserved. It is only when they cannot do this that they engage the services of some evil spirit. Over those spirits the witches and wizards have real power of command by virtue of the occult or cabalistic formulae they use. But each time they exact some work from them, they must promise them some sacrifice or another.

If diseases or other calamities are attributed to some evil spirits, the Asur as we have seen already, try to be free from them with the help of magic. In some cases of magic when operation of a spirit is assumed, an attempt is made to win their favour by prayer and sacrifices. Such cases exhibit magic tinged and alloyed with religion. Magico-religious treatment of diseases depends upon a correct diagnosis. This is done by a Baiga with the help of divination which is described in greater detail elsewhere in this book. Inspite of the best efforts of the Asur to get rid of diseases and calamities with the help of magico-religious treatment, if the same continue to recur every now and then, it becomes a serious matter for them. They then begin to think that all this may be due to a malicious act of some sorcerers known as dains and bisahas. The help of a diviner who has courage enough to name a particular individual for bringing such calamities is sought again. When such an individual is exposed, it is very difficult for him or her to live in the village, because no one knows when he or she would be done to death.

As said earlier, the Asur entertain a belief in the existence of supernatural powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of human life. So they have evolved ceremonies for worship and propitiation or conciliation of these powers along with magical rites. These beliefs in the existence of supernatural powers and the ceremonies for their worship constitute the Asur religion. The aim of religious practices is to please the deity and if the deity is one who delights in hearing his own adulation and praises chanted by
his worshippers or in oblations of blood or in any other rituals, the Asur will spare no pains to please him. To serve his purposes, the Asur woos the good will of gods and spirits by prayer and sacrifices, while at the same time he takes recourse to ceremonies and forms of words which he hopes would themselves bring about the desired result. The Asur villager equipped mentally as he is today, is not able to grasp the fact that his belief in superhuman beings who rule the world and his attempt to win their favour would lead to an assumption that the course of nature is to some extent elastic and variable and that he can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it to deflect for his benefit, the current events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow.

As the Asur have lived among the advanced groups like the Oraon and Munda, their beliefs and practices have also been conditioned by those of their neighbours. The Asur pantheon consists roughly of several deities and spirits. Of course, *Pat Deota* may be placed in a class apart: *Sarna* and *Devi Mai* belong to the category of a *Deota*, while *Darha, Nasan, Mua* and others belong to the category of evil spirits. The spirits of the dead ancestors may be placed in a separate class by themselves.

Some of the neighbours of the Asur entertain certain clear-cut beliefs concerning the origin of these evil spirits. As we have seen in the *Asur Kahani*, the Munda owe the origin of these spirits to the struggle that took place between them and the Asur. After the Asur men were killed in the blast furnace, Sing Bonga rose to heaven when the Asur women clung to him. He shook them off and they fell on the Munda country where they converted themselves into tutelary spirits. The cult of deities and spirits and the propitiatory or religious ceremonies connected with the Oraon as mentioned in the Oraon legend of genesis appear to have been instituted afterwards when the intense heat from the furnaces of the iron-smelting
Asur began to scorch up everything green. According to this legend, it was not till Dharmes in the garb of a magician killed the males of the iron-smelting tribe of the Asur by a trick and their widowed females implored him to provide them with means of subsistence that he ordained that they should inhabit the earth as spirits and live on such sacrifices and offerings as the children of man might make to them. When the Dunda Katta ceremony is performed by the Oraon, the sacrificer reciting the Oraon story of the genesis of bhuts and spirits, concludes by saying, 'Today, the evil mouths of the twelve Asur brothers have been pushed into the iron furnace with a pole twelve cubits or thirteen cubits in length and their evil mouths have turned into Uddu Baranda, Neha Baranda, Hankar Bai, Pos Bai, Chiguragari, Darha Goensali. I have appeased them today. May there be no more fever and other sickness, no more evil dreams or fear of evil.' Though the Asur tribe seems to be the cause of the evil spirits among the Oraon and the Munda, it is also responsible for a benevolent spirit among the Kharia known as Darha which is looked upon with reverence. We sometimes hear among the Kharia the name of a spirit known as Asur Darha which is also called Raksha Dubo, meaning the 'protecting spirit'. Raksha Dubo moves about axe in hand, and calls people by name at dead of night. If the person addressed responds to the call, he falls sick and dies. Sometimes this spirit asks for a little tobacco, and if it is given, no harm is done. The spirit is supposed to guard the door or entrance to the village. If the Asur are responsible for the origin of the evil spirits among the other tribes, certain vultures who were killed by the former, as we have seen in a myth in the earlier chapter, are believed to be the cause of evil spirits among them.

Who is the Supreme God of the Asur? It is very difficult to say precisely whether the Asur believe in a Supreme Being or not. If we mean that it is the high god who towers above the rest, the answer is simple. Of course, the Asur
have some ideas of a Supreme and Benevolent Creator of all things. A diety called *Pat Deota* has a very high place in the Asur pantheon. He has control over the lesser spirits. He is supposed to give and take away the life of every creature. He is on the whole benevolent though he is believed to punish sinners with malignant diseases like leprosy and epilepsy.

Manga Asur and his assistant separated from the main body of the Asur who were performing *Sarna Pooja*, worship of the Sacred Grove at Sakhuapani on the Day of *Sarhul*. He wished me to see what he was going to do. I followed him to the root of a tree in the Grove where he dug a small hole. As he was digging, he unearthed three effigies having human shape which were made of twisted rags. He told me that he was going to worship the great deity known as *Mahadania* who claims independent worship and would not be satisfied with common worship for all gods and spirits that was being offered in the Sacred Grove. This great god *Mahadania*, I was informed by the Asur, was worshipped in the past with human sacrifice which is now represented by the effigies of human beings. In view of the changed circumstances, the Asur now try to propitiate *Mahadania* with the blood of a chicken which is crushed to death by a stone instead of its neck being cut by an ordinary sacrificial knife. *Mahadania*, if not properly propitiated at the appointed time, is believed to bring the most terrible epidemics and death to the villagers. Who is this *Mahadania*? The name *Mahadania* is derived from the Sanskrit words *Maha*, meaning 'great' and *dan*, meaning 'gift' or 'sacrifice'. It is interesting to note that even today the teachers of the Asur Residential Schools are very careful in not allowing the inmates to roam over distant places during summer, simply due to the fear that they might be waylaid and killed by some bad persons for the purpose of human sacrifice to the above spirit. There is also another aspect of this spirit *Mahadania*, which makes me to interpret its meaning
as "Giver of the greatest gifts". It is he who bestows the gift of a child upon a barren woman. A childless couple among the Asur will always take a vow to worship this spirit in order to have a child. In short, he is both the "Greatest Destroyer" as well as "the Giver of Precious Gifts". This nature of Mahadania is quite in keeping with the nature of Siva or Mahadeva who is prone to kindness and mercy for all who worship him with a pure heart.

Is Mahadania the same Mahadeva or Siva who is worshipped also by the Aryans in India? It seems to me that Mahadania is none other than Mahadeva. In order to establish the identity of Mahadania with Mahadeva or Siva, it will be necessary to go once again into the past of the Asura.

The history of the struggle between the Aryans and the Asura is also the history of racial fusion and cultural assimilation. Two races cannot live for ages together without affecting each other. Those who were superior have forced those who were inferior into their own moulds, but at the same time they could not help being influenced by them in turn. In religion, the Aryans have unquestionably borrowed much of their demon-worship from the non-Aryan races. 'To whatever mythology Siva or Rudra may originally have belonged to, there can be no doubt that Siva worship as performed particularly in lower Bengal is the reverse of the Aryan spirit of devotion. As we have seen, in the old times the chief object of adoration among the Asur-Dasa races was this terrible deity whom they appeased with human blood. The first aim of the British Government on acquiring a province in the past was always to put down such sacrifices.'

Siva worship in ancient times, now universal throughout the whole lower valley of the Ganges, seems to have been unpopular with the Aryans. This deity of the non-Aryans gradually rose to distinction among the mixed people of Bengal and later on among the Aryans as he happened to resemble in
many particulars the Sanskrit divinity whose name he now bears. His great shrines are among the hills which separate the aboriginals from the Aryan race or some other frontiers of Sanskrit civilisation. The scenes of his adventures are placed among the Himalayas. As Prof. Wilson justly remarks, 'Siva worship has ever been one of mystery, a worship bare of the charming legends which grew up so luxuriantly around the objects of adoration of the more civilised race and one whose sole visible representation is a rude emblem'.

There can be little doubt that this sanguine deity whose worship is a worship of blood is none else than Rudra of ancient Sanskrit literature. The worship of both is in so many respects alike. There are indications in the Veda, held to be more or less distinct by different scholars, of the struggle of the aboriginal deity for admission into the Aryan Olympus and indeed a faint tradition survives of his first entrance into that august convention. 'The gods meet in heaven, says an ancient text. They asked Rudra (Siva), 'Who art thou?' The stranger declares that he is the one supreme god and so he took his seat in the assembly of the Aryan gods, not as a new comer, but as another form of Agni, one of the many Indo-Germanic divinities. The struggle of the ancient religion of India is also witnessed in the interruption of Daksha's sacrifice. Siva wished to have part in the worship of the conquerors, and in their sacrifices, from which he was excluded and by disturbing their rites, and by a display of violence at their sacrifices, he succeeded in being admitted to them.

Siva or Mahesh has occupied a unique position in the Trio of Hindu religion as the Great Destroyer. His physical appearance has been described as ugly, he is almost naked and his companions are spirits and serpents. He is unconcerned about things going on in the world. Despite all these ugly features, every one without distinction, be he a god or a demon, is attracted to him and worships him, because he can
be easily pleased. He is Asutosh. He is ever ready to bestow his boon or favour upon those with whom he is pleased without caring for its consequences upon the world or even himself. Ravana, the great Asura of Lanka could please him by his devout worship and get a boon. When the Devas wanted a progeny from him to fight against the Asura, he was prepared to marry Parwati. It seems the Hindu Religion has cast much greater responsibility upon Vishnu, one of the Trio for the protection of creation. He cannot be unmindful of the dreadful consequences that would follow if charity and favour are allowed to be showered indiscriminately. For the protection of the world he has had to assume numerous roles even descending upon the earth in incarnations in the form of animals, semi-human beings and what not. He has had to play the role of a Dancer Mohini to deprive the Asura of the cup of nectar which was churned out of the ocean by the Devas in collaboration with the Asura. In short, Vishnu seems to be the emblem of the Aryans, while Siva is the prototype of the Asura.

To which cultural type the ancient Asura are to be related was the question that was faced by Dr. Ruben. The mythological Asura are often Shaivaite. Are they Shaivaite because they were fought by Vishnu? Whatever it may be, the Asur of Netarhat are the worshippers of Mahadania whose characteristics as described above are similar to those of Siva. As we have seen in the Asur Kahani, the Munda could vanquish the Asur with the help of their god Sing, Bonga who is one of the forms of Lord Vishnu. It seems that at a later stage, Mahadeo or Siva carved out his position in the Religious Trio of the Hindus.

As mentioned earlier, the Asur have no precise idea of a Supreme Deity, but they sometimes try to express it by calling it Bhagwan which is purely a Hindu name. When they use the word Bhagwan, the idea of god is entirely separated from the Sun. Of course, when they offer prayers and sacrifices
to the Supreme Deity they turn their face to the direction of the rising sun. Though this Supreme Deity is acknowledged, recognised and reverenced, he is usually neglected, because he does not rejoice in inflicting pain upon mankind, whilst the malignant spirits are adored. The fact that Bhagwan controls the other gods and spirits is particularly symbolised by the arrangement of the sacrifices at the principal Asur religious festival known as Sarhul. On this occasion, fowls are sacrificed to each Asur deity and spirit including the Supreme One. It is believed that Bhagwan sees all that men and the spirits do. The Asur has a notion that Bhagwan punishes offences against customary morality. As an expiation for such an offence, the sacrifice of a white cock to Bhagwan is considered indispensable.

The Asur’s belief in the ancestor spirits appears to be the natural outcome of his conception of the human soul. The beneficent nature of the ancestor spirits came to be recognised at a later stage, probably due to contact with other cultures. The Asur believe that the spirits of their deceased fathers or grandfathers often come to attend the sick bed of their living sons and grandsons guarding them against intrusion by mischievous spirits. In case of a serious illness in the family, a vow is sometimes taken to offer on recovery, a grey fowl to the ancestor spirits.

There is no special religious festival at which offerings and sacrifices are made solely to the ancestor-spirits. These spirits are invoked and offerings are made to them by their living relatives at every feast and on every suitable occasion. The principal occasions are three which have already been described earlier. This ancestor worship is a simple ceremony of offering a drink and sacrifice of a fowl to the dead ancestors.

Among the village deities and spirits to whom periodical sacrifices are offered by the Asur village priest on behalf of the
village community is the old Lady of the Grove. In the religious history of the races in India, the worship of trees has played an important part. In the tribal areas in the country, holy groves are maintained where even to break a twig would be considered as a sin. To the savage, the world in general is animate, and trees and plants are no exception to the rule. 'Primitive man, it is said, led unhappy life, for their superstition did not stop at animals, but extended even to the plants.' It is only particular sorts of trees that are held sacred. The principal trees in the Sacred Grove of the Asur are Sal trees. When two or three deaths among the Asur inhabitants occurred all of a sudden at Sakhuapani, the cause of it was attributed to the falling down of one old Sal tree in the village Sacred Grove. Some particular trees in the grove are also supposed to be tenanted by spirits. This belief of the Asur indicates that he is passing from animism to polytheism, as he has begun to think that a tree is no longer the body of the tree spirit, but simply its abode which it can quit at pleasure. When the tree spirit thus disengages from the trees in the grove, it begins to change its shape and assume the human form. This spirit is recognised by the Asur as *Sarna Buria*. She receives sacrifices attended with the most elaborate ritual at the annual *Sarhul* festival.

*Pat Deota* is a village deity who is considered to be the master of all the village *bhuts* or spirits whom it controls and keeps under check. The *Deota* protects the village from sickness and other misfortunes. He has his seat on a hill in the plateau on the outskirts of every village. *Pat Deota* is said to ride a pony and patrol the village in times of epidemics, but the pony alone is visible and not its rider. *Duarsini* is said to be the attendant spirit of *Pat Deota*. Ordinarily *Pat Deota* is ignored and no separate sacrifice is offered to it.

*Darha* is also one of the most dreaded spirits of the village. This spirit acts as the guard or gate-keeper of the
village which it is believed protects it from the incursions of spirits from outside. It has a seat on a plot of upland near the boundary of every Asur village. Like Pat Deota, this spirit is sometimes visible in the shape of a young stalwart riding a pony. Ordinarily Darha does no harm to the villagers, but if he does not get proper sacrifices at the appointed time he makes his displeasure felt upon the village people by afflicting men and cattle with some terrible calamity. This may be withdrawn by him only when expensive sacrifices are offered. Darha sometimes becomes a tutelary deity of the witches and sorcerers who incite him to cause trouble to people.

Feasts and festivals.

As we have seen, the Asur society tries to secure favour and active help of supernatural powers with the help of magico-religious ceremonies so as to ensure the safety and well-being of the individual and his family on all critical occasions. Every religious ceremony is preceded by some sort of purification of the body and mind by bathing, fasting and certain other self-imposed restraints. The ceremony is performed by an individual or the village community as a whole praying in an apologetic mood that all sins which may have been committed knowingly or unknowingly may be pardoned or it may be a simple expression of gratitude to these powers for helping them in times of crisis. When the ceremony is over, the person or the society concerned feels happy at the prospect of a general riddance of evil and absolution from all sins. His mind is freed of the sense of oppression under which it continuously labours, joy comes into his life thereafter and with a renewed sense of social solidarity he participates heartily in feasting, drinking and dancing. The Asur society seeks to ensure safety and prosperity to the village community as a whole at each new stage in the annual cycle of its simple economic pursuits, and the feasting and rejoicing and social reunion mark their successful termination,
The *Sarhul* Festival is one of the three most important festivals of the Asur which is celebrated with gaiety and merrymaking. On this occasion, the village deities and evil spirits too are offered worship at the village Sacred Grove. There is no fixed day for the *Sarhul*. It, however, coincides more or less with the end of March and the beginning of April, when the Sal tree puts forth its new leaves and gets covered with bunches of small whitish flowers. The day is fixed with common consent. A death or some other untoward event in one or several houses of the village is a sufficient reason for its postponement. About a week before the day agreed upon, the *Baiga* goes through the village announcing the day for the *Sarhul*. The occasion is also celebrated to promote the fruitfulness of the earth. Like the Oraon, the Asur also worship the Earth as a goddess. She is *Dharti Mai*. In order that she may yield increased food crops for the Asur, she herself must be fertile. This makes it absolutely necessary for her to have a male partner. Hence the Asur annually celebrate her marriage with the Sun-God, *Suraj Deota* when the Sal tree is in blossom. Flowering of the Sal trees is regarded as a sign that the Mother Earth is in her menstruation.

Kaloo Mahto and the *Baiga* followed by a number of men assembled in the Sacred Grove after a bath. A small patch of ground under the principal tree was cleared. The *Baiga* and others sat in a group facing the east. The ground was sprinkled with water and a small circle was drawn on it with rice flour. The *Baiga* had by his side a sacrificial winnowing fan which had turned black because of its having been kept undisturbed in his smoky room at one place for a long time. Equally black and unclean was the sacrificial knife which was kept in the fan. The *Baiga* made two small heaps of *aruu* rice by the side of the circle. He held in his hands two chickens which had been washed by his assistant before handing them over for sacrifice. Then the *Baiga* began to chant prayers addressed to hordes of spirits both benevolent
and malevolent and was joined by the *Mahto* and a few others. Then he made the chickens to eat some rice grains from the two heaps. He cut the necks of the chickens one by one with the sacrificial knife without severing them from their bodies. He dropped the blood over the white line which described the circle. Those of the Asur who had taken a vow to make such sacrifices to the deities and spirits presented their chickens and pots of rice beer to the *Baiga*. This beer was later on drunk by those who were present. At a distance of about twenty yards from the place of sacrifice a few of the Asur males were busy preparing the sacrificial dinner of rice to be mixed with the meat of the sacrificed chickens.

Before they sat down for dinner they were all dead drunk. The *Baiga* was then carried back to the village on the shoulders of a strong man. Near the village the women met them and washed their feet. With the beating of drums and singing, dancing and jumping all proceeded to the *Baiga*’s house, which was decorated with leaves and flowers. Then the usual form of marriage was performed between the *Baiga* and his wife, symbolising the supposed union between the Sun and the Earth. After the ceremony they had nothing to do except to eat and drink and make merry. They danced and sang obscene songs and sometimes indulged in the vilest orgies. The object is to move the Mother Earth to become more fruitful. The Sacred Marriage of the Sun and the Earth, personated by the priest and his wife, is celebrated as a charm to ensure the fertility of the earth. The Asur is forbidden to start sowing operations in his fields before this Sacred Marriage.

Like the *Sarhul*, the *Hariari* is also an agricultural festival. It is the festival of Green (Rice) Plants which is celebrated in the month of July-August after paddy, *gondali*, *marua* and other seeds have been sown in the fields of the village and the land is green with verdure. No one in the
The Asur are engaged in performing the worship at the village Sacred Grove at the time of
the Sarhul Festival. This is also the occasion of marriage of the Mother Earth with the
Sun God. In order that the Mother Earth may yield bumper crops, she herself must be
fertile. This behoved that she must have a partner who is the Sun God. Flowering of
Sal trees is considered among the Asur that the Mother Earth is in her menstruation
period. This is the fertility cult which is also observed among various other primitive
tribes in the world.
After the worship at the Sacred Grove, the village priest is taken on shoulders to his house in the village which is decorated with leaves and flowers. Here the usual form of marriage is performed between the priest and his wife, symbolising the supposed union between the Earth and the Sun. The sacred marriage of the Sun and the Earth personated by the priest and his wife is celebrated as a charm to ensure the fertility of the agricultural lands.
Tribal life without dance is not worth living. Whether starving or not, no opportunity is missed for dancing by the Asur girls and boys. It provides a good recreation to the tired mind due to drudgery in daily life and also gives a meaning to the life of an individual participating in it.
village may transplant his fields unless this public festival of Hariari is celebrated. The village elders appoint a day for this festival after consultation among themselves. On the morning of the appointed day, fowls for the sacrifice are collected. The village priest accompanied by his assistant and the villagers go to the open upland where the festival is annually held. The site for the sacrifice is cleaned and the sacrificial winnowing fan and the knife are placed on the ground. Arua rice is placed in heaps by its side. After the fowls are made ready for the sacrifice, the priest holds each fowl and addresses the victim thus: "Let there be no sickness and let no other trouble enter the village or visit its houses, affect its people, its children, its cattle and so on. May all in the village remain in peace and happiness. Do then bring us sufficient rain, may we have bumper crops. Look here, shouldst thou be a real deity, do then eat the rice". After the fowl has picked up some rice grains it is sacrificed and a little of its blood is dropped on the ground. Then the meat is fried or boiled with rice and all have a hearty meal and plenty of drink.

Another important festival of the Asur is the Sohrai. It seems, it has been borrowed by them as by most other tribes of Chotanagpur from the cattle-tending Ahirs. In a few of the Asur villages, there is a family or two of the Hindu caste of Ahirs to whom sometimes the cattle of the village are made over for tending. In the evening of the New Moon day in the month of Kartik, a number of earthen lamps fed with oil are lighted in cattle sheds, manure pits and kitchen gardens. The lamps are, if possible, kept burning the whole night. A special meal is prepared in each house for the cattle. Next day, the cattle are bathed at some pool or stream and then taken into the cattle shed where some female member sprinkles rice beer on their hoofs. The cattle are given a hearty feed of grains boiled overnight. The horns and hoofs are annointed with vermillion diluted in oil. In a few families a fowl is sacrificed at the cattle shed to its presiding deity called Goraiaq
Deota. Some families who own buffaloes sacrifice to Goraia, a black pig. They first wash the hoofs of the buffaloes and anoint their forehead with vermilion diluted in oil. Then the pig is offered a handful of arua rice to eat, and its feet are washed and the forehead anointed with vermilion diluted in oil and with rice flour moistened in water. The pig thus dragged over the ground struggling and squeaking to the place where the buffaloes have been let loose. The buffaloes excited and frightened by the squeaking and grunting of the pig, gore the pig to death with their horns. Ordinarily, the pig is purchased by subscription from the villagers who may own the buffaloes.

Among the hunting festivals, the Phagu Sendra or Spring Hunt is considered to be the most important. It takes place every year in the month of Phagun or March. The festival is celebrated between the first appearance of the moon at night in the month of Phagun until the night of the full moon. The Asur leave aside every kind of work and engage themselves in the celebration which is called 'Slavery of the Lord'. Every individual has to participate in the celebrations and families defaulting are fined and the money so realised is spent in purchasing kitchen salt which is distributed among the villagers. The celebrations last for full fifteen days. In between, the Asur families who are engaged in iron-smelting or blacksmithy in their crude forges perform the Sansi-Kulasi Worship. Evenings and nights are spent in dancing and merry-making. The peculiar feature of this festival is that musical instruments which are so essential for all social and festive occasions among the Asur are not played on this occasion when the youths and girls are engaged in dancing. Every head of a family has to don himself with a new piece of cloth on this occasion which is considered important in the annual cycle of festivals of the Asur.
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

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CHAPTER 10

WITCHES, WIZARDS AND GHOSTS.

There is not always a hard and fast line of demarcation between good magic and bad magic, though usually there is a distinction drawn between socially approved and anti-social magic. "Sorcery and witchcraft are ritual means of working harm against an enemy". Witchcraft may be distinguished from sorcery in that it is generally believed to be a power, more for evil than for good, lodged in an individual himself or herself (the witch). Witchcraft may be inborn or acquired by undergoing special practices. It is a belief among the Asur that at the dead of night particularly on the night of the new moon in the month of Kartik when the Sohrai festival is celebrated, the witches of several neighbouring villages assemble under some tree at a secluded spot at some distance from human habitation. There they strip themselves of their clothes and wear only fringes of old brooms made of wild grass suspended from a girdle round their waists. Thus arrayed, the naked women hold the Witches' Dance in the light of lamps burning on tiger's, skulls. The Asur further told me that lamps were also fixed on their knee joints while the Dance was going on. They also carry in their hands big needles for the purpose of black magic. On this occasion, a black chicken is sacrificed. It is at these Witches' Dances the novices learn the spells and incantations and other technique of the magic art. Should any outsider happen to come there during these dances and sacrifices, the stranger is challenged and asked to learn the black magic along with them. If he is found to be a mere wayfarer and not an inquisitive spy, he is warned on pain of death not to speak to anyone what he may have seen or heard. Should he prove faithless, it is said, he is sure to be killed by black magic. All traces of
footsteps and other marks of the Witches’ Dance are said to be wiped off through magic. The witches enter into commission with the spirits that ordinarily receive no sacrifices such as the spirits of the ancient dead and by tempting them with vows of sacrifices get their diabolical designs on others executed with their aid.

Various methods are employed by the witches who are called Dains by the Asur to bring disease or other calamities to an individual, a family or a village. The Asur have a strong belief that a witch is able to transform herself into the shape of an animal. It certainly suffices to make them accept the possibility of the metamorphosis, and once it is admitted, the ordinary Asur readily believes such stories and other ones still more fantastic. According to the Asur the natural tiger is never a man-eater. ‘Only men temporarily changed into tigers attack and devour human beings, because the latter appear to them in the shape of cattle. While such people roam about as tigers, their human form lies at home fast asleep’. The most popular form which a witch adopts is that of a cat to effect her nefarious designs to harm the people. In the form of a cat she enters people's houses, licks the saliva trickling down the corners of the mouth of some sleeping person and the unfortunate person falls ill. If such a cat could be caught and killed or one of its legs or other limbs broken, the witch too will be found dead at her home or maimed in her leg or other limb, as the case may be.

The witches also employ other spirits to carry out their designs against the people. The invisible spirit is asked to take the visible form of an animal, say of a tiger. An Asur can defend himself with his hunting axe if he is attacked by a real tiger. But unfortunately for the Asur, if that animal happens to be a spirit, he has no means of self-defence, because even if he deals a well directed blow, it will pass through the figure as through thin air, since a spirit is proof against material weapons.
A special kind of witches who by the help of a spirit whom they worship in secret acquire the power to change themselves into a cat, a goat, a sheep or any other animal and so prowl about at night doing various kinds of little mischief. The spirit whose devotees they are is called Chandi who chooses to act in this modality. The principal pranks ascribed to these witches are nightmares. They will come generally in the shape of animals and lie down on the sleeper's stomach, oppressing it by their weight and preventing him from shouting or moving. To prevent them from entering the house and playing these tricks, people draw a line with a piece of charcoal across the doorstep and on the wall around the door. The one who is subject to such nightmares also ties a piece of iron to his hand or foot. The charcoal line is to be renewed every night, because it loses its efficacy as soon a man crosses the doorway.

The witches also have a great hankering for hearts or livers of men or animals which they can see right through their bodies. 'A witch will extract the heart of the victim through magic spells on the Sohra night and pack it up in a bundle of Pipar leaves, and name a day for the death of the victim. The victim pines away and dies on the day so named.'

The magic spell is sometimes cast by the witches with the help of an arrow-shot. The magic 'arrow' has a very long range and silently hits the intended victim even over very long distance, altogether unperceived. As a consequence, the victim feels a sharp pain for which there appears to be no known cause. In such cases, it is inferred that some witch must have aimed her magic 'arrow' at the patient.

The wizard is a person who has acquired a familiar spirit which he sets on to harm other people when its appointed time for receiving sacrifices arrives. The Asur call him a Bishaha. Like the witches he is created with the evil eye as well. Some Bishahas learn the magic art in secret from adepts who are
mostly witches in the art and can walk about in the shape of cats, tigers and harm people in the same manner as a witch does. 'A powerful wizard, it is asserted, can by his spells uproot a tree and in the same night remove it to a distance of twelve Kosas (more than twenty four miles) and again bring it back to its former position.' It is a belief among the Asur that a wizard by assuming the shape of Chordeva, a pigmy not bigger than a man's thumb and carrying on the shoulders a sika-bahanga consisting of a pole made of a castor stem with two sikas made of human hair suspended on either side of the bahanga, removes paddy or rice from people's houses. From the time that a witch or a wizard thus steals grains, prosperity bids farewell to the master of the house.

We come across a number of ghost stories of the weirdest kind among the tribal people. The much dreaded ghost is that of a churel. When a woman dies in child-birth or pregnancy before actually giving birth to a child she becomes a ghost of the most malignant type. The belief in this kind of ghost is not confined to the aboriginals only. It is widely prevalent among the Hindus and many other communities all over India. In my home town in Saurashtra, I heard stories
of this ghost having the heels in front which frightened me considerably when I was a child. I could not understand at that time why the heels came in front of the ghost which clue I got now during my study of the tribes in Chotanagpu. Roy has given a vivid account of the belief among the Oraon about the atrocities perpetrated upon the body of a woman who dies in child-birth or pregnancy. It is believed that the shade of woman who dies in pregnancy has an irresistible longing to return to her home. If she succeeds in reaching it, she will take with her the child or person who loved her most. For this purpose she will in a fit of laughter either strangle him or tickle him under the arms till he dies. The *churel* will pursue any man who may happen to pass by the graves, and goes on teasing and tormenting him till he falls down in a swoon. The man thus attacked generally falls sick and loses his life unless some powerful witch-finder saves him by his incantations and magical operations. The *churel* runs after and seeks to possess every man whom she meets, for, it is said, her carnal appetite remained unsatisfied in life. Timku Asur (60) almost shivered with fear when he began to narrate to me his experience with the *churel* as if it was a fresh one.

HE SAID, "I had gone to village Jairagi some two years ago to attend a weekly market. I remember the time quite well, because the marriage of my son had taken place at that time. While returning from Jairagi it was almost sunset, and when I came to a dense forest on my way home, it was completely dark. It may be about 11-00 P.M. at night, when all of a sudden, I heard a flutter among the leaves of the trees followed by a peculiar sound resembling a human voice which I did not mind in the beginning. I proceeded further, but soon I heard again a heart-rending cry of a woman by which I was mortally afraid. I at once realized the idea of a *churel*, characteristics of which had been described to me by my old father while I was young. I thought that it was impossible now to escape from the clutches of the *churel*, so I mustered my courage and prepared myself for self-defence. I threw off my clothes and sat naked facing the direction from which the cry was heard. I waited for 5-10 minutes in this position till the cry stopped. It is said that a *churel* will not pursue or chase a man who goes naked, because she feels ashamed. I collected my clothes, ran as fast as my legs could carry me and put them on again when I came to a safe distance. I reached
another village where I stopped for the night to be relieved of fear and shock. Here I learnt from the villagers that the *churel* was really the spirit of a pregnant woman who had died in childbirth only two or three days before and that her dead body was buried at the very place by which I had passed”.

It is dreadful and at the same time very interesting to hear strange stories of the *churel* which the Asur are never tired of narrating. This spirit being a woman also likes to join in a dance in a village dancing arena. When so minded she excites in one of the girls such a mirth that she is forced to withdraw. Shortly afterwards the intruder appears in the shape of this girl and takes her place as if she has returned to dance. When the *churel* thus joins a dance there is no end of gaiety and generally one of the dancers either a youth or a maiden gets into a trance. When caused by the *churel* the trance is characterised by immoderate and hysterical laughter. The Asur say that the intruder could be easily detected if only her cloth were not drawn over the back, because it is hollow.

In order to prevent the *churel* from doing any harm to the family or the village people, every precaution is taken to render her task impossible. The bodies of pregnant women are not buried in the common burial ground. They are taken for burial outside the village and are interred on the boundary lines between the village and an adjoining village. In the past before such a corpse was buried, thorns were driven into the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. In order to increase the difficulty of returning home from the burial place, the feet were broken up and turned round so that the heels came in front. The eye-lids of the deceased woman were sewn up to prevent her from seeing her way to her home. The Asur also used to bury the corpse with its face downwards deep in the ground. When the corpse is taken out for burial, a *Baiga* or a spirit doctor of the Asur draws a line of charcoal in front of the house, forbidding the spirit of the dead woman to go there again. He follows the corpse to the burial place scattering mustard or *gondli* seeds here and
there which he carries in a sieve of cloth. After the corpse is
burried the Baiga immobilises the spirit by drawing a
charcoal line round the place reciting some mantras or magic
spells. While returning home he scatters again the seeds all
along the way and at the same time mutters mantras saying,
'pick up all these when thou goest to the house'. It is believed
that on account of the difficulty of walking caused by the
thorns in the feet and the time spent in picking up the seeds,
dawn will overtake her before she can reach the house, because
she can roam about only at night. The Asur told me that
now they did not mutilate the corpse of a pregnant woman like
that, but the eye-lids were still sewn up with thorns, so that
her spirit could not see the way to her home.

Another most-dreaded spirit is Baghaut. It is the
ghost of a human being who has been actually killed by a
tiger. The spirit of a person devoured by a tiger roams about
in the forest or near about the place where he was killed in the
shape of a dwarf with a dense crop of hair which is so long
that it trails on the ground behind. 'The man-eating tiger
with its stealthy approach, its lightning-like leap on the
unwary victim and the deadly stroke of its claws, naturally
looms large in the imagination of the forest dwelling people'
like the Asur. The tiger especially is strictly obedient to this
spirit and unless the spirit so wills, a tiger would not dare to
kill a human being.

Several girls including Jati, daughter of Makdu Asur of
Upparlodapat had gone into the adjoining forest one afternoon
in February 1959 in a group to collect some edible flowers.
But how could they keep themselves under restraint when the
beautiful trees and plants around them looked so gay and
instinct with life. The environment around them was so
bewitching that the joy of the girls burst forth in a beautiful
Asur song. Fully engrossed in singing and plucking of flowers,
they forgot that they had separated from one another. Jati
attracted by a big bunch of *Jirhool* flowers strolled down into a ravine leaving her companions on an elevation in the forest. All of a sudden she saw a big tiger lurking in the bushes. She tried to run away at once, but hardly had she gone a couple of steps, when the tiger pounced upon her and she dropped down dead on the ground. All the girls ran home breathlessly to report to the people what had happened. The Asur armed with various weapons like battle-axes, spears, bows and arrows went to the spot where they found the dead body of the girl which to their surprise was not eaten by the beast. They searched for the tiger but could not trace him. So they returned to the village with the dead body which was taken to Bishunpur for post-mortem. After that it was buried there.

It was the talk of the day in the village as to why the girl was not devoured by the tiger. It is a belief among the Asur that if any human being is killed by a tiger, he or she is bound to become a ghost known as Baghaut who would every now and then assume the form of a tiger and work havoc among men and cattle. The Asur Panchayat assembled soon to decide how to save the village from such depredations. The village-folk ultimately resolved to expel the evil spirit by a scapegoat, because they believed that the spirit could be embodied in a material vehicle. The ceremony of expulsion is nothing but magic pure and simple practised for propitiating the ghost. It can be performed by appointing a man to be a substitute for the Baghaut and expelling him from the village and its surroundings. After some effort the village people could persuade one Bigna Lohar of the adjoining village who offered himself as a substitute on payment of some cash. The Lohar had to fast for three days and on the appointed day his body was striped red and white by means of burnt clay and rice flour which made him appear like a tiger. A tail was also provided to him. The Lohar was roped heavily and the long

* Lagestroemia regina macrocarpa. The flower is eaten as a vegetable from Magh to Falgun.*
ends of the ropes were held by strong men. The sorcerers to the accompaniment of music recited *mantras* over him till he got into a trance, which was considered a proof that the Baghaut had entered his body and possessed him. Soon the Lohar began to walk on all fours growling, roaring and attempting to leap like a tiger. Spectators kept at a safe distance fearing that they would be mauled by him in case he got free. Roped in this way the Baghaut was brought to the place where the girl was killed. Here he collected some earth on which blood had been dropped and put it into a bamboo tube. When this was being done, the persons who had held him were careful enough not to allow him to lick the blood, because if in this state of trance he chances to lick the blood with his tongue it is believed that the scapegoat, would turn into a real tiger and run away into the jungle. The Baghaut was offered chickens and a goat as sacrifices for his propitiation and soon the trance came to an end. The villager had a grand dinner with rice and sacrificial meat and plenty of rice beer. They returned thereafter quite confident that they need entertain no fear of the Baghaut any more. The Lohar went back to his village having received his small remuneration for playing the role of the Baghaut.

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CHAPTER 11

DISEASE AND DIVINATION.

The Asur look upon disease as something unnatural and make their own deductions from this proposition. Like the Santal they believe that 'a human being has a natural right to health and life and that consequently he ought to live up to a good old age. But they fail to understand why all are liable to be attacked by disease and carried by death at any time'\(^1\). The Asur also believe that the life of man is predestined by Bhagwan and that man is not immortal. Now if they act up according to this belief, they should know that death comes according to the will of god and not according to the will of any other being, like evil spirits and the witches. They have full faith in Bhagwan who will not distress them except when it is absolutely necessary. Famine or some other natural calamity like it is deemed to be a sign of his displeasure. As a matter of fact, certain diseases are regarded as direct punishment for certain acts considered specially sinful. Timku Asur of Sakhuapani told me that an Asur of the nearby village had illicit sexual relations with his daughter-in-law who was a widow. It was such a heinous act that no society would tolerate it. But he did not survive long as within six months, he was attacked by a severe disease. His body was eaten up by worms and he met with a most contemptuous death. But inspite of their faith in Bhagwan, the belief of the Asur in spirits who are without exception evil and enemies of man is still firm and unshakeable.

These spirits and also ancestors send diseases, partly because their nature is such and partly because they want food, shelter and attention. The wrath of the spirits is wanton and unpredictable; it flares up and destroys the innocent and
simple, the most orthodox observers of taboos and sometimes
even the most devoted worshippers. The irrational character
of these attacks is specially evident in incurable cases of
paralysis, lameness and insanity. The Asur simply cannot
understand why they are made victims of these mysterious and
unmotivated attacks. These spirits are believed to be very
sensitive to all kinds of neglect and disobedience. They react
immediately to any breach of an established taboo. Sickness
is the routine punishment for every lapse and crime meted out
to human beings by these evil spirits.

Sickness is caused by the dead also. The motives that
prompt the dead to afflict the living are more varied and
interesting. The Asur view is not that they are wicked or
cruel, they are rather pathetic and sometimes well-intentioned.
These spirits of the ancestors are a constant drain on the
health or pockets of the living. The motives of the ancestors
are more complex and elaborate. They are supposed to have
a desire to perpetuate their names through naming of their
grand-children for which purpose they also cause illness.
Diseases may also be caused by them as a mark of their disapp-
approval of any particular marriage of their descendants. These
spirits of the dead are supposed to harass humanity, because
they are hungry and annoyed. They may also be used by the
witches or they themselves harass the people in a number of
ways.

Sickness, according to the Asur, is also caused by the
evil eye of some heavy-souled people. They believe that in any
village there may be persons, men or women who have a heavy
soul. ‘When the evil eyes fall on the children they cause
them to become sickly; when cast on youths, prevent them
from finding suitable partners in marriage; when falling on a
pregnant woman, they cause death or very difficult and painful
child-birth.’ There are certain persons called sorcerers who
are supposed to do their work either by directly sending objects
into a victim’s body or sending indirectly the evil spirits to do
their work for them. The Asur call them Dahia or Bishaha. These sorcerers are supposed to take a malicious delight in interrupting and spoiling the effects of sacrifices, and that is why most ceremonies in the life of the Asur begin with invocations meant to ward off their evil influence.

Nevertheless, the Asur's attitude towards disease is not so crude as it seems to be. They do acknowledge natural causes of illness, because they cannot help seeing the effect and its immediate cause. They can also see the material nature of a disease. But there is always a suspicion that the natural cause is not the original cause, but that evil influences are at work in the first instance. So far as an ordinary disease is concerned, they will not give much heed to it and allow it to run its course, because in that case a person is expected to be well again within a reasonable time. But if the disease does not disappear, if it begins suddenly and is of an unusual character, neither known nor understood, and above all, if death ensues, the latent suspicion asserts itself. Even where the immediate cause is evident, they have a tendency to suspect something behind it. As for example, it is not by one's own will that one falls down from a tree. In play, a boy accidentally kills another boy by shooting him with an arrow. There is no doubt that the arrow is the immediate cause, because the boy had no intention to kill the other. The natural cause is there, but to the Asur mind there is room for something more.

As this supernatural influence is believed to be hostile with little possibility of its being transformed into something benign, the only practical question for them is, how to stop it, and in the case of the witches, how to stop it and punish it. It is believed that the spirits can do only evil. It is their nature to cause distress to others. They have no power to undo the evil that they do. Bhagwan is the only one who can give life or restore it. He has created the world that contains remedies for all ills. To bring about recovery from any disease it is
only necessary to find the correct medicine which is intended for any particular disease.

The Asur are aware that the stomach performs a most important function in maintaining health. They are also aware that errors of diet cause various ailments. The Asur generally live on leafy vegetables and tubers along with gondli or other lesser millets. They cannot afford to take meat so often. When they get an opportunity of eating whether of a sacrificial goat or the carion of a cow or buffalo, they eat it in large quantities. The meat may also be bad or not properly cooked. They have also knowledge of the contagious nature of some skin diseases and to a certain extent also of the infectious nature of epidemic diseases, but their views with regard to most other infectious diseases are rather vague. They do not understand the nature of tuberculosis. So they do not take any measures that might help to check its spreading. Leprosy, according to the Asur, is passed on from parents to children through successive generations. But infection, they say, may be avoided, if one does not eat food touched or left by the leper. They also believe that people get disease mostly through carelessness with their body. If we eat anything in an unclean way, we become subject to illness. As regards many diseases or infirmities they have their own theories which are of a grossly superstitious nature. On the whole, science and superstition are strangely blended together by the Asur.

When somebody in a family falls ill and the illness is not serious, the Asur prefers to wait till it leaves. The Asur are a practical people in this respect. They wait to let the disease become tired. The people, in the meantime, apply some household remedies. If however, the disease is of a pronounced nature, or does not yield to the household remedies, or if it is not controlled in a few days, they think of a medicine man or a diviner called Baiga. The difference between them is that the former gives only medicines, while the Baiga in addition to
giving the medicines tries to ascertain through divination whether the disease was caused by an evil spirit or a witch or a wizard.

The magico-religious treatment of the disease naturally depends upon a correct diagnosis. The simplest and most common method of diagnosis is for a diviner to summon his tutelary spirit and persuade her to find out the truth. This is done in a number of ways among the different tribes in the country. It would be quite interesting to know how divination takes place among the neighbours of the Asur whose influence upon the latter is visible in a number of religious beliefs and practices. Among the Munda, the head of the afflicted family goes to a Deonra with some rice which has been touched beforehand by the sick person. The Deonra after washing his hands and feet and then turning to the east, pours some of the pearl rice grains into the palm of his left hand and whilst fingerling them with the thumb, the forefinger and the middle finger of his right hand, he addresses the following prayer to Sing Bonga: ‘O Lord in heaven............I, in my stupidity and ignorance, seek a solution. Help me in finding the real truth. Do not allow me to fall into an error. Let the one who causes this illness be discovered and revealed by the examination of these rice grains. Let the patient be restored to health, let him get strength by taking his usual food’. Then he takes a pinch of grains from his left palm and lets the grains fall on the ground naming a particular spirit which may have caused the sickness three times and then with the forefinger draws a circle three times round the rice. If all these grains pair off, then the answer is in the negative, that is, it is not that spirit which has caused the sickness. Then the grains are thrown in the name of some other spirit. The throwing is continued till there is no pairing off the grains. That spirit in whose name the last throwing is made is considered to have something to do with the sickness,
Among the Oraon, the process is almost similar. 'A Mati picks up some arua rice grains from his left hand and places them on the ground. Then he counts by twos the grains thus placed. If there is any left over, the process is repeated four times more to see if each time there is one grain extra, in which case it is the bhut already named at the time of throwing of the grains which has caused illness'. The Deonra of the Ho of Singhbhum inquires into the cause of sickness with the help of a winnowing basket. 'He puts some rice in the basket and asks Sing Bonga and Nage-Bonga while naming the spirit or Bonga in succession. In the process of interrogation, if any displacement of the grains is noticed then that particular Bonga is believed to have caused the malady'. The second method is known as a Danda Nam. Here, again, questions are put to Sing Bonga, but 'instead of the grains, two men with tall staves in their hands sit on either side of the Deonra, and when the formulae are being recited and the names of the spirits called out one after another, the men are suddenly 'possessed' and begin to shake their staves, indicating thereby the cause of the disease'. Another method is that 'few grains of arua rice are taken in a Sal leaf, and the Deonra touches the body of the diseased person with the leaf. He then mutters his weird mantras over the grains, and when the names of the Bonga causing the disease is called out, the patient feels a heaviness over his body which makes the identity of the Bonga clear. Divination with the help of oil is also resorted to by the Deonra among the Ho. Two leaf-cups of oil are taken to the Deonra after they have been touched by the patient. The Deonra looks into the oil and discovers some signs from which he ascertains which spirit has caused disease'.

Verrier Elwin has observed some more interesting processes of divination among the Saora of Orissa. Here the diviner is called a Shaman. In a state of trance which is the basic condition for his commerce with the unseen world, he tries to find out the cause of illness. The leaf of the Bel tree is
very much in use. 'The Shaman lights a lamp and places it in a winnowing fan half filled with rice. Some one brings him a branch of Bel leaves. He takes these one by one and in each he puts an unbroken grain of rice. He holds the leaf in the flame of the lamp and recites names. In this, as in all similar ceremonies, the Shaman proceeds as in a guessing game, gradually narrowing the field of possibility. He begins, for example by taking the names of gods, ancestors and sorcerers. In the Bel leaf test, the answer is given by the grain of rice turning black and specking to the leaf or by the way the leaf curls itself in the heat. A similar test is conducted with the help of a knife also. 'The Shaman takes one of the ceremonial knives with an ornate brass handle and passes it through a flame, judging the answers by the way the blade is blackened. If a Shaman wants to know what part of patient's body has been affected by a sorcerer, 'he also takes a lamp and passes it over him when the flame burns brightly or when the skin shines unnaturally, it indicates the effected part.'

The Asur diviners adopt some such methods for divination. The most common method practiced for divination by the Baiga is by means of rice grains which is known as Dali-Dekhna. Some do it by staring intensely at the peacock feathers till they get into a trance. In this condition they describe the cause of illness. Some pretend to see everything after a few incantations in the flame of an oil lamp or in the smoke of Sal rosin. The chief business of most of them seems to find the name of sickness causing spirits and of wizards and witches who cause such spirits to afflict either single persons with sickness or smite the whole village or villages with epidemics among men or domestic animals. Some of the Baigas do not fear even to point out clearly the wizards or witches responsible for sickness and also name the kind of sacrifices required. Sometimes the Baiga combines in himself the jobs of a diviner as well as a sorcerer.

The head of the family in which somebody is sick takes
some pearl rice and a bundle of four or five Sal leaves, touches it to the afflicted member and goes to the Baiga for divination and offers him a small fee, say four pice and requests him to examine the grains. The Baiga washes his hands and feet and then facing to the east he sits for divination. He begins to recite incantations asking his tutelary spirit to come over and soon he is 'possessed'. He gets into a trance. In this position he picks up a few grains of rice and naming a spirit he begins to pair off the grains. After doing this for a number of times, he succeeds at last in declaring a particular spirit to be the cause of sickness as the grains did not pair off in its case. As to the result of this divination, the Baiga without any great difficulty would be able to get an inkling of the mind of those whom he is called in to serve. He is at liberty to declare what he sees, and very few would think of challenging his 'vision'. This might involve disrespect of the supernatural and taking responsibility on oneself. According to circumstances, the Baiga finds out whether the origin of the trouble is a natural one or a witch or some spirits and so on. Frequently a mixed cause is also found. Having performed the divination, the Baiga will tell those who have employed him what is needed. He will say something like this: 'Such and such spirit comes on the rice grains, or in the peacock feather or in the flame of the oil lamp. Somehow it has been offended or hurt. Please satisfy it and make it friendly again. Do something yourself, do not trust in the Baiga alone. It sometimes so happens that the divination points in a wrong direction. It is, therefore, necessary that further satisfaction corroboration may be obtained from elsewhere'. Then all doubts vanish. Thereafter, the head of the family approaches a Mati or a sorcerer for propitiation and expulsion of the spirit. He is saved from the burden of going to another person for expulsion if the Baiga happens to combine in himself the role of a Mati as well.

The Mati is requested to come to the house of the afflicted
person where he usually proceeds in the evening. After washing his hands and feet he orders an earthen lamp to be lit and incense to be brought together with burning coals on a hoe or on a roofing tile. The head of the family brings some arua rice in a winnowing fan which has been touched to the sick person beforehand. The Mati sometimes carries with him a Jhunki (a big iron ring with several small rings inserted) for playing at the time of his incantations. The Mati sits facing the east and chants in the first instance mantras for bandhna, that is protecting himself against any spells of witches who might try to interfere with and spoil the ceremony of expulsion of the evil spirit. He throws a few rice grains in all the directions and starts his prayer addressed to a horde of gods and godlings seeking their favour in his attempt to overpower the evil spirit which has inflicted sickness. The prayer is called Sumiran which is like this:

“Sumiran Karu Guru, Sumiran Karu Dev;
Aj Uttar Dakhin ke, Sumiran Karu Dev;
Sumiran Karu Guru, Sumiran Karu Dev;
Aj Poorab Pachhim ke, Sumiran Karu Dev”.

The prayer goes ad infinitum repeating the names of gods like Gaon Deoti, Bara, Dharha, Khokho Dharha, Bucha Dharha, Masan Sadhak, Baghaut and a number of other godlings residing in streams, rivers, rivulets, ponds, falls, hills, trees and forests, etc. While the Sumiran goes on, he plays the Jhunki with his left hand and rubs the rice in the winnowing fan with the right hand. When he is tired of playing the Jhunki with the same hand, he changes the hands and now he moves the rice with his left hand. Then he begins the adjuration, full of synonymous repetitions addressing to the evil spirit which has caused the sickness. He begins each stanza with a high pitch of apostrophe, sounding somewhat like an angry threat from which he again relapses into a plaintive and monotonous chant. In between he gives severe and violent
jerks to his body. With his incantations and bodily movements which form a part of his sorcery he intends to compel the evil spirit to reveal itself. It is expected to come this moment, a little before midnight or a little after mid-night. Necessary offerings for propitiation of the spirit have already been ordered to be kept ready. The Mati continues to reproach the spirit that it has entered the house by fraud and deceit it mid-night. Then he tries to force it by appealing to its tenderest feelings saying, "The day is dawning, come, it is time to go home". Then he winds up by inviting it to take all these gifts, rice beer and other things kept ready. When these adjurations, coaxing and appeals go on, the patient by chance feels sleepy and seems to be feeling better from his previous restless condition, which fact creates some confidence among the members of the house-hold and also those who are present on the occasion. They also think that the spirit is now prepared to reveal itself and accept the offerings and quit the place. It is further testified by making the fowl, pig or goat kept ready for the sacrifice eat some of the rice from the winnowing fan, because it is the spirit which is said to accept the offering when the rice is eaten by the sacrificial animal. Now he will sweep the spirit out with a broom or gaudy feathers of the peacock’s tail.

At about 4 a.m. in the morning, the Mati intensely examines the flame of the lamp which is already burning before him to make sure that the spirit has come there. If the flame happens to rise straight without flickering, he would with a knowing look say, ‘So, here you are’. He takes a rag and twists into a wick and soaks it in oil. He touches the wick to the flame of the earthen lamp and when it is lighted, he puts it into a singhi (an iron tube closed at one end) which is at once closed with an iron stopper. It is believed that the spirit passes into the flame of the wick and is thus imprisoned inside the singhi. Some mud is also plastered to make escape of the spirit impossible from the singhi. Another process of
imprisonment of the spirit as adopted by some is not so ingenious as that described above. In this process, a *Mati* would take a green sal leaf and place some rice grains on it from the winnowing fan and fold it believing that the spirit has been arrested therein.

He again addresses the spirit, "Come now, take these gifts under thy arms and on thy head, for in this house there is nothing else for thee". After these words, he leaves the house with the *singhi* in one hand leading the spirit out and some rice in the other which he scatters in every direction while proceeding towards outskirts of the village where it is buried in the ground. If the patient by this time feels fully cured, the sacrificial animals are also taken there and killed. Meat is roasted and eaten with other offerings of rice, rice beer etc. by those who are present at the outskirts. They all return to the village fully satisfied and entertaining no apprehension from that particular spirit.

As regards medical practices, the attitude of the Asur may be summed up as being, as according to their lights, practical treatment combined with superstition, resulting in sometimes in quite a sensible attitude and sometimes in absurd attempts to gain victory over the enemy. Knowledge of their medicines will, within certain limits, show their knowledge of nature and how they use this knowledge. The bulk of the Asur pharmacology is indigenous. The ingredients come mostly from the forests of the Netarhat plateau. The Asur seem to have watched the common lizard or the mongoose using some herbs for the sting of the scorpions and for snake-bite. During such encounters, lizards and mongooses, it is said, have been seen to eat certain plants or the bark of certain trees. This can also be seen from the following legend which is still heard among the Asur:

'Once upon a time a *ganda garud* (the adjutant bird of India) was flying over an Asur settlement and dropped the snake it was carrying. It
fell before an old Asur woman and bit her. There was a great consterna-
tion in the whole camp and the Asur people said, “Where shall we now
find a remedy?” In the camp there was a tamed mongoose. When it
saw the snake it jumped on it and killed it. In the fight the snake bit
also the mongoose. Then this ran about, stopped at a certain herb and
sniffed at it and was cured. Then the Asur also made the old woman
sniff at the same herb and she too got cured. Finally the mongoose bit
the snake into seven pieces and ate the central piece in which snake
poison is supposed to be most active11.

Rev. P. Bodding is reported to have heard a story of a
couple of men watching an old hanuman monkey treating and
curing a couple of young monkeys bitten by a cobra. ‘The
old monkey was acting like a regular doctor, feeling the hands
i.e. the pulse of the patient. Having in this way ascertained
what the matter was, he had bitten off the bark of a certain
tree, chewed it and spitting it into their mouths he made eat
this whilst he also applied some of the same stuff on the spot
bitten. The young monkeys recovered very quickly, whilst
before treatment they had been very low’19. Many such stories
may be heard concerning an antidote against poison and other
diseases. Thutha Asur of Sakhuapani narrated to me one such
story about his personal experience of the treatment resorted
to by monkeys in the case of a sick member of the group.

HE SAID, “Once I was going to village Kotia. On the way I saw a
group of about fifty monkeys sitting under the shade of a tree, I thought
they were holding a ‘meeting’. (Thutha is a bit enlightened among the
Asur and due to his contacts with Government officials he used the word
‘meeting’). But it was not that. I saw one monkey lying at some distance
from the group. I felt interested in them and waited to see what happen-
ed next. To my surprise, one old monkey plucked some leaves of the tree
and kept a bundle near the monkey who appeared to be sick. The old
monkey took one of the leaves and swept with it the ailing monkey from
head to feet. Then he returned to the group throwing the leaf away.
Another monkey from the group did the same thing with a new leaf and
it was followed by four others. After that two of them went near and
lifted the sick monkey and brought him to the group. He appeared to
be better.”

On an enquiry about the kind of leaves Thutha replied
that he had unfortunately not that inquisitiveness to examine
the leaves and discover their medicinal properties.
The remedies resorted to in various diseases are quite startling. In female barrenness the stuffs used is the dried umbilical cord. Some midwives will secure a bit of this, dry it up and keep it to be able to give it to barren women. To cause the mother’s milk to dry up, a little milk is buried in a plough-furrow. For a suppurating breast earth that is heaped in front of a plough at the time of ploughing is applied with water. To sum up, it may be said that of the origin of the large number of medicines practically nothing is known, but it can be supposed that what has been the case with others has also happened with the Asur. The Asur have hit upon something in some way or another and thought it efficacious; they have then tried the same for complaints other than those it was originally used for, and have, in this way, been guided by experience according to their lights. It may not be surprising to note that people like the Asur must have left with them more of the primitive instinct than others. To mention a concrete example, the Asur are very fond of eating wide varieties of the mushrooms. As is well known, some of the poisonous mushrooms may look very similar to certain edible ones. Elsewhere mistakes are sometimes heard of; among the Asur they are very seldom indeed. But as they have medicines to be used in such cases, they must be happening.

So far as diagnosis of the disease is concerned, the Asur face a great difficulty, particularly when they are confronted with anything different from the common diseases of everyday occurrence. Most of the diseases are symptomatic. The name is generally taken from some easily recognised, and striking symptom observed. But as several diseases have symptoms in common, the same is used for different diseases. On the other hand, some diseases will show different symptoms at their different stages of development. The same disease may, therefore, be known by several names. A few examples will make the position clear. Take tuberculosis of the lungs. In
the advanced stage it is called *Dhok* meaning bronchitis. After some time it is declared as *Raj Rog*. A disease like cholera is called *Hava Duk*—meaning air affliction. Leprosy is called *Maran Rog*, the great disease.

Malaria in its prevalence was far ahead of all other diseases but is now controlled. Next come skin diseases such as scabies, eczema, ringworm etc. and then bowel complaints. Dysentery and diarrhoea are more common than in any other place and sometimes cause mortality during the hot and rainy seasons. Bad drinking water is the principal cause of these diseases. A contributory cause is the large extent to which the Asur feed on the jungle fruits and coarse grains, such as *gondli*, and it is for this reason that the mortality from bowel diseases is the highest in and after the years of scarcity. In such years, *gondli* which ripens in August and is eaten unmixed with rice produces diseases in constitutions already enfeebled by a sparse diet of jungle fruits and roots. Eye diseases are very frequent. Night blindness among the Asur is reported to be assuming a serious proportion which is also due to lack of vitamins in their scantly diet. Among the epidemics the Asur recognise four viz. cholera, small-pox, measles and children-pox. Children's disease locally called *Rangbad* has become very common in this area for sometime past. It is stated that this disease was imported from the tea gardens in Assam and Bhutan. The mortality rate due to *Rangbad* is almost cent per cent.

It might also be mentioned that the Asur use several kinds of amulets worn in a string round the neck, the waist or on the elbow. The most frequently used form is a small hollow receptacle with medicines inside it. Another form is a dysentery stone which is believed to be a charm against the disease. A third form is a bit of root or a bark tied up with hair (of bear) and kept on the body somewhere. These amulets are intended to keep away disease such as bronchitis, cough, etc. They are very commonly used and often found
Treatment of illness is a focal point for the Asur religion and ceremonies, as such they resisted in the beginning to visit health centres and Government dispensaries. Actually the Asur are a practical people in this respect and the common pattern is to try divination by a witch-finder. Then they try medical treatment in a medical or health centre, if divination does not work. If the doctor does not effect a satisfactory cure, then they try again with the witch-finder. However, medical treatment by doctors is getting very popular now-a-days. Here the doctor examines a patient at the Health Sub-Centre at Jobhipat.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
The Asur need not come necessarily to a medical centre for treatment. The Vaidya appointed under a welfare scheme attends to them in their villages periodically riding on a pony which is provided by Government. Here he treats an Asur at Sahuapani.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
Simple operations are also made at the Health Sub-Centre at Jobhipat which has been opened under the multipurpose development programme for the tribals. It is the first experience of the Asur to get themselves cured with the modern technique of surgery.

(Photo: Zephyr Studio, Ranchi)
tied by the Asur mothers on some part of the body of their children.

What has been said above pertains to human beings. Similar is the practice among the Asur for cattle diseases. Cattle diseases are prevalent in the Netarhat plateau and epidemics of rinderpest, hacmonhagic and septicaemia are also not too frequent. The Asur are extremely apathetic to taking any effective measures against the disease. They regard such calamities which they cannot account for as due to the malignant spirits of one or the village spirits and try to appease them by sacrifice. Only in August, 1960, there was an epidemic of Khurha (foot and mouth disease) in village Kujam which was not reported by the village people to the Block Development Authorities. The epidemic was claimed to have been brought under control by a ceremonial expulsion of Rogo Bonga, the spirit who caused the epidemic which has already been described in the earlier chapter.

The Asur, isolated though they are, could not be neglected in a Welfare State. Efforts have been made by the local Government to extend health services to the Asur in these inhospitable areas of Ranchi district. Now they have made a beginning in not relying much on their amulets or medicines of doubtful value. At present there are two Government dispensaries one at Netarhat and the other at Bishunpur. R.C. Mission Station at Dumarpat in the plateau also provides medical aid to the tribals including the Asur. Under the Multi-purpose Development Programme, a health sub-centre has also been started at village Jobhipat which is visited by a doctor twice in a week with his medical van. As it happens every where in the tribal areas, the Asur did not show interest in the beginning in the allopathic medicines at this sub-centre. But now this treatment is getting very popular.

Under the welfare scheme for the Scheduled Tribes, the Government of Bihar also opened a medical centre at village
Sakhuapani which is in charge of a *Vaidya* who administers Ayurvedic medicines to the Asur for their various bodily ailments. Here the *Vaidya* is also given a pony by the Government as a conveyance when he visits the ailing persons in the inaccessible areas of this plateau. The Asur have not that much hesitation to accept the Ayurvedic medicines from the *Vaidya* as they exhibit in the case of allopathic ones. Malaria has been satisfactorily controlled. The Medical and Public Health Programme of the Multi-Purpose Project has been appreciated by the Asur who are gradually becoming medicine-minded.

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CHAPTER 12

FUTURE OF THE PEOPLE

KALOO Mahto uttered some sensible words even though he was deadly drunk when the Asur were engaged in worship at the Sacred Grove on the occasion of the Sarhul Festival. He said, "We, the Asur are still living the life of a mongrel, while our brethren elsewhere have become 'men'. God knows when we may have a chance to progress". This realisation about their backwardness seems to be a happy augury that the tribe may shake off all its sluggishness and strive to improve its lot. This realisation has dawned upon them because of culture contacts with other groups of people as well as social workers and administrators who go to them for the purpose of ameliorating their condition.

Now the question would arise as to how far the Asur would be able to march towards progress. What would be the outcome of this progress? Would it end in detribalisation of the Asur? Or would the progress enable them to preserve their much prized tribal traits, namely honesty, truthfulness, ability for hard work and a care-free life. The Asur is not the only tribe which is facing these questions. A number of tribal groups have already grown out of this stage of primitiveness and advanced towards progress which has resulted in the adoption of a different way of life. Anthropologists and sociologists have not been silent all these years in guiding the destinies of the tribal societies in the country. Before I begin to predict the outcome of the progress that may be achieved in the development of this tribe I would once again revert to the geographical setting of the Asur, because it is necessary to understand the course of the development.
The Asur find their place in one of the three zones demarcated by B.S. Guha. "The Central Zone which is separated from the North Eastern Zone by the Gangetic plains comprising the Central mountain barrier that divides the Northern from Peninsular India is the area inhabited by 'the tribes which are of a higher stage of culture, because of contacts with the non-tribal people living there'\textsuperscript{11}. This may be true in respect of other tribes, but it may not be so, so far as the Asur are concerned. Whatever may be their past achievements and their remarkable cultural background, the Asur though living in the Central Zone do not lend support to the above observation. This is obvious from the simple statement of Kaloo Mahto mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. The Asur have had the least contact with the non-tribal people unlike their neighbours, the Oraon, the Munda and the Kharia due to the inaccessible habitats of the former. Of course, in recent years the Netarhat plateau has been developed fairly well with the improvement of communications. Naturally the Asur are being affected in their beliefs and practices due to infiltration of the non-tribals.

Like the other tribes living in the Central Zone, the youth's dormitory is still a living institution among the Asur and it is the chief characteristic feature of their social life. This institution, as we have seen, organises and controls the entire youth of the village and helps develop them as fully trained members of the tribe. This important feature of the social life places the Asur in distinct contrast with their non-tribal neighbours who believe in different values of life.

What does Kaloo Mahto mean by saying that members of other tribal group have become 'men', while they still remain like dogs? He probably means that the members of the other groups have been educated and some of them occupy places of honour in life. They are also improving economically, because they get more food to eat now-a-days. They have started
putting on good clothes and have a variety of articles and utensils in their houses. They do not fall an easy prey to superstitious beliefs which still make the life of the Asur miserable. In short Kaloo Mahto feels that the Asur should be educated so that they may not be exploited by money-lenders, their lands should be made to produce more food crops so that they may get at least one square meal a day and they should have public health and medical facilities so that they may not have recourse to divination for the cure of their diseases and ailments. The problems of the Asur have been presented very well. Its solution may not be so easy. Simply by starting a few schools, or making the Asur to adopt improved methods of agriculture or opening a few dispensaries or health centres, the problem will not be solved. This can be done and is being done already, but what would be the effect of all these activities upon the Asur? Would they really become ‘men’ or something else? This is the vital question which cannot be answered easily.

There are no social workers in the Netarhat plateau, except two or three teachers who have been employed by the Adimjati Seva Mandal. Hence the whole burden of the development programme and of creating of consciousness among the Asur for a better life rests with the Government servants who are in charge of this programme. The future of the Asur, therefore, depends, to a large extent, upon the administration of the area in which they live. The tribe, unfortunately, is so small that it cannot be thought of for considering the area in which it lives as a unit for administrative purpose. So far as administration is concerned, the problems of the Asur cannot be viewed separately from the other tribes among whom they live.

We are facing today the most difficult problem of finding out the best way of administering the tribal population in India. The Policy of ‘Leave Them Alone’ was discarded long ago. We do not want to preserve the tribesmen as
museum specimens, because 'separation and isolation are dangerous theories and strike at the root of national solidarity' as observed by the late A.V. Thakkar. In contrast to this policy is a second one of assimilation or detribalisation. It is simple and easy but it has serious disadvantages. 'It tends to make the tribesman ashamed of his own culture and religion. It breaks up the tribal society and leads to a loss of tribal virtues and a rapid acquisition of the vices of civilisation. Between these two extremes, there is a middle path that has been found out by the Prime Minister of India. His policy may be summarised as one which approaches the historical development in a spirit of affection and identification that eliminates any possibility of superiority.' The historical development as envisaged by the Prime Minister is, however, difficult to be achieved. It cannot take place simply by single-handed efforts of the administration and social workers. This may be possible only when the tribals come into their own. What I mean by the historical development of the tribals is not simply that they should be educated, or they should have enough food to sustain their life, or they should be given medical facilities. All this is to be done and that too without delay, because the tribals cannot wait indefinitely as they have waited for more than a long time for the last so many years. So the development programme has to be carried out expeditiously. But at the same time, the administrators have to be careful to preserve the beautiful traits in the tribal life by which the Prime Minister and all others are so greatly attracted. Their moral virtues, self-reliance, courage, artistic gifts and cheerfulness are not to be lost sight of in a hurry for their development. On the contrary, they are to be preserved and allowed to grow in a natural way. This is the most difficult task.

This difficult task can be easy if it is tackled in a spirit of affection and identification that eliminates any possibility of superiority. It is suggested that the administrators should not approach the tribals in European costumes. This type of dress
has a terrifying effect upon the tribals as it was associated with the oppressors. Of course, now-a-days the tribals and even the Asur are not afraid at the sight of European dress. They are equally suspicious of the non-tribals or the outsiders in whatever dress they come to them. A Christian missionary in his priestly robe is always a welcome guest, while a non-tribal even in a simple dress of kurta and pyjama is looked upon with suspicion. The missionary has been able to identify himself with the tribals and as such he is respected even though he dons big robe, while a non-tribal does not get a welcome even though he puts on a simple dress. Hence, not much importance should be attached to the dress which an administrator or a social worker puts on. It is the spirit of identification that counts more than the dress alone.

The administrator has to face an odd job every now and then. He is supposed to see that the beautiful tribal traits like truthfulness, honesty and others are preserved and at the same time to acquit himself creditably with the task of development which is bound by plans, estimates and physical targets. For preservation of these traits, he should be allowed time to identify himself with the tribals. This fact is always ignored. He finds it much more convenient to devote himself to the achievement of the physical targets. This largely determines his future prospects in Government service. In the circumstances, he has to choose between the two, namely, to avail himself of the requisite time or to apply himself to the achievement of the physical targets. When a Government servant tries to explain the short-fall in the physical targets, a slur is flung at him by his superior officer saying, "Father Dehon got a beautiful church constructed in Mahuaudand when there were no roads, no bricks, no cement, no mason, why can’t you do it?" The superior officer conveniently forgets that Father Dehon had no plans and estimates and time limit for construction of the church. It is true the problem of the tribals can no longer wait for solution. But the time factor at the same time cannot
be ignored. With the advancement of science and technology you can replace a brooding hen by an incubator for hatching eggs, but you cannot reduce the period of three weeks for chickens to come out from the same. Hence for identification a worker needs time. Say for example, it takes quite a lot of time to convince the tribals that epidemics among the cattle as well as among human beings can be stopped by administration of medicines and preventive measures rather than magic as is employed by the Asur or by divination which is resorted to by almost all the tribes. Hence the time factor should be viewed in proper perspective.

Identification on the part of the administrator also becomes difficult as he has to approach the tribals with a mission which is not liked by them. Because upon the administrator also falls the responsibility for enforcement of laws and regulations which come in direct conflict with the tribal way of life. Living as they mostly do in forests, subsisting on its produce and the spoils of the chase, Forest Regulations, Excise and Game Laws have brought in restrictions and prohibitions to which they were not accustomed, and some of which were even against their customs. For instance, 'the Forest Laws have taken away the right of disposal of unclassed state forests which are no longer considered as common property of the tribe, and such methods of cultivation as Jhuming or Bewar are disallowed in most parts of India. The Excise and Game Laws in operation do not permit them to distil liquor in their houses necessary for household consumption and religious offerings or to kill game for sacrificial purposes during the close season... The customs and religious rites of primitive races are very closely integrated and deeply rooted in certain beliefs such as Soul-Matter or the supernatural powers of the Mana, which cannot be uprooted without disturbing the whole foundation of their life. Even such practices as head hunting are not merely cruel savage rites, but are in reality fertility cults and intimately associated with their agriculture. These are also
the media through which manly virility and physical prowess were encouraged and as shown by Mills, not more than two or three persons are thus annually killed in any village in the Naga hills. Buffalo hunting as suggested by the missionaries is no substitute, as buffalo heads do not possess the Soul-Matter. Even in such personal affairs of marriage, a Bhil or a Gond does not find himself free to do so according to his tribal custom of "marriage by capture", for then he is liable to be punished for abduction. The above Laws and Regulations have been framed and enforced in pursuance of the national policy. They require to be modified to suit the needs of the tribals, but the chances of such modification are few.

This is all about the policy of the national Government which is not to the liking of the tribals. But what about the welfare measures? The obvious thing would be that the administrator approaching the tribals with a programme for opening of schools, dispensaries, wells, roads etc., should be welcomed by them. But the fact is otherwise. A number of tribal students come to me and they seem to curse the Government even though they get a post-matric scholarship of Rs. 480 each per year. The Asur curse the administrators even though they get houses at an estimated cost of Rs. 932 each under the Rural Housing Programme. The tribals feel disgusted at the Government because wells that were dug for them have dried up. A tribal contractor fails to understand why he is being harassed even though he has constructed the best culvert or causeway which he was asked to do. A tribal agriculturist gets a loan of paddy from a Government grainola when he is actually starving. He should have been thankful to the Government that he got timely help in kind to tide over the starvation period. He too curses the Government instead of feeling obliged. All such instances make the task of the administrator difficult for his identification with the tribals. The representative of the Government at the village level who is looked upon as a symbol of the Government is not
always above board. Even if he is honest and sincere, he proves too incapable to rooting out the suspicion of the tribals. Though the tribals realise that big attempts are being made by the Government for their well-being, still they hesitate to place their confidence in the Government.

Outsiders with whom the Asur come in frequent contacts are mostly Government employees. Next come money-lenders and small traders, and now-a-days men employed by forest contractors who come to the plateau for cutting forests. All these contacts have a silent effect upon the traditional way of life of the Asur. The process of culture change has been accelerated with these contacts. Change can come about from within a society or from outside. The most important change came as an internal factor which resulted in alteration in the subsistent economy when Dalton threatened the Asur to stop iron-smelting. With the stoppage of iron-smelting the Asur devoted much more time to plough cultivation gradually receding from that wasteful method of shifting cultivation. It was not difficult for them to switch over to this occupation, because they could easily learn the art of cultivation from their neighbours, the Oraon and the Munda. Contacts with these neighbours have also left visible effects upon their religious beliefs and practices which have already been described in the earlier chapters. This borrowing of culture has resulted in the assimilation of the behaviour pattern and the inner values of the new culture. But this cannot seem to be true with regard to contacts with the non-tribals. A subtle change no doubt is taking place on account of contacts with the non-tribals resulting in change in the values of life, as for example, in the manner of clothes worn and use of household articles hitherto unknown among the Asur. Though this change was subtle and gradual so far, it has been greatly accelerated with the opening up of the area. This fact has now made them realise their backwardness as it provided them an opportunity to compare their life with that of others who seemed advanced in their view,
Now the question is what would be the outcome of this contact with the outsiders. Would it result in peaceful and willing borrowing or in conflict and upsetting the tribal life of the Asur. Isolation of the Asur is out of the question as the area has been opened up. Thakkar had rightly said, “Safety lies in union and not in isolation”. As isolation is not the ultimate solution of the aboriginal problem, so also is indiscriminate or unregulated contact. Hence Dr. Guha thinks that in devising a suitable machinery for the administration of the tribal population, both these factors will have to be taken into consideration. But when we come to actual practice, it becomes difficult how to regulate the indiscriminate contact. If the personnel for the machinery is available from amongst the tribals themselves, the problem would be somewhat easy, because it would be easier to win confidence of the tribal people. But unfortunately, it is the experience of everybody that in the majority of cases suitable candidates with requisite qualifications from amongst the tribals are not available. Hence for a number of years the machinery for the administration of the tribal areas will have to be provided with the personnel drawn from the non-tribals. And when the development programme for the tribal areas has to be executed with speed quite a big number of the non-tribals like contractors, artisans and others will be required to work there. In the circumstances, it would not be so easy to regulate the contact. Hence if isolation is out of place, so also is regulation of indiscriminate contact impracticable. The net result of the culture contacts with the non-tribals will be that the tribals will be swept off their feet and ultimately they will have to adapt and adjust with the outside world. The only thing that will be required is to help them in this adjustment. This can be done by educating them and improving their economic condition. But in the face of aggressive culture contacts, detribalisation of the Asur and his neighbours will not be stopped whether we like it or not.
Will this detribalisation of the Asur result in a decline of their population? What would be the Asur like after detribalisation? As regards the decline of population, it would be interesting to quote Guha in his important paper on "The Indian Aborigines and their Administration". He has observed that 'wherever the primitive man first came in contact, in the New World, Oceania, Africa or South-East Asia, he suffered terribly at the hands of European immigrants and colonists, before whose superior arms and skill, his poison darts and boomerangs stood no chance, with the result that he was conquered and almost exterminated. To give only the most striking examples, the once proud and warlike Red Indian tribes of the U.S.A. living in Tipis and hunting the bison on their horse-back, were reduced to one quarter of their total estimated strength. In Australia the fate of the aboriginal people was even worse, they were virtually wiped out of the southern temperate regions and were confined to a few strangling bands in the central waste lands and deserts. None, however, suffered so much as the native Tasmanians who from a population of 7,000 were reduced to 120 in 1764, and in 1876 the last representative of this ancient race passed away from this world leaving a sad commentary on the civilised man's solicitude for the aboriginal. Even when attempts were made to protect and help the tribal people, the trend of depopulation continued. In America measures for stopping exploitation were not very successful and between 1887 and 1923 the Red Indians were swindled out of ninety one million acres of land and, with the exception of the Navahos, showed a rapid decline in population, for which the chief causes were exploitation, lack of adaptability and loss of a will to live. Similarly in Australia, Malenesia and Polynesia official commissions and scientific investigations revealed that the very high rate of decline in the population was due to economic exploitation leading to the disappearance of original arts and crafts, psychological apathy and unwillingness to shoulder the burdens of life.'
Of these, the latter was undoubtedly the most important and was the outcome of the disintegration of tribal culture and authority. When contact with a higher culture takes the form of a clash, and tribal patterns and values are too quickly replaced by others of a different order, primitive man is unable to adapt himself to changing conditions and an upsetting of the harmony and balance of his life takes place. Guha further points out that 'this disquieting feature reveals itself in a significant change in the birth-rate with high masculinity. It was found among all the aboriginal tribes in Oceania and the U.S.A. that this was the danger signal marking the onset of a decline in population'.

But it is my firm belief that causes for the decline in population observed in countries mentioned above may not be applicable to India where the process of racial assimilation and culture-fusion had taken place thousands of years ago and the same is still taking place even to day. The conditions are quite different in India. In the United States of America, Australia, Africa, Oceania or South-East Asia, the aboriginals suffered at the hands of European immigrants and colonists. These European immigrants claiming to belong to a superior race of mankind did not allow themselves to be assimilated with the semi-human creatures like the aborigines. That was not the case with the Aryan immigrants in India. The Aryan migrations are supposed to have taken place about a thousand years after the Indus Valley Civilisation and yet it is possible that there was no considerable gap and that tribes and peoples came to India from the north-west from time to time as they did in later ages and became absorbed in the then existing population. The Indian subcontinent has five principal types of racial elements which may be distinguished according to physical appearances, namely 'the Negritis, the Veddis, the Mediterraneans, the Indids and the Mongoloids'. These various groups have mixed with one another resulting in a large harmonised Indian population
with elements from several, if not all the above mentioned races.

We might say that the first cultural synthesis and fusion took place between the incoming Aryans and the population including the Asuras. Out of this synthesis and fusion grew the Indian races and the basic Indian culture which possesses the distinctive elements of both. In the ages that followed, there also came many other races, Iranians, Greeks, Parthians, Bactrians, Scythians, Huns, Turks, early Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. They came, made a difference and were absorbed. India is, according to Dodwell, infinitely absorbant like the Ocean. It is odd to think of India with her caste system and exclusiveness having this astonishing inclusive capacity to absorb foreign races and cultures. Perhaps it was due to this that she retained her vitality and rejuvenated herself from time to time. I would like to quote from the Introductory Essay by Risely in his famous book 'The Tribes and Castes of Bengal'. 'On a stone panel forming part one of the grandest Buddhist monuments in India at Sanchi, a carving in low relief depicts a strange religious ceremony. Under trees with the conventional foliage and fruits, three women attired in tight clothing without skirts, kneel in prayer before a small shrine. In the background the leader of a procession of monkeys bears in both hands a bowl of liquid and stoops to offer it at a shrine. In the background four stately figures—two men and two women—of tall stature and regular features clothed in flowing robes and wearing most elaborate turbans, look on with folded hands and apparent approval at this remarkable act of worship. It is not simply the panel depicting some pious legend of the life of the Buddha. A larger interest however, attaches to the scene, if it is regarded as the sculptured expression of the race sentiment of the Aryans towards the Dravidians which runs through the whole course of the Indian tradition and survives in scarcely abated
strength at the present days\textsuperscript{10}. In view of this wonderful assimilative power of the Indian people it will be wrong to think that detribalisation or assimilation of the Asur or any other tribe would result in a decline of its population.

Another question would arise namely, what would be the position of the detribalised groups in the Indian society? Detribalisation of a tribe can be called a type of progress by a break with the past, not by evolution from it. Verrier Elwin thinks that ‘it creates that inferiority complex which is a political as well as a social danger. Although it favours a few gifted individuals, who are able to assimilate the new way of life, it generally deprives the mass of the people of their standards and values without putting anything comparable in their place. All over the world it has been noted that break-up of tribal society leads to a loss of the tribal virtues and a rapid acquisition of the vices of civilisation......... At the same time, throughout tribal India there is a tendency towards the transformation of tribes into castes, and these ‘castes’ are usually at the bottom of the social scale\textsuperscript{11}. We may get a convincing reply to the question if we study in the words of Sir Alfred Lyall, ‘the gradual Bhahmanising of the aboriginal, non-Aryan or casteless tribes.’ This Brahmanising movement has manifested itself in four distinct processes viz: (1) ‘The leading men of an aboriginal tribe, having somehow got on in the world and become independent landed proprietors, manage to enrol themselves in one of the leading castes. They usually set up as Rajputs; their first step being to employ a Brahman priest who invents for them a mythical ancestor, supplies them with a family miracle connected with the locality where their tribe is settled, and makes the sensational discovery that they belong to some hitherto unheard-of clan of the great Rajput community. All stages of the process, family miracle and all, can be illustrated by actual instances taken from the leading families in Chotanagpur. (2) A number of aborigines embrace the tenets of a Hindu religious sect, losing thereby their tribal
name and becoming Vaishnabs, Ramayats, and the like. This is also regarded as a case of true absorption. (3) A whole tribe of aborigines, or a large section of a tribe enrols itself in the ranks of Hinduism under the style of a new caste which, though claiming origin from a remote antiquity, is readily distinguishable by its name from any of the standard and recognised castes. Thus the great majority of the Koch and inhabitants of Rungpore now invariably describe themselves as Rajbansis or Bhanga Kshatriyas, a designation which enables them to represent themselves as an outlying branch of the Kshatriyas who fled to North Eastern Bengal in order to escape wrath of Raja Dasarath, father of Rama. They keep Brahmans, imitate the Brahmanical rituals in their marriage ceremony and have begun to adopt the Brahmanical system of gotras. (4) A whole tribe of aborigines, or a section of a tribe becomes gradually converted to Hinduism without, like the Rajbansis, abandoning their tribal designation. This is what is happening among the Bhumij of Western Bengal. This movement has been going on for many centuries and its working can probably be most readily observed in Chotanagpur. It will therefore, not be the whole truth to say that these ‘castes’ will invariably be destined to occupy the lowest rung in the social ladder. The remedy to prevent such eventualities may also be found in a movement for tribal revivalism which had taken place from time to time in the past. This tribal revivalism should not be looked upon as contrary to assimilation. Beautiful traits of the tribals are sure to revive their pride in themselves. Their varied and rich culture is bound to create self-respect among them, and above all, their virtues of truth and honesty which are held in high esteem should enable them to shake off their inferiority complex. In fact these virtues will be the foundation of the tribal revivalism. ‘This revivalism will do the greatest service to India if it is able to bring the above peculiar tribal treasures into common life of our countryman.’ But this revivalism
cannot be confined to the tribals themselves. It will have its impact upon the Indian people as a whole; as such it is also likely to hasten the process of detribalisation resulting in assimilation in the wider orbit of the Indian social life as happened with Buddhism.

Another suggestion for solution of the tribals problem is that we should not try to go too fast. The tribal people should be allowed sufficient time to adjust themselves to the new world. But as observed earlier, the tribal people cannot wait longer, because their hungry stomach demands food immediately. If they cannot wait for their bare essential requirements, how can they ask for the breathing time? They have to march forward rapidly cooperating with the Government in their efforts inspite of all the shortcomings of the latter. Lord Percy had rightly stated that 'it is a most difficult problem in the world as to exactly how far you can keep the aboriginal people in cold storage and also to lead them on towards absorption into the wider community around it'.

But the problem of the tribal India has to be solved once for all. Detribalisation will be the future of these people. By detribalisation I mean absorption of the tribal people in the wider community of the country. In this process the tribals require help. This can be rendered in a manner keeping in view the time factor in its proper perspective. The task of rendering such help will become easier if a worker takes interest in the daily life and culture of the tribals. This will ensure continued rapport between himself and the people. Participation by the worker in play, dance, music and rituals of the tribals will bring him very close to them. This participation is possible only when he approaches them in a spirit of humility and brotherliness. It will be admitted that the tribal people appreciate friendship and goodwill better than others. All this will be necessary in winning the confidence of the tribal people. Then comes the question of actual help for leading them to progress and absorption. All the innovations
and new ideas for improvement of the tribal life may be connected with something old. This will ensure continuity and the experiment will be safe. As far as possible work may be done through the indigenous institutions. Youth's dormitory, tribal Panchayats and village graingolas are some of the institutions still working among certain tribes. The youth's dormitory may be utilised as an adult literacy centre or social education centre and also for a number of other educational purposes. Tribal Panchayats will be helpful in eliciting public cooperation in the nation building works and village graingolas may be transformed into grain banks which may be useful in a programme for economic development. It is better to convince the people by showing actual results through greater use of demonstrations. Preaching or talking alone would not help carry conviction to these people. Audio-visual aids for the purpose are also important. But they should be correctly used, because generally the educative part becomes less important than the entertainment part. Magic lantern has decidedly an advantage over the movie films, because the former provides enough time for grasp of new things and new ideas by spectators like the tribals. Lastly, dealings with the tribal people must be straight-forward and honest. Dishonesty and corruption at any level will defeat the purpose. All good work done will be washed off by one single corrupt move. How much will the Indian community be indebted to the tribals who when fully absorbed in it would be able to retain their age-old traits like honesty, truthfulness, ability for hard work and care free life? And how happy shall I be when Kaloo Mahto will begin to feel that his society is on its march towards the goal of becoming 'men'?

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APPENDIX I.

ASUR POETRY

All the aboriginal tribes alike are passionately fond of dancing. Dancing is one of the few recreations in which the Asur indulge. A group of Asur boys and girls fully decked out for a festival makes a fine show. The costume of the girls is as fine as they can make it. Every ornament in the shape of beads necklace, silver collar, bracelet, armlet and anklet would seem to have been brought out on the festival. The long black hair is gathered up in a big coil in which are fastened all sorts of ornaments of brass and silver. The ears are distorted by huge earrings that pierce the lobs.

The Asur have a great variety of dances appropriate to special times and seasons, but one which may be suitable to any occasion seems to be favourite. The girls interlace their arms behind their backs, in rows of three or four abreast led by a drummer who goes in front beating a drum, they dance to his tune, advancing and retreating as he gives them the sign. The motion of dance is slow and graceful, the steps are in perfect time and the action wonderfully even and regular. This is particularly noticeable in some of the variations of the dance, representing the different seasons and the occasions.

When we hear the Asur boys and girls singing and dancing in the village Akhāra, we would feel that the tribe is not devoid of poetic instinct. The Asur clearly look to life in an intensely human way. They clearly see its joys and sorrows; they perceive them as such and clothe them in a profusion of songs. The Asur are keenly alive to the beauties of scenery as well as to the charm of flowers, colours and plays of light as can be seen from the following songs.
I

Pakri bilee tanna
Kudi lova bilee tanna,
Birid me to peron
Nava hov jhumari ene gavu.

Now, O, dear friend, Spring has come. Fruits of Pippal and Gullar trees have started ripening. Come, let us all dance in a group.

II

Dadi re dadi buru
Dadi buru hariar tanna,
Chote chote dahuda, bade bade sing,
Dadi buru hariar tanna.

The Dadi hill is completely green, there are various kinds of big trees and there are various kinds of small trees on it.

III

Sirma re simair baha
Latar se chavaiya rasa,
Latar se chavaiya rasa
Hona latar maina ting,
Nirjhar dal aa
Bhaiya nirjhar dal aa.

The Semar tree appears to have grown so high as to touch the sky and it is entirely covered with flowers. Underneath the Semar flowers are the flowers of Chavai and below them there is clear water (in a stream).

IV

Etan ode lukud kukud ra adai,
Ju to maiya niduva bera nela aguime.
Bhengraj ode lukud kukud ra adai,
Ju to maiya niduva bera mela aguime.

A mother asks her daughter, "Dear, which was the bird that chirped all the night round; go and find it out." The
daughter replied, “It was Bhengraj bird that chirped throughout the night; I have seen it.”

V

Etan ode ege ay,
Adha nida buru teng re,
Sahiya, adha nida buru teng re.
Kuhu ode ege ay re
Adha nida buru teng re,
Sahiya, adha nida buru tengre.

A girl says to her friend, “Which was the bird that sang on the mountain nearby at dead of night?” The friend replies, “It was a cuckoo that cooed on the mountain at dead of night.”

VI

Kachnara baha tanak ko
Buru injot tanna
Adha nida baha tana ko
Buru injot tanna.

A boy asks his friend, “When do the Kachnar trees flower so that the entire forest is brightened?” The friend replies, “The Kachnar trees flower during mid-night and so, the whole forest appears as if in flames.”

VII

Etan baha reseoo tadam bhala
Bhag jugni lakan lavak aa te dara me aa,
Bhala bhag jugni lakan lavak aa me aa.
Tilau vaha re se a ta adam bhala
Bhala jugni lakan lavak aa to dara me aa,
Bhala bhag jugni lakan lavak aa te dara me aa.

A group of girls addresses one of their friends who approaches them, “Dear friend, which flower do you wear in your braid of hair so that you are shining like a beautiful glow-worm in the dark rainy night?” The girl replies, “Friends, it is none other than Tilau flower which I wear in
my hair on account of which I appear shining like a glow-worm."

The fairy dream-land of first love with its counterpart, the poignant grief of a disappointed lover, sometimes due to pangs of poverty forms the subjects of these songs. A few specimens have been shown below:—

**VIII**

Tingri tang sireeng laeeng dhiya  
Latar bacent aaioom  
Na chi ko van jadi  
Latar bacent aaioom nachi ko van  
Aaioom ho o aioom laeeling  
Jodi kati eken laeeling  
Aaioom dadi la aa  
Jodi kati eken laeeling aaioom la aa.

A girl who is in love addresses to her lover from the top of a hill, "Oh dear, tell me, have you heard what I sang from here just now?". The boy friend answers, "Yes, my beloved, I did hear you, but sorry, I could not follow what did you mean."

**IX**

Ni aa hora re da aa kua,  
Hakim re sipahi ho, Hakim re sipahi.  
Ni aa hora re da aa kua,  
Raja re sipahi ho, Raja re sipahi.  
Nu ku me maina ting  
Nir jal da aa ho, nir jal da aa.

The girl says, "Oh, the warrior of the king may be coming this way; Oh, the warrior of the lord will be coming this way. Oh, brave man of the king, drink this water, please drink this very clear water."
Na ti eere dokra mai,
Na ti eere damri.
Ita lakan nuing mai,
Nir jal da aa,
Hai re nir jal da aa.

"O, beautiful girl, I have nothing to pay you, neither a penny nor a pice for your offer. How dare I drink so clear water offered by you?"

Ka laga a dokra sahia,
Ka lag aa damri,
Kahari re nui men nir jal da aa
Hai re sahiya, nir jal da aa.

"O, dear friend, I tell you, I am not after money. I crave only for a word of love from you. Hence you should not hesitate to drink the clear water."

Mandar ru ru titam hamsu na
Jivtam mandar teng re.
O ke do Raja dowar, O ke do Hakim dowar,
Jivtam mandar teng re.

"The youth by playing vigourously on the drum has started having pain in his palms. Still he is engrossed so much in playing upon it. Even if he is treated at the palace of a king or if he is treated at the house of the lord, he will not give up his love for playing upon the drum”.

Though the Asur poetry may appear worthless or crude to a superficial reader, but though it lays no claim to artistic perfection, it brightens the Asur’s life and is certainly not without its own intrinsic merits.
**APPENDIX II.**

**LIST OF COPPER OBJECTS FOUND IN THE DISTRICT OF RANCHI.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Description of the articles</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>How obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Vill: Bedwa</td>
<td>Found by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Bartoli</td>
<td>Presented by H.H. Sir Edward Gait</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>P.S. Bansia</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Bandna</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P.S. Ranchi</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Bartola</td>
<td>H.H. Sir Edward Gait</td>
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<td>P.S. Bansi</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Kandesa</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>P.S. Ranchi</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Kandesa</td>
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<td>P.S. Ranchi</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Dargoma</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>P.S. Khunti</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Copper bracelets</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Buruma</td>
<td>Excavated by Sir S.C. Roy</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Copper ear-ornaments</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Buruma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>S. No.</td>
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<td>Locality</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Copper toe-rings</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Fragments of copper ornaments</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Copper diba</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Ranchi</td>
<td>T.T. Act</td>
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<td>15.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Copper rings</td>
<td>Asura graves</td>
<td>Namkom</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Copper bells</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Buruna</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Copper ear-ornament</td>
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<td>Copper rings</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Copper ear-ornaments and objects</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Murud, P.S. Khunti</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Presentation Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Copper chains (in 6 pieces)</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Murud, P.S. Khunti</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Copper bracelets</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Kanthartoli</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Copper bracelets</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Gargaon</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Copper Vessels</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Behia, P.S. Ranchi</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Copper or bronze bracelets</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Khunititoli</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Copper or bronze earrings</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Khunititoli</td>
<td>Presented by Mr. S.C. Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>Ranchi District</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
<td>Copper Age</td>
<td>V. Bartola, P.S. Basia</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Copper axe-head</td>
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<td>Ranchi</td>
<td>Presented by E.C. Ansurge, I.C.S.</td>
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LIST OF LOCAL WORDS OCCURRING IN THE BOOK WITH THEIR EQUIVALENT MEANING.

Akhara ... Dancing Arena.
Agua ... A go-between.
Arkatia ... An emissary of the labour recruiting agents.
Asur-garh ... Fort of an Asur.
Asur-har ... Bones of Asur.
Asur-Vidya ... Science of Asur.
Atman ... The Self.
Ayas ... Iron.
Baghaut ... An evil spirit of a person killed by a tiger.
Baiga ... Priest, Diviner.
Ban ... A bunch of young sprouts of paddy without roots.
Bhut ... Ghost.
Bichi ... Haematites from coal measures.
Chai Bhitar ... A ceremony for inviting spirits of the dead in the house.
Chapua ... Bellows.
Chati ... A purification rite after child-birth.
Chaukidar ... A village watchman.
Chipni ... A plate.
Chordeva ... Name of an evil spirit.
Chorta Depot ... A secret depot.
Chuka ... An earthen bowl.
Chumaun ... One of the rites in a marriage ceremony.
Chunauti ... A metal box containing lime.
Chungi ... A kind of cigarette rolled in a sal leaf.
Churel ... An evil spirit usually of a woman who died in child-birth.
Daha ... Slash and burn method of cultivation.
Deonra ... A spirit doctor among the Munda and the Ho.
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<td>War between gods and demons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sangram</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dharmes</td>
<td>Supreme God of the Oraons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharti Mai</td>
<td>Mother Earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhumkuria</td>
<td>Youth's dormitory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dibri</td>
<td>A kerosene lamp without chimney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinda</td>
<td>A bachelor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubha</td>
<td>A cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fica</td>
<td>A kind of cigarette rolled in a sal leaf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gata</td>
<td>Haematites from laterite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghar-damad</td>
<td>Son-in-law staying permanently with his father-in-law's family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghara</td>
<td>A water pot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giri</td>
<td>Lump of iron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giti-ora</td>
<td>Youth's dormitory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonon</td>
<td>A child named after some relative among the Munda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonong</td>
<td>Bride-price.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotra</td>
<td>Clan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graingola</td>
<td>A grain store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulaichi</td>
<td>A kind of tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat</td>
<td>A weekly market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idi-Me</td>
<td>Cohabitation as husband and wife without performing a regular marriage ceremony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illi</td>
<td>Rice beer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jatra</td>
<td>A fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jirhool</td>
<td>A kind of flower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahani</td>
<td>A legend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kardhani</td>
<td>A plaited thread worn round the waist by youths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kata-abun</td>
<td>A foot washing ceremony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khar</td>
<td>A kind of grass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khurha</td>
<td>Foot and mouth disease among cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killi</td>
<td>Clan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumhar</td>
<td>A potter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurao</td>
<td>Shifting cultivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurta</td>
<td>A shirt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagna</td>
<td>A deer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ledra</td>
<td>A quilt made of worn-out pieces of clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohar</td>
<td>A blacksmith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lota</td>
<td>A jug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahadan</td>
<td>Great gift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahajan</td>
<td>A money lender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahua</td>
<td>A kind of tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mana</td>
<td>Soul-matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandoa</td>
<td>A lover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mati</td>
<td>An excorcist among the Oraons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayavin</td>
<td>Gifted with occult power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mora</td>
<td>A bundle made of paddy straw woven into ropes for preserving paddy seeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morung</td>
<td>A Naga youth's dormitory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parchunia</td>
<td>Hawking of liquor outside the licenced shops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paria</td>
<td>A long piece of cloth worn by women round the waist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palki</td>
<td>A palanquin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>A flat-topped upland on an elevation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagri</td>
<td>A turban.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipal</td>
<td>A kind of tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pooja</td>
<td>Worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pola</td>
<td>Magnitite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pundi</td>
<td>White people of enormous stature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pur</td>
<td>A town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyjama</td>
<td>Trousers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogo Bonga</td>
<td>An evil spirit causing epidemics among men and cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadan</td>
<td>Non-tribals particularly the Hindus living in Chotanagpur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Saki ... A child named after some relative among the Asur.
Sal ... A kind of tree (Shorea Robusta).
Sang chutauni ... Compensation for separation.
Sarpa yagna ... Snake sacrifice.
Sasan-diri ... Stone slabs kept over bones of the dead among the Munda.
Sing Bonga ... The Sun God.
Sirkar ... Government.
Sup ... A winnowing fan.
Supid ... A chignon-like knot of hair.
Tar-sakom ... A roll of palm leaf dyed red and set off with a tinsel or lac worn by tribal women in the lobe of an ear.
Tanr ... Upland.
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