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The following paper was read by the author :

SOME ACCOUNT *of a LEAF-WEARING TRIBE on the WESTERN COAST of INDIA.* By M. J. WALHOUSE, late Madras Civil Service.

SOUTH CANARA is the most northerly of the Madras Provinces on the western coast of the Peninsula, and lies nearly midway between Bombay and Cape Comorin. Probably nowhere in India will a greater variety of castes, classes, and nationalities be met with than along its seaboard; for trading vessels from the Persian Gulf, the Arabian, and even the African ports, as well as from all along the Indian coast, resort thither; and on the inland side a constant communication is kept up with Mysore, Coorg, and Malabar. One of the family of Dravidian tongues peculiar to Southern India is spoken only in South Canara, namely, the Tulu, now spoken by about 150,000 people, and really the popular tongue of the district, the ancient Hindoo name of which is Tuluva, but not being recognised officially or taught in schools, and being, moreover, hard pressed by the Canarese which surround its limited area, will probably die out. The Aliya Santāna law, or custom of inheritance on the female side, to the exclusion of sons, is also the recognised law of the district. Having been posted for several years at Mangalore, the head-quarters of the district, I often met with the people about to be described, the Korāgars, a remnant, now numbering but a few hundreds, of the aboriginal slave-castes, whose dis-

inctive peculiarity is that the women wear aprons or screens of woven twigs and green leaves over their buttocks. In old times both sexes were allowed to wear only these leafy aprons for clothing; but now the custom is confined to the women, and is an instance of how what was once a badge of degradation may become a cherished observance; for the leaf aprons are now useless, being worn *over* the clothes, and must indeed be inconvenient, and might doubtless be abandoned, but the usage is maintained by the women, who think that leaving it off would be unlucky. A number of Korägar women walking before one on a road present a quaint and peculiar appearance, with the leaf aprons covering all their hinder parts.

The people themselves are a very quiet and inoffensive race; small and slight, the men seldom exceeding five feet six inches; black-skinned, like most Indian aborigines, thick-lipped, noses broad and flat, and hair rough and bushy. Their principal occupation is basket-making, and they must labour for their masters. They live on the outskirts of villages, and may not dwell in houses of clay or mud, but in huts of leaves, called "Koppus." Like many of the wild tribes of India, they are distinguished by unswerving truthfulness. "The word of a Korägar" is proverbial, and is always at once accepted by even so tortuous and suspicious a people as the Hindoos, whose tendency is quite Cretan, and the other way. It were curious to speculate on the origin and continuance of this habit of truth-speaking in barbarous tribes; possibly an original instinct that may have become hereditary, or upheld by popular usage in peculiar circumstances, but too generally obscured and destroyed.* Numerous slave-castes, held and regarded by the upper classes as slaves, exist throughout India, not of course recognised by law—indeed, formally emancipated by an Act of Government in 1843—but still, though improved in condition, virtually slaves. Their origin and status in the complex Hindoo system are thus described.

After the four principal classes, who sprang from Brahma, came six Anuloma castes, which arose from the intercourse of Brahmans and Kshatryas with women of the classes below them respectively. The term Anuloma denotes straight and regular hair, which in India always characterises the Aryan stock. After these came six Pratiloma castes, originating in reverse order from Brahman and Kshatrya women by fathers of the inferior classes. The third amongst these was the Chandāla, the offspring of Shudra fathers by Brahman women. Each of

* See J. S. Mill's "Essays," page 51, "Savages are always liars. They have not the faintest notion of truth as a virtue." This must have been said in his haste.

these castes has its own distinctive appellation, and rigidly observed rules and status.

The Chandālas, or slaves, were again subdivided into fifteen classes, none of which might intermarry, a rule still strictly observed. The two last, and lowest of the fifteen classes, are the Kāpāta, or rag-wearing, and the Soppu, or leaf-wearing Korāgars. Such is the account given by Brahman chroniclers; but the probability is that these lowest slave-castes are the descendants of that primitive population which the Aryan invaders from the north found occupying the soil, and, after a struggle of ages, gradually dispossessed, driving some to the hills and jungles, and reducing others to the condition of slaves. No history records the contests, struggles, and revolutions that must have prevailed for unknown periods; only some faint echoes can be caught in popular traditions; and in laws, rules, and existing customs, the antiquary can see evidence of times when the ancestors of the half-wild subject classes of to-day were the masters of the land. The mountain-ranges and great jungle tracts of Southern India are inhabited by semi-savage tribes, who, there is good reason to believe, once held the fertile, open plains, and were the builders of those megalithic sepulchres which abound over the cultivated country. It is known that even up to the 15th century a primitive race, called Karumbar, formed an extensive and powerful federation in the south. That race has now very nearly vanished, a very scanty remnant only existing in the wildest recesses of some of the western mountain regions. All these races are regarded by their Hindoo masters with boundless contempt, and held unspeakably unclean. This feeling seems the result and witness of times when the despised races were powerful, and to be approached as lords by their now haughty masters, and was probably intensified by struggles and uprisings, and the memory of humiliations inflicted on the ultimately successful conquerors. Evidence for this may be inferred from many curious rights and privileges which the despised castes possess and tenaciously retain. On certain days they may enter temples which at other times they must not approach. There are several important ceremonial and social observances which they are always called to inaugurate or take some share in, and which, indeed, would be held incomplete and unlucky without them; and at particular seasons there is a festival much resembling the classic Saturnalia, in which, for the time, the relation of slaves and masters is inverted, and the former attack the latter with unstinted satire and abuse, and threaten to strike work unless confirmed in their privileges, and humbly solicited to return to labour.

Moreover, the contempt and loathing in which they are

ordinarily held are curiously tinged with superstitious fear, for they are believed to possess secret powers of magic and witchcraft, and influence with the old malignant deities of the soil, who can direct good or evil fortune. As an instance relating to the subjects of the present paper, if a Brahman mother's children die off when young, she calls a Korägar woman, gives her some oil, rice, and copper money, and places the surviving child in her arms; the out-caste woman, who may not at other times be touched, gives the child suck, puts on it her iron bracelets, and if a boy, names it Korägar, if a girl, Koräpülu; she then returns it to the mother: this is believed to give a new lease of life. Again, when a man is dangerously ill, or persistently unfortunate, he pours oil into an earthen vessel, worships it in the same way as the family god, looks at his face reflected in the oil, and puts into it a hair from his head and a nail-paring from his toe. The oil is then presented to the Korägars, and the hostile gods or stars are believed to be propitiated.

The power and eventual degradation of the Korägars are thus spoken of in an ancient local tradition. When Lokadiräya, whose date is fixed by Wilks about 1450 B.C., was King of Bhanvarshe, in North Canara (a place noted by Ptolemy), an invader, by name Habāshika, brought an army from above the Ghauts, consisting of all the present Chandāla or slave-castes, overwhelmed that part of the country, and marched southward to Mangalore, the present capital of the province. The invading host was scourged with smallpox, and greatly annoyed by* ants, so Habāshika moved on to Manjeshwar, a place of ancient repute, twelve miles to the south, subdued the local ruler, Angārawarma, son of Virawarma, and reigned there in conjunction with his nephew; but after twelve years, both died—one legend says through enchantments devised by Angārawarma; another, that a neighbouring ruler treacherously proposed a marriage between his sister and Habāshika, and on the bridegroom and his castemen attending for the nuptials, a wholesale massacre of them all was effected, after the manner of the massacre of the British chiefs by the Saxons on Salisbury plain. Angārawarma then returning, drove the invading army into the jungles, where they were reduced to such extremity that they consented to become slaves, and were apportioned amongst the Brahmins and original landholders: some were set to watch the crops and cattle, some to cultivate, others to various

* The neighbourhood of Mangalore is still very bushy, and the fierce, biting yellow ant (*Ecophylla smaragdina*) makes its nest amongst the leaves, and abounds to a most annoying extent, penetrating everywhere; one cannot brush against a tree or bush without the risk of getting some on one, and they bite like furies.

drudgeries, which are still allotted to the existing slave-castes, but the Korāgars, who had been raised by Habāshika to the highest posts under his government, were stripped and driven towards the sea-shore, there to be hanged, but, being ashamed of their naked condition, they gathered the leaves of the nicki bush (which grows abundantly on waste places) and made small coverings for themselves in front. On this their executioners took pity on them and let them go, but condemned them to be the lowest of the low, and to wear no other covering than leaves. This wild tradition no doubt covers some actual occurrences; whether the invader and his host were foreigners, or whether he was a Hindoo Spartacus or Wat Tyler, who roused the servile races against oppression, must be doubtful; but that in some way, at a remote period, a revolution happened, in which the present degraded classes attained the upper hand, seems very probable; and this would account for the contempt and loathing with which those classes are now regarded, as well as for the rights and privileges which it may have been found prudent to concede, and for the tincture of latent superstitious dread which they still inspire. The Korāgars, it will be remembered, are said to have occupied the highest posts under the revolutionary government; they are now the lowest of the slave divisions, and regarded with such intense loathing and hatred that up to quite recent times one section of them, called Andy, or Pot-Korāgars, continually wore a pot suspended from their necks, into which they were compelled to spit, being so utterly unclean as to be prohibited from even spitting on the highway; and to this day their women continue to show in their leafy aprons a memorial of the abject degradation to which their whole race was doomed—a degradation as deep as their traditional eminence, attested by the magical influence still attributed to them, had been high—a memorial, moreover, that is now a mere useless encumbrance, retained when it might be discarded.

It may be noted that, according to the traditional accounts, when the invading hosts under Habāshika were in their turn overthrown and subjected, they accepted slavery under certain conditions that preserved to them some shadow of right. Whilst it was declared that they should be for ever in a state of servitude, and be allowed a meal daily, but never the means of providing for the next day's meal, each slave was ascripted to his master under the following forms, which have come down to our days, and were observed in the purchase or transfer of slaves within living memory:—

The slave having washed, anointed himself with oil, and put on a new cloth, his future owner took a metal plate, filled it with water, and dropped in a gold coin, which the slave appro-

priated after drinking up the water. The slave then took some earth from his future master's estate and threw it on the spot he chose for his hut, which was given over to him with all the trees thereon. When land was transferred the slaves went with it, and might also be sold separately; occasionally they were presented to a temple, for the service of the deity. This was done publicly by the master approaching the temple, putting some earth from before its entrance into the slave's mouth, and declaring that he abjured his rights and transferred them to the deity within. So in England, when a master abjured his right over a slave it was done publicly in the market-place, or in the church before the principal altar, when the lord, taking the slave's hand, offered it to the sheriff or priest, gave him a sword and laver, and told him that the ways were open to him and that he was free.

Rules were also laid down, with the Hindoo passion for regulating small matters, not only detailing what work the slaves should do, but what allowances of food they should receive, and what presents on certain festival occasions they should obtain from, or make to, the master. On marriages amongst themselves they prostrated themselves before the master and obtained his consent, which was accompanied with a small present of money and rice. The marriage over, they again came before the master, who gave them betel nuts and poured some oil on the bride's head. On the master's death his head slave immediately shaved his hair and moustache. There was also a list of offences for which masters might punish slaves, amongst which the employment of witchcraft, or sending out evil spirits against others, expressly figures; and the punishments with which each offence might be visited are specified, the worst of which are branding, and flogging with switches. There was no power of life and death, and in cases of withholding the usual allowance, or of punishments severer than prescribed, slaves might complain to the authorities. This mildness contrasts favourably with slave-usages in Europe and America.

Like all the slave-castes and lower races, the Korägars worship Mari Amma, the goddess presiding over smallpox, the most dreadful form of Parvati, the wife of Shiva. She is the most popular deity in Canara, represented under the most frightful form, and worshipped always with bloody rites. Goats, buffaloes, pigs, fowls, &c., are slaughtered at her temples; and their heads must be severed at a single blow by an Äsädi, one of the slave-tribes from above the Ghauts. Although the Korägars, in common with all slaves, are looked upon as excommunicated and unfit to approach any Brahminical temple or deity, they have adopted the popular Hindoo festivals of the Gokalastmi or Krishna's birthday, and the Chowti. In the latter

the preliminaries and prayers must be performed by a virgin; in the former there is much feasting and drinking: they sit close together, and if a grain of rice should fall, accidentally or not, on a neighbour's platter, all cease eating, and the offender is liable to a fine and excommunication; for even these lowest of tribes do form castes, from which exclusion is inflicted for various offences, such as seduction of a girl or widow, intercourse with women of the castes beneath them, eating in the houses of those of inferior caste, and, amongst the Korägars, to enter the hut occupied by a single female after sunset brings degradation. Re-admission is usually effected by paying a fine and giving a feast to the community; and in some instances a row of seven small huts is built on a river-bank, set fire to, and the offender made to run over the burning sticks and ashes as a penance. But the principal and familiar worship of the Korägars, as of all the primitive village populations throughout India, is paid to local demons, evil spirits or goblins, called Bhutas, legions of which are spread over the country, some one usually becoming temporarily popular from one cause or another over a narrower or wider area. The special Bhuta of the Korägars is named Katu, for whom a spot is chosen under a kasārcāna tree. Two plantain leaves are placed there, and a heap of boiled rice coloured with turmeric laid on them, and prayers offered by the eldest Korägar. May, July, and October are the principal months for worship.

At the marriages of the Korägars, for which Sunday is an auspicious day, though Monday is for the other slave-castes, the bridegroom and bride, after bathing in cold water, sit on a mat in the former's house, with a handful of rice placed before them. An old man presides, takes a few grains of rice and sprinkles on their heads, as do the others present, first the males and then the females. The bridegroom then presents two silver coins to his wife, and must afterwards give six feasts to the community. Though amongst the other slave-castes divorce is allowed by consent of the community, often simply on grounds of disagreement, and the women may marry again, with the Korägars marriage is indissoluble, but a widow is entitled to re-marriage, and a man may have a second, and even third, wife, all living with him. On occasion of a birth the mother becomes unclean, and the hut is deserted by the other inmates for five days; on the sixth day the mother and child are restored to purity by a tepid bath, and the child is named. Rice and vegetables are presented to the mother, and several cocoa-nuts split in two, the under half being given to the mother, and the upper to the master, if the child be male, contrariwise if female. On death the bodies of all the slave-castes used to be burnt, except in cases of death by smallpox; this may have been to obviate the pollution of

the soil by their carcasses when their degradation was deepest, but now, and from long past, burial is the universal rule. The master's permission is still asked, and after burial four balls of cooked rice are placed on the grave, possibly a trace of the ancient notion of supplying food to the ghost of the deceased.

All the Hindoos believe that the Korāgars have a language of their own, understood only by themselves, but it seems doubtful whether this is anything more than an idiom, or slang, such as is current amongst almost every caste and profession in India. It may be noted that the Korāgars alone of all the slave or other castes eat the flesh of alligators, and they share with one or two other divisions of the slaves a curious scruple or prejudice against carrying any four-legged animal, dead or alive; this extends to anything with four legs, such as chairs, tables, cots, &c., which they cannot be prevailed upon to lift unless one leg be removed. As they all work as coolies, this sometimes produces inconvenience. The only reason assigned for this scruple is lest they should be treated as deformed.* It only remains to add that during my last sojourn at Mangalore, after a considerable interval of absence, three years ago, the number of women wearing the leaf aprons behind seemed perceptibly to have diminished, and very possibly the custom may in a generation or two become extinct.†

Common Korāgar Names.

Male.—Jibbu, Chanda, Purala, Timmu, Tanya, Toma, Tukra, Angāra, Tāwāda.

Female.—Korāpūlu, Mawa, Timpalli, Chantri, Tukri.

Designations of the fifteen slave-castes, in order of precedence.

| | | |
|-------------------|---------|------------------------------|
| Hambatar | Merar | Bākada, with 3 subdivisions: |
| Pānar | Korājar | 1. Chujana Bākada |
| Hasalar | Asādi | 2. Turibina Bākada |
| Parawar | Holiya | 3. Gōddina Bākada |
| Bélar, or Medarar | Madiga | Kāpāta Korāgar |
| Butadar | Nuliga | Soppu Korāgar |

Even the three Bākada subdivisions may not intermarry.

* It may probably fall within the category of remarkable customs, collected by Mr. Tylor, in his "Early History of Mankind," chap. x., for which no reason can be assigned. A somewhat similar scruple obtains amongst the Bygas of Central India, whose women are not allowed to sit or lie upon any four-legged bed or stool.

† In the Chānda district of the Central Provinces the women in the wilder tracts wear no clothes at all, but only a string round the waist, whence every morning they suspend a bunch of leaves before and another behind. The practice is reported to exist in the Kōl country, and also in Orissa, where it is traced up to the command of one of their deities to reprove women for their pride.—*Rev. S. Hislop.*