

CHAPTER VII.RELIGION AND WITCHCRAFT*I.

The traditional religion of the Shila has four elements. First, Shila believe in a few Hindu Gods regarded as powerful, but benevolent and not maleficent. Second, they believe in the survival of the dead and in the persistence of the authority of the senior relatives even after their death. Third, they believe in numerous nature spirits - spirits of hills, streams and forest and in bands of punitive and maleficent spirits, all of whom demand personal loyalty and frequent propitiation by offerings of blood and liquor. Finally, Shila believe strongly in

x witchcraft and sorcery¹ - an innate power to harm, destroy and to corrupt others, exercised by certain wicked individuals against their fellowmen. Since the spirits are benevolent

x and easily propitiated the major emphasis in Shil religion is upon the propitiation of the numerous malevolent and malignant spirits by frequent offerings of blood and liquor and on detecting and neutralizing the witches and sorcerers in their midst.

A characteristic feature of Shil Religion is its almost total lack of dogma. There are very few tenets or articles of faith enjoined by authority. There are priests, but they do not have any authority and there are few ceremonies, direct or indirect, vested in them to be performed.

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against the infringement of the few dogmas there might be.
 Hindu religion may be described more as a way of life
 maintained by traditions, conventions and customary behaviour.

In spite of their strong beliefs in the survival
 of the dead and conception of spirits as powerful beings
 etc., they don't seem to have any defined notions of heaven
 or hell. The spirit continues to hover about the area of
 their habitation. They continue to take an interest
 in the survivors. Such persons who had lived a 'good' life
 of moral satisfaction and who died under "natural"
 circumstances, become ~~spirits~~ after their death. "good"
 or tutelary spirits and continue to take a benevolent --
 interest in the welfare of their descendants. On the
 other hand, persons who were jealous, spiteful or otherwise
 antiseocial during their lifetime, persons who were witches
 or sorcerers or those who died from violence, (murder, suicide
 etc.) or from epidemic diseases, and are transformed after
 their death into "malevolent" or malignant spirits, jealous,
 spiteful or nursing feelings of bitterness or hatred towards
 their survivors and against living beings in general.

While endow the spirits with all human attributes
 of pleasure, bitterness, benevolence, anger and hatred
 according to their nature when alive, and the circumstances
 of their death. Being freed from a corporeal existence,
 they are much more volatile in their movements and can

operate in spheres where no corporeal body can function, so their capacity either for doing good or for inflicting damage is considerably enhanced.

21.

The top layer of Shil gentlemen consists of a few Hindu deities, such as Mahadev, Soma, Kalika, Karmadev and Ganesh. The most influential of these all is the Mahadev (Iiva), the God of Destruction in the Hindu trinity. ^{him} Many

- ✓ Shil traditions claim ^{him} as a relative by marriage. It is said that once Mahadev was wandering in the Vindhya jungles when he met a lovely ~~Indian~~ girl - who was none else but an incarnation of his consort - Parvati, ^{and} ✓ he fell in love with her and married her. Shils claim that this ~~paternal~~ girl was in reality a Shil girl. Consequently Mahadev stands in a specially cordial relationship to the Shils in general. To the extent, that he seems to have promised the Shils to stay in the Shil country for at least six months in the year, commencing from the New Moon of the month Chaitra (April - May). He has his shrines dotted
- × about on either bank of Narmada and on the top of
- × a few high peaks in the Shil country. Of these the more important shrines in the region of our interest, are the shrines at Anupam and Garuldevar on the bank of Narmada
- u rana sp. & and on the hills Jatanool and Kalurena near Lathivara.

Shils gather here once in a year on the new Moon of Chaitra - to worship Mahadev, dedicate the new crop

to his (Bani Ganga) and to supplicate for a better harvest and more prosperity during the coming years.

Bahair is regarded as the Supreme deity. All other deities and spirits are subservient to his authority and derive their status under his mandate. Indraj - the god who controls rain and hence responsible for harvest, is regarded as his chief attendant and friend. Indraj is also referred to as Kalurana or the Lord of the clouds, and has his main shrine atop the densely wooded peak of the main range hill near Bathivara.

Every year, sacrifices are offered to Bahair, and to Indraj on the Akhatig (For Moon of Bhairava) and the ^{the} Akhatig is consulted as to the prospect of timely rains and harvest in the coming season. This festival usually commences the agricultural vacation and heralds the coming monsoon. Soon after this festival, hills start looking over their livestock and implements in readiness for the arduous ploughing.

Next, the Lord of the epic garuda is another deity supplanted by him on several occasions. All traditions of this speak of him as their patron and foster parent. He is worshipped in Chakranatha, Tulumana and in the plains of Kanchanabadi district i.e. Chital and Chaitulana. He is frequently referred to as Bahair and with respect as Rapa Ram (His name, the Father) (as Indraj is the Father, hence any to a popular misconception, cult of him is least developed among them. On the other hand, cult of him with its emphasis upon the softer virtues of life, such

on abstinence from liquor and business to a Hindu, is hardly compatible with the traditional Bhil religion where the emphasis is heavily laid upon the use of blood and liquor in their ritual complex.

Further the association of Rama with the Bhils seemed to be based on certain references in the Ramayana to a Sabara people inhabiting the Vindhyan forests. It seems to us that this cult was never an integral part of the Bhil religion, but one of its outer ramifications, - - particularly in the more easily accessible plains of Sabar Kantha & Machchhalis. Today, this cult is largely associated with the Bhil Sava Hanthali of Dahanu, which has been doing pioneer work in the social and economical betterment of the Bhils in this region and with a few "Bhakt" cults of fairly recent origin. Bhils at large owe allegiance to Mahadev.

Among the lesser deities Hanuman, the Monkey-God, regarded as the chief attendant of Rama, symbolizing endurance and steadfast loyalty, and Ganesha, the elephant headed son of Mahadev, are supplicated whenever any important or dangerous task is undertaken.

Another deity whom they regard with much reverence is Kalika, the Mother "Kali" of all Universe. She is described as kind, gracious and "beautiful as a bride". She protects them from the wild beasts of the jungle and from the many evil spirits that abound in the world. But she is also capable of swift and dire punishment, when offended.

The Shils everywhere celebrate with pomp and fervour the Festival of Holi which is consecrated to her. This is a post-harvest festival that falls during the last week of March or during the first week of April (— on the Full Moon of the month of Bhadgana). Preparations are started a month earlier, and the entire month is spent in a gay atmosphere. Bands of young men and women may be seen dancing and singing songs in praise of Kalika, till late hours of the night to the rhythm of drums (Dhol). It is also a frequent sight to see a band of hilarious young girls describing themselves as the slim maidens of Purgatory (*Parani patthalizo*) surrounding a male visitor or a traveller to extort from him contribution (*gaj*) in cash or kind towards the Holi feast. This happy environment is characteristic also of the festivals, Akshatrij and Indraj. This seems to be the result of an inherent conviction that these deities are benevolent and kindly. They punish only when strictly necessary. But even when offended, their grace may be attained by a solemn undertaking on the part of the offender to mend his ways, to abstain from his anti-social acts and by a simple offering of a coconut and some flowers. All these deities are regarded as 'gure' (*gutha*) deities and consequently animal sacrifices are not acceptable to them.

Holika is sometimes offered a sacrifice of goats.
 × But the convention is that goats must be offered alive only.
 When the Holi bonfire is lit on the Full Moon of the month, sometimes a young kid is thrown alive into the fire as oblation to her. Frequently a worshipper dedicates an

all-white bird in her name and decorating it with red
 ✓ flowers, indrag. --- lets it loose in the jungle. He may
 might kill it and when it is killed by a tiger or a
 panther, it is assumed that the "Mother" has accepted
 the sacrifice.

Coming now to a discussion of spirits, we may
 distinguish several categories:

First - there are hosts of punitive spirits
 x associated with the several epidemics such as the plague,
 x small pox, cholera, and dysentery. They are all regarded as
 children of Kali and her attendants, entrusted with the
 task of maintaining order and morality in the world. These
 spirits are all kept moving incessantly, always moving
 in a westerly direction and on look-out for offenders
 against man or beast, or the deities. Whenever a spirit
 finds such offenders, he establishes his camp in that
 x village and harasses the individual or group concerned,
 by visiting him with the particular disease he contains.
 If repentance is quickly forthcoming, the victims may be
 freed of the disease and the spirit moves elsewhere.

This band of punitive spirits is led by
 Motijhara Saharaj (gall-gar) and his consort Sitale
 Mata (chicken pox). They are also referred to as Biliya Baba
 and Biliya Mata (lit. the spirits who burn). As one of the
 ritual chants now used to placate Motijhara it is described
 how Motijhara and his consort Sitale mata (chicken pox , also
 known as Biliya Mata) goes out every year on a punitive

competition, seeking people who are proud and arrogant, and who do not give due respect to the Gods and the ancestral spirits. Whenever he finds such people, he pitches his tent in that village. Then he proceeds to harass these people by visiting them with attacks of small pox and other epidemics. If repentance is quickly forthcoming enough, he may release his victims and move on. But frequently he kills them. Jotighara and Saliya Mata together account for the largest number of deaths in these villages. Yet, he is by nature very kind and is rarely motivated by spite or jealousy. He and his attendant spirits are regarded as policing the world. They punish only the offenders. Their attacks may be guarded against or warded off, by believing strictly in accordance with Bhil traditions and modes, by not offending the gods or the ancestral spirits, and by occasional propitiations of Jotighara and his host through sacrifices. A Bhil generally regards the attacks of several epidemics as visited by the victim and feels that these attacks should be borne without any ill will. It is for the victim on the other hand to seek the grace of the spirits and of the Gods. In fact, a person so affected with small pox or any other disease associated with Saliya Babji (lit. the Lord who burns) or his family, may not try any medicine to cure it, lest the spirits be offended, and kill him straight away. On the contrary efforts should be made to locate the spirit who has visited the victim, with the

disemboweled, or levinized, and then to expiate through sacrifice.

One spirit in this category ~~is~~ attacks men and cattle in the form of wild beasts from the jungle. Baba Kasumar for instance, assumed the form of a large tiger and made the villages of the offenders against deities and spirits. Moreover each ridge seems to a village in which succession, the people say must and will the animal responsible. But propitiatory sacrifices are also offered at the local shrine of Kasmur and solemn vows are taken that they would undertake for whatever transgressions these might have been so far.

Then there is another category of malevolent spirits who feed on the souls (soul, or *hainia*) of the living and upon the flesh of the dead. They frequently assume a lovely appearance and seduce men of tender soul, thereby causing him to gradually weaken and die. Usually the victim himself might be unaware of the loss of soul and come to know the true extent of his misdeeds only after consulting the levines. This kind of the fear of people. It is believed that these spirits are predominantly powerful in the twilight hours and at noon. So strong is the fear of these people that these spirits that usually they avoid going out at these hours. If they go out at all, they go out in some company such as in the form of a small bag or of a dog.

The most malignant of them all is the Jagan.

✕ Jagan vampire that haunts about in the atmosphere either

singly or in groups, after sun set. She is capable of sucking any form she likes. She is very fond of sucking warm blood from the living beings, and to feed on their vital organs while yet alive. In order to ensure a steady supply of victims, she establishes contacts with certain malignant human agencies such as the witch (*Witch*) and the sorcerer (*Sorcerer*) who seek her favour in order to share in occult powers and to serve her to any extent.

x However, they are afraid of the *Witch*; should they fail her, their lives are practically forfeit.

x Then come a horde of malevolent ghosts - of persons who died under unusual or tragic circumstances and consequently imbued with consuming hatred for the survivors. The most malignant of these are held to be the spirits of pregnant women who died in confinement, with the fetus as yet undelivered (*Witch*). Being frustrated in one of the deepest desires of a woman, such a spirit is said to nurse a deep hatred towards all men, especially the husband and his kinsmen and towards all pregnant women married to his agnate lineage. Such a spirit (*Witch*) wanders about on the outskirts of a village, waiting for any lone wayfarer. Assuming the form of a young girl dressed in red - (red in the bridal colour), it tries to attract the prospective victim, to persuade him to draw near to his destruction. Several people claimed to have seen such a spirit on a river bank, in a jungle or on a tank bank at noon time. They claimed that they could know that it was a *Witch* - ordinary girls do not flirt with strangers. Further, when they drew near they could see her

eyes burning with hatred. " When I turned anified with fear " said one, " she chased me all the way to the ashram (Boarding school) of the Shil Gova Mandal at Sigore assuming the form of a black dog. When I looked back after reaching the ashram, she had disappeared. "

An attempt is made to placate such a spirit³ by the husband, who encloses her in a wooden image set outside the village under a large tree. Once a year, on every Divasa day, (a harvest festival falling in September) he offers a hen or a small kid as sacrifice and also a length of new red cloth. Since it is believed that the Vishen tries to kill any pregnant woman of her husband's agnatic kin group by obstructing delivery, whenever a confinement is expected in a such family, propitiatory offerings are made to the vishen.

Whenever a person dies an abnormal death, from murder or suicide, for instance, he becomes a khavi and hates the surviving kinmen and all living beings generally. It generally resides on a large tree on the outskirts of the village where it formerly lived, and moves about in lonely spots assuming the form of a handsome bull buffalo calf (male). Whenever an untouchable passerby is tempted to take it home, thinking it to be a wolf and dangerous, it assumes gigantic proportions and swallows him up. A khavi generally moves in the company of Marata Kavar, the much feared leader of bands of such malignant spirits).

Further, an unusual birth - twins, babies with

unusual features, or physical malformity - is regarded as a jinn - a source of great danger to its parents and other kin. It is not a child really - but an evil spirit which enters the womb during early stages of pregnancy, killed the foetus within and assuming a human form, was delivered in the normal course of events. Immediately it is recognised as a jinn, or a demon child. The eldest male member of the family takes up the new born infant in his arms and tries to delude the monster into a false sense of security, by loudly praising it, while a hole is hastily cut in the back wall of the room of confinement and the mother is quietly removed to another house. All the neighbours are called to recognise the jinn and approve the course of action about to be taken. They leave the house under cover of darkness, with the man holding the infant, in lead and another following close behind, with a naked sword hidden in his robes. All along the way to the execution ground, the infant is continuously and loudly praised for its beauty etc.,. Five deep pits are hastily dug in a corner of the burning ground. When all is ready, the infant is thrown violently on to the ground and is immediately cut up into at least five pieces. Each piece is buried in a separate hole, after pinning it down with a chunky piece of wood. A propitiatory ceremony follows after three days. Such incidents are, however, very rare. For one thing the natural sentiments of the parents come in the way of such murders. Second, the killing of jinn has been declared a criminal offence since long and though the entire incident might often be

x passed off as cases of still birth, still the risk of being apprehended by law is considerable. Only rarely is a child killed for a jag, and even then under very unusual circumstances. I was informed by one of the Mal legislators of Bombay that he himself was very nearly killed, as his head was covered with a sheet of very light hair, then some body remembered that such hair had been found a couple of times in an earlier generation.

Unlike the hosts of punitive spirits led by Jethabhai, these malignant spirits are motivated by jealousy and hatred for those that survived them and no particularly incentives are needed to rouse their fury. Such spirits are held responsible for the many ills and diseases that the people suffer from. Consequently a Mal is ever faced with the problem of placating them and of securing their good will by periodic sacrifices and offerings of liquor. These spirits are much more exacting in their demands than either the deities or the ancestral spirits.

III.

The belief in ancestral spirits however, is a source of great relief and security to the Mal. All those persons who died from natural causes after living a life of normal satisfactions, are believed to turn into kindly spirits who watch over the interests of their descendants. They intercede with the deities and spirits on behalf of their descendants whenever necessary.

In a number of ancestor propitiations rites, it was noticed that the ancestral spirits commencing with its descendants through the priest medium, generally opened the proceedings with an account of how hard pressed they (the ancestral spirits) are, trying to keep out the several punitive and malignant spirits from entering their village. "You should take heed and try not to sin any more, nor to be disrespectful towards the deities (~~gods~~). If you do not, then the deities will be angry and we may no longer intercede on your behalf with any success". The response was always the same. The assembled people would tremble and urgently plead for the continued support of their ancestors, and promise that every care will be taken not to anger the deities or spirits by any commission or omission. "Oh Lord (Babji), if you should also desert us now, where can we - your children go for protection?" The ritual drops ends the same way, with the spirit receding after assurances to the people that as long as they try not to offend the deities or the evil spirits, they will be protected. These spirits are definitely benevolent to their descendants and constitute their main support in the supernatural realm.

All spirits of dead persons prefer to hover around the area where they used to reside when alive and demand that they should not ^{be} forgotten or neglected by their survivors. However, it is only the 'good' spirits, ~~in~~ the souls of persons who died from natural causes after a life of moral satisfaction that are welcomed. The unhappy,

✓ jealous and malignant spirits who seek revenge, or ~~the~~ harass out of sheer spite, are not confined in the neighbourhood and every attempt is made to keep them away out of the village territory, when such corpses are taken to the cremation spot. A mixture of several small grains are strewn about in quantity along the entire way. Three times during the outward journey, the bier is lowered to the ground and the spot is marked by a small circle of pebbles, which are scattered in all directions when the bier is again lifted. The belief is that the spirit does not gather every single

* that, so long grain and make a separate heap of each kind, and gather the pebbles and rearrange them into the original circle again, it may not even approach its former residence.

Further, people who accompany such a corpse to the cremation ground, wait till it is consumed by fire and then disperse. In order to avoid being followed by the spirit of the dead person back to the village, each person takes a different and devious route home. It is hoped that the spirit would be confused as to whom it should follow and as will not be able to find its way back.

However it is preferred that the good spirits dwell in the vicinity of the village and protect the interests of their descendants. Every village in this part of the country has a large grove, which is consecrated to the ancestral spirits and is regarded as their dwelling place. Within this grove which they call "the forest of the Gods" (lo¹ pu yan) no trees may be cut or the ground ploughed under any circumstances. All the 'good spirits'

of the village are believed to reside in this grove and look after the interests of their descendants. Once a year in Diveli, offerings of food and liquor are made to all the spirits resident in this grove by the Villagers (Plate IV^Y).

The memory of a dead ancestor is frequently perpetuated by the erection of a memorial stone (gathia) in this grove. This memorial stone is generally plain, but is often embellished with carvings depicting the person in several heroic poses, depending upon his wealth and importance. The accompanying ritual is very elaborate. A particular variety of stone - a long broad slab with a triangular shaped head is sought and approved by the priest (badava) who officiates. In the ancestral grove, a pit is dug in a specified spot and the slab wrapped up in a length of new, white cloth, is laid beside it.

All the people of the village are invited to be present at the sacrifice and partake of the sacrificial meat and liquor. When all are assembled the priest medium gradually slips off into a state of trance through set procedure (dharva)⁴ when he becomes a fit medium for spirit-possession (dhar). The ritual develops through a routine procedure. First, the medium announces himself, greets the assembled persons by the words 'Sam, Sam' and accepts their greetings. He then reproaches the people as being too negligent in matters relating to the deities and ancestors, and warns them with dire consequences. He then calms down and mentions a subject believed to be closest to his heart,

a goat for himself in the ancestral grove, and gifts of food and liquor. Then the eldest male member of the sacrificing family present, brings up the prepared stone to the medium for inspection, and due approval. The stone is erected under this supervision. The spirit in possession sits on the stone, satisfied, indicating that he has taken possession of the stone. Food and liquor are offered to the spirit, and are formally accepted by the medium, who pours a few drops of liquor in his cupped palms and lets them trickle down to the earth. This is done twice. Then the medium takes hold of the bowl containing liquor, and calling forth the head of the sacrificing family, the headman (talavi) of the village, and the worshiper (pajara - he is distinct from the ^{old} ~~badava~~ of the priest) gives them three drinks each. Thus a tie of commensality is established between the ancestors and the people. Then the spirit recedes, leaving the medium (badava) in a normal condition. The ritual is then wound up with a sacrifice of a goat and three or four fowls. The vital organs, such as the heart and the liver, are removed, and burnt as offering (hovan) to the several ancestral spirits resident in that grove. The meat and liquor is shared by all the people present.

Such a ritual involves considerable expense. At least all the people of the village have to be invited to witness the ceremony and to partake of the sacrificial meat and liquor. The ceremonial stone has to be brought

from a distant place. The priest goes, accompanied by four to five persons, to fetch it. The entire expenses of the party are to be met by the family sponsoring the ritual. The sacrificial goat and fowls, liquor, a length of new cloth to wrap the memorial stone in, and payments to be made to the priest (ranging from 2 rs. to Rs. 1-2-0) all increase the cost of the ceremony.

Consequently, it is only the prosperous families that can afford to erect memorial stones in honour of their ancestors. The others do not openly say that they cannot afford it. They go on postponing it from year to year. They are confident that the ancestors, being sympathetic to their troubles, will not be angry with them for this mild deception. But in all harvest festivals, special offerings of food and drink made to the ancestors and better their intercession is sought for better harvests and for immunity from the dreaded hosts of Hottijhara and of Dapata.

Now or, a Bhil knows that even the ancestors are apt to be furious, when slighted or neglected. When food offerings are not made to them for a long time, or their grove is desecrated by cutting down a tree, or ploughing the land, or by the commission of an offence such as murder or sexual intercourse there, the ancestors get angry and punish the offenders. The displeasure of the ancestors expresses itself in many ways such as continued sickness among children of the offending family, sudden drying up of milk in the udders of their cattle, a series of deaths, and unexpected failure of crops. In such a situation, a medium (badeva)

is consulted, and prompt steps are taken to establish contact with the offended spirit and to placate it. Often, it turns out that a particular spirit was angry just because a seat was not provided for it in the ancestral grove even after the lapse of several years. Khusan, the headman of Pigongota, wanted to find out why a series of misfortunes befall him during the year. The medium who was consulted told him that they were due to the anger of an ancestor. That "ancestor" was none but his elder brother who died some years before. A medium was called for and contact was established with the spirit in question. When asked why he was so angry with his 'children', he complained in a slow, gasping and mournful chant, "When I lived, I was rich. I had everything I wanted - good lands that yielded regularly, fine cattle and an affectionate wife. Now I am dead. You are having my land and my cattle. I look after you and your children, protecting you from all the evil spirits. Yet I do not have ^a place to sit. You did not give me a stone. This year you have not even given me a small fish. You seem to think that since I am dead I am also powerless. And now you see what I can do. Last year two of your children died. This year your big buffalo (it was the best one he had) fell down in the stream and broke its neck. Last winter your grain crop was very promising. But a heavy frost, confined to your fields, ruined it. Yet you do not know who caused it or why. And now your children are ill again. I do not want to do this

to you, my children. But you force me to do it ". Khuman admitted to all charges levelled against him. But he pleaded that he was forced by circumstances to act as he did " Oh Father you are aware that for three years nothing grew in my fields. Our children are starving. Where then can I find the resources to make offerings to you? You know that I would give you all you want, if I could. But wait for some more time. Let us have one good harvest and you shall have all that you ask. I have not ^{for-} forgotten that you are hungry. Here is a fowl for you, let it suffice for the present". Ultimately the spirit relented, and promised to withdraw the blight he had cast over Khuman's family.

In each village, the memorial stones in the grove are erected in several groups, each representing a lineage group resident in the village. When food offerings are made to ancestors at harvest festivals, each family places offering of meat and drink and lights a lamp, not only before the group of memorial stones representing his clan or lineage but before all the other groups in the grove. Except in cases where a particular spirit is offended and must be placated individually, no clan or lineage references are made. Whenever references are made to the ancestors, it is the ancestors of all people that are meant. There are instances of the people of an entire region getting together to participate in an ancestral ritual. But I know no instance of an entire clan getting together for a similar purpose. Ancestors

are regarded as being above class or lineage differences. This is not surprising when one recalls that for a Hill, the class (akha) is not as significant an entity as the village.

Moreover, the ancestral spirits seem to be regionally organized. While they are regarded as being common for the Hills everywhere, prominence is attached to different ones in different areas. Even within this small area, one may distinguish at least three such areas of influence. Valang-johwar is regarded as the leading spirit by those Hills who live in the area to the north and north-east of Patnagol upto Dehal. To the south of Patnagol in Lathivada and Chota Bhogpur areas, the principal ancestral spirit is Lathon Khar, while in the east upto Khobara, for both the Hill and Bhilala, Valajo Khar is the most important. This does not mean however, that the influence of anyone is restricted to a particular area. Kharaja Khar is regarded with reverence everywhere and gets his share of the sacrificial offerings in all parts of this country, and so do the others. But it is just that each is known in his particular area of influence as the Babuji (lit. the divine father), while the other two are referred to by name only. The principal

- × spirit to offer sacrifice first, and is regarded as the
- × chief attendant of the Supreme Deity, Mahadev. Inquiries as to their mutual relations elicited the glib and unsatisfactory reply that all the three - there are many more - are the sons of Indraj (the deity who presided over the firmament and controls the rain-bearing clouds, and is therefore regarded

as the giver of good harvests). All the three were given different parts of the country as their domains.

A legend has it that Hajarjo Kuvor was a scion of the clan of Danor and that he was a great 'robber' when he was alive. He looted the Palace of all its treasures. He is regarded by the people of Batanaal as the most powerful of all ancestral spirits, and as the chief attendant of Katsenar Mahādev, the presiding deity of Batanaal hills. His shrine faces that of Katsenar Mahādev, on the highest part of the hill.

Each of the ancestral spirits has special functions or areas of influence. Hajarjo Kuvor is the guardian of women and their fertility, and of the harvest. The festival of Anādevij is associated with Mahādev and Hajarjo Kuvor. People flock there from long distances to worship them. Childless couples go there to supplicate for children. Having remained fasting and in a state of ritual purity for twenty-four hours, they go up in the evening to the platform (oil) on which the shrines are situated. They spend the night in singing and dancing in a clearing around the shrines. Towards dawn, after the main sacrifice has been offered, they are called forth by the priest who is still possessed by the spirit of Hajarjo, and receive from him five raw mangoes consecrated to Mahādev. It is expected that the couple should share the five fruits equally between themselves and eat them without uttering a word. No part of the fruit - not even the seed or the skin may be left unconsumed, if their prayers are to be fulfilled. Having

water, they should have a drink from the clear, cold water, of a sacred spring (nisaluna panti) nearby.

Throughout the succeeding year they have to observe a number of restrictions. They may not greet any person of whatever rank, nor pluck flowers or fruits from any plant, or bathe in a running stream or a spring. If they strictly observe all the restrictions, the woman conceives and bears a child, boy or girl according to their prayer. If a boy is born, the man may not see his child till he has sacrificed a fowl, and offered an earthen image of a horse (Ghadi) at the local shrine of Kadarjo, as a token fulfillment of his promise. But on the next Akshatrij he has to go up the Ratannal hills with his wife and child, and there sacrifice a goat to Kadarjo and offer coconuts and flowers to Bahadur.

Kadarjo is also regarded as an associate of Indraj, and is therefore the controller of harvests. A large number of people come to Ratannal hills every year for Akshatrij, to know what the harvests will be like in the coming year. The priest who is possessed by Kadarjo speaks in vague terms about the prospects of rainfall in any particular region, and the prospects for each variety of grain. These warnings are interpreted to the people by the headman (padavi) of Pilergota, who is the traditional padavi to baba Ratannal and to Kadarjo Kavar. People plan their cultivation for the year accordingly.

The hills may not make use of the new crop of grains, or of ambara flowers, till it has been first

consecrated to Hedarjo Kuyar in the Akhatrij festival. On
 this day three pots of necha liquor, which has been
 distilled out of flowers taken from a particular tree
 reserved for this purpose - referred to as kuvario - are
 offered as an oblation to Hedarjo. The term kuvario literally
 means virgin, but here it refers to the hitherto untasted
 liquor contained in these pots. Once the priest possessed
 by the spirit of Hedarjo signifies acceptance of the offering
 by opening each one of the covered pots and pouring a few
 drops of liquor on to the ground, the new crop may be used
 by all. The spiritual possession itself invites the headmen
 of the four villages of Batumai to drink the 'new' liquor,
 and pour out to each of them three handfuls in an act of
 communion. Later, the headmen of all the villages assembled
 there are given a drink each, along with the several priests
 who are present.

This injunction regarding the new crop (nevi ucha la)
 is taken very seriously. Its violation would result in a
 failure of crops in all the area under Hedarjo's influence,
 especially in the four villages on the hill which are jointly
 responsible for the conducting of all ceremonies connected
 with Hedarjo Kuyar. However, an observance of this injunction
 would mean a great deal of hardship, for the hills in general
 rarely have enough stocks of grain or necha to last them
 till after Akhatrij. Hence compensation has been effected
 by the sons of the injunction sailing on the headmen of
 the four villages on the hill, and the several priests in

the area, who have undertaken to observe the injunction on behalf of all the people of the ' world '.

Hadiol is the guardian of cattle. Whenever a cow or a buffalo calves, the owner may not use its milk till he has offered a feast to Hadiol at the local shrine. If this condition is not complied with his cattle may be destroyed. Kachuar is the guardian of the village. He moves on the outskirts of the village guarding it against wild beasts, evil spirits, and witches on the sward. A sacrifice is offered to him on the coming following Akhatrij by the people returning from the Kotschal Hills, just before entering their several villages.

II.

But all these deities and spirits, good as well as bad, are superhuman. They may not come into direct contact with the people at large for the very atmosphere around them is deadly to the living beings of this world. Those that seek and maintain direct contacts with the deities and spirits have to have special aptitudes and knowledge, and therefore form a small but influential section within the community. They form the link or the medium through which the superhuman and the human interact and communicate with each other. Among the Halls, two such groups are noticed. There is a group of men who are by nature suited to act as mediums and who are trained under the supervision of -- proficient men in the techniques of propitiation of the deities and spirits, in the instruction, in themselves or

in others of a variety of trances can arrive at possession by spirits and in the healing of illnesses to which human beings
 X are subject. Such a person is known as belave, but will be referred to as a priest hereafter. Such a priest may combine in himself all the roles of a medium, diviner, worshipper and of a healer, or he may specialize in any one aspect only. But he is always working in the interests of the community.

As against the belave (priest), there are a large number of men and women, who have an anti-social disposition and who have consciously or unconsciously aligned themselves with the evil spirits. This group consists of two types of persons. There are those women who are by nature evil, whose glance is enough to destroy living beings. In may or may not be aware of her evil propensities. A danger to the community even when she is not conscious of her evil nature, she becomes a positive menace when she is conscious of her evil power and aligns herself with the janai or any other
 X evil spirit. Such a person is known as a dehon, and will be referred to as a witch hereafter. These there are some men, who, though not evil by nature, have become so owing to certain circumstances. They are persons who wanted to be priests, and who acquired the necessary knowledge. But lacking the stability of character for a true priest,
 X they fall a prey to the temptation of using their contacts with spirits, to enhance their own power and prestige. Such persons are generally prepared to aid anybody in their

personal feeble for a monetary consideration. Such a person is known as a "priest who turned a witch" (lakonia badava)

× But will be referred to as sorcerer, in this paper.

Priesthood is limited to men only. Women are regarded as ritually impure and lacking in the requisite strength of character. Further, only those men who have an inherent spiritual strength and character may hope to be real priests. The others, attracted by the prestige of contact with spirits, may contrive by dint of application, to achieve a mastery over the techniques of priesthood, but lacking the strength to be a real badava. They fall a prey to the desire for power which their knowledge confers on them. Such power is used to acquire wealth and some power.

A man is born a priest; but before he could make use of his potentialities he has to be trained in the ⁱⁿ⁻tricacies of his profession, and has to appreciate and avoid the pitfalls and dangers that he encounters in the discharge of his several functions - especially when dealing with the malignant spirits and witches and sorcerers. It is difficult to find a priest who can train him, for only a person who ^{has} complete mastery over the technical intricacies of priesthood and also the integrity of character can train another properly. Such persons are fully alive to the dangers of imparting the dangerous knowledge of priesthood to people who may not have the right temperament for the profession, for then, such a person may become a danger to the community. Generally, an intending pupil has to live with his master, follow him about, assist him in his work, and convince him that he has found a proper pupil. The discipline

(pāthang) which he has to undergo is rigorous and prolonged. The culmination of his discipline involves his facing successfully an ordeal referred to as the ordeal of Kali Chamdash. Once this is done, he is a fully qualified priest.

There are different degrees of specialisation among the Bhili priests. Very few of them reach the stage of perfection referred to earlier and dare to face the ordeal of Kali Chamdash. Similarly it is only a bedava of a high calibre who can get possessed by deities and induce possession in others. Such priests are referred to only as 'those who do the work of gods (dēvan kāmaj kare)', and are expected not to officiate in functions involving malignant spirits and witches as this type of work is regarded as impure.

The large section of priests, however, are regarded as good enough where malignant ghosts are concerned, but not at all efficient, where the deities and the higher order of spirits (punitive spirits such as Notijhaga and the ancestral spirits like Madarjo) are concerned. A priest of this type when in a trance exhibits all the superficial signs of a possessed person, but it is not deep enough. Khatiya, a priest of Alindra, informed me that he also was formerly involving possession. "I would tremble all over, my head would roll, and foam would come out of my lips. Something would even speak. But I never felt that surge of power (kakalat) - - - - -"

lai) which develops and dominates one's entire being in that split second before one passes into a trance. I had felt it sometimes at a very early stage in my career. Later my trances were never intense or deep enough. A slight disturbance would break the trance. Only a Khavi or Sarata could come on as (bhar avi) ; it was however too light for a bigger spirit. Such a priest, however, is deemed competent enough to officiate in all such sacrifice where the services of a medium are not strictly necessary.

Lowest in rank and the most numerous are those who are referred to as priests only by courtesy. They are not qualified enough to be either mediums, who can make the gods speak, or simple priests who may offer sacrifice or worship. They have just enough to divine the underlying cause of several ills and diseases which harass mankind and their cattle - whether due to natural causes or due to the action of evil spirits. In the case of diseases naturally caused they act as healers, and suggest remedies in other cases. And sometimes they even exorcise minor spirits, which are believed to have caused the illness.

Distinct from all the types of priests described above, but sharing with them the important characteristic of social service is a witch-doctor (Kajalia badava) a type of priest, that is only rarely found. He is a person who has reached a very high degree of technical proficiency and has a great -- strength of character. He has undertaken the most dangerous and difficult task of identifying the witches and sorcerers, and of neutralising them wherever possible, or destroying them if neutralisation is not possible. Of all the malignant beings,

a witch is the most powerful and dangerous to the priest, and only he who has won over Kālikā completely to his side, can control the witch. A priest who associates himself with witch hunting is rendering a very great social service; nevertheless he is regarded as impure. Any traffic with witches involves pollution. He may not offer worship to the deities. He may, however, officiate in ghost rituals, and as a medicine man in cases of sickness and disease.

But these priests are all primarily agriculturists. They act in a priestly capacity when necessary, and at other ^{such} times they are just ordinary peasants. Only a priest who is a medium is retained by a group of villages on a regular retainer basis (phali). He is given an annual contribution in grains and mushra flowers (about 6 lbs. of grain and 12 lbs. of mushra from each family). Further he is given an additional share in the meat of the sacrificed animal or soul on his right (lāg) as a priest, in addition to what he receives as the normal share due to him as a participant in the ritual. Sometimes he may be given small cash presents ranging from 4 to 8 annas. The other types of priests do not receive such contribution. Whenever they officiate in any ritual, they are given shares in the meat—one for the person and another for the priest. Whenever a priest is sent for, he must come, and preoccupation with agriculture is no excuse. A priest who has a number of sons and field labourers (hali) working on his fields does not suffer a loss as a consequence. But one who has not many persons in his house, loses considerably from his priestly

responsibilities. This loss is compensated for by the gain in prestige. He is treated with respect, and his views always carry some weight in the assembly.

The priest comes in the eyes. He is a prominent person not only in his own village, but in a few neighbouring ones as well. Babar is known all over the area of Malango River, as an established and respectable priest. All other priests in the area acknowledge his superiority. Similarly, the reputation of a particular witch-doctor (Bajallo Badava) or Devigach in Jackson District has travelled as far as Kotsi.

Unlike a priest, a witch always works in the dark. A sorcerer is known only to a limited circle who decide to make use of his occult powers. But even the sorcerer does not dare to operate openly for he is regarded as dangerous in society. So the witch and the sorcerers represent a hidden danger to the prosperity and security of a people. It is believed that neither of them is easily recognised. On the contrary, they generally maintain an exemplary standard of behaviour in public. It is only when a witch-doctor (Bajallo Badava) denounces those that their true nature is revealed to the public.

The general consensus of opinion among the Tlilo regarding women is that they are inherently weak in spirit, and unstable. They are very susceptible to the influence of evil spirits and therefore potentially evil. A large number are actually evil. By looking at a person or animal they destroy the soul. By touching any implement, they destroy its virtue. This evil in them, though operative at all times, is particularly

powerful after sunset and until sunrise on the following day. The intensity of this evil faculty will be at its peak during twilight and dawn when a mere glance from them is sufficient to kill a person. These women may or may not be conscious of their evil faculty. Such women very soon fall a prey to the influence of evil spirits - especially the jogani who has great occult powers. They hope to have ^a share in the jogani's powers. The jogani has the power to assume the form of any animal or bird, to identify and associate on equal terms with the evil spirits, and of moving in the atmosphere at a rapid pace. In return for conferring such powers on them, she makes it possible for the jogani to have a regular supply of victims. A jogani, it may be remembered, is fond of sucking the warm blood and feeding on the uncoagulated flesh of living persons.

A witch, it is believed, solicits victims for her mistress, the jogani, and by drawing out and destroying their soul (or by 'eating away their hearts') breaks down any resistance they might be having. Then the jogani feeds on such persons. A person who is so victimised gradually weakens without any apparent sign of illness and dies. Once a woman turns into a witch, all her daughters will automatically become witches. They carry their witchcraft into their husbands' homes.

Both a priest and a witch are regarded as most efficient when they inherit the proper temperament for it. But before they can operate efficiently, their faculties have

to be trained and all the technicalities learnt under the supervision of a master. It is significant that both the priest and the witch are believed to undergo a similar course of training, the culminating point of which is associated with Kali Chaulash (the fourteenth day of the darker half of the month asvin, occurring roughly during the first week in November); On this day all the planets are in a critical relation to each other; and the very atmosphere is surcharged with danger. On this day both the priest and the witch have to undergo the supreme test of their courage and proficiency. At midnight they leave their village in secrecy and go alone to a lonely spot, such as a cremation ground, where there is also some water for bathing. Once there, the priest (or the witch) removes all clothes and enters the water till it reaches up to his waist, and then he goes into a deep trance. On the Kali Chaulash, a person undergoing the ordeal challenges any spirit to subjugate him. Disturbance of his trance is regarded as evidence of the subjection of his will power. While the priest commences with the deities and seeks their protection, the witch commences with the jinn. The malignant spirits make a great effort to subjugate them. fierce storms are made to rage around them ; rivers rise up in turbulent floods to wash them away, and wild animals from the jungle snap and snarl at them on all sides, if they continue to be in communion, impervious to all of these, till dawn, they emerge victorious and are regarded as masters of their profession. But if on the other hand, their trance is broken

even for a split second. The malignant spirits set upon them and tear them to shreds. Only those who have the fullest confidence in themselves dare face this ordeal. Success means enormous power, and failure, certain death.

The priest and the witch are always opposed to each other, representing as they do good and the evil respectively. As between the two, the witch is regarded as being the more powerful. In his dealings with the deities and the spirits, the priest depends mostly upon persuasion. He divines the root of all trouble. But where it touches any supernatural influences, he may not use any compulsion. For instance, when Hanning of Sipero fell ill, Babar, a famous priest in the area, was called in for consultation. He divined that there were three distinct malignant influences behind the illness - Kanata and his attendant Khavi, with a vision; all three of whom were eating away at his vitals. Babar, acting under the instructions of the relatives of the sick person, immediately communicated with the spirits. Kanata and the Khavi were persuaded to leave Hanning alone, accepting a brace of fowls offered to them as an alternative food. The vision, on the other hand, would not even respond to the ritual chant of the priest. And when at last it responded, it flatly refused to leave Hanning. It would not accept any substitute. Babar tried all he knew to save Hanning, but in vain. After a few hours of struggle, Babar gave up. He could only hope that it would leave Hanning of its own accord.

A priest is immune from a witch when he is actually possessed by a deity. She dares not even approach the site of ritual, for then she would have to contend with the deities. Then, during the nine nights of Navara, (a major festival of nine nights observed all over India during the month of October) the priests are in a state of possession everywhere. It is believed that the witch remains hidden in the darkest corner of her hut and does not dare to look in their -- direction, she sits crouching in a corner with her eye fixed on the ground. But normally no priest is a match for a witch. Only a witch doctor (Bajelio Salava) would dare to deal with her, as he is protected by Salika. The others do not even move after sunset, and avoid the witch as much as possible. When he is called out to officiate, a priest is always escorted from his house to the site of ritual, and then back again. It is generally so arranged that he reaches his destination before sunset. I knew a priest, Baling of Bejavan, who preferred to remain overnight in Dipongeta rather than go in the night to his own house a few miles away. The explanation was that the witch seizes such opportunities to destroy his soul and so cause him to die a slow and prolonged death. She waits concealed in his path, assuming the form of a wild cat (bilali), a fox, (siyala), or a bird known as tittoli. When the priest is almost upon it the animal or the bird flies away making loud and startling noises. During that split second when he is startled and does not have full control over his faculties the witch captures his soul. Immediately a priest realizes

that he has lost his soul, he tries to counter the witch's move by seeking the aid of another powerful priest if one is available in the neighbourhood. If, however, such help is not available, he gradually weakens and dies.

Some of the characteristics attributed to a witch are worthy of note. She is regarded as dangerous only to certain sections of the people. She does not harm any women for they are unacceptable to the jogani. Further, she is not regarded as dangerous to the members of her natal lineage or clan. Her father, brothers and their children are all immune from her activities. Whenever a woman is accused of witchcraft, she is banished from the village of her husband. She may seek refuge with any of her natal kin. Neither her father, nor any of her brothers, or their children, may refuse to accommodate her if she desires to stay with them. Even the family of a sister or a daughter seems to be quite safe from her, for often such a woman is known to have taken refuge with them. Further, a witch does not attack strangers, other than a priest. Between the priest and witch, there is a never ending feud as representing the two conflicting forces of good and evil. Thus the field of her activities seems to be concentrated mostly against the particular section of the people, viz., her husband and her relatives through marriage. This is borne out to a considerable extent, by the several instances that occurred when I was in the field. In one case the woman accused of witchcraft was the son's wife of the victim. In another, it was the mother who was so accused and driven out by her furious sons. It is true that the allegations were first voiced by the son's wife, who seemed to have

had some personal grudge against her parents-in-law. In another instance, a woman was strangled to death in the village Mall, by the sons of her husband's brothers. She was alleged to have caused the death of a number of children in the joint family. An instance has not so far come to my notice where a daughter of the house was accused of practising witchcraft against the members of her natal family. Two of the families mentioned above had daughters living with them, who, in their turn, had been driven out of their affinal families, on charges of witchcraft. Such daughters are severely abused on their return by their kinsmen for ruining the prestige of their natal lineage. But they will not be under suspicion in their own lineage group. In the cases referred to earlier, the accused women sought shelter with a sister's husband in one case, and with a daughter's husband in the other. A man may not refuse to protect his wife's sister or mother as they are not dangerous to him. But it might often create doubts in his mind regarding the integrity of his own wife.

This concept of a witch as working outside her own lineage and sex, but mostly against her affines, may well be a rationalization of affinal conflicts. Even in the case of a vishan (the malignant ghost of a woman who died in child bed before delivering the infant), the hatred is concentrated mostly against the affinal males only, including the children of the family - to the extent that even the women who are about to bear children for the joint family are attacked. Even there, the attacks

against strangers are sporadic and very rare. The main
 X threat in either case is to the joint family, and from those
 who come into it as a result of marriage.

Actually the position of the woman in the Whil
 joint family would support considerably the above hypothesis.
 The Whils place considerable importance on the relations
 between a man and his sister, but tend to neglect or even
 distrust women who marry into their family. She comes
 into the family, works very hard, and bears children who
 continue the lineage. But she herself is never accepted
 as an integral part of it. A woman has no ritual status
 in her affinal group where she is regarded as ritually
 impure and so unfit to be associated in any way with
 X any sacrament. She may not even touch or prepare the
 food of a person who is in a state of ritual purity (chira)
 But a daughter of the house may by bathing every day,
 attain to the state of ritual purity and prepare food
 for such persons. As they eat it, a daughter (beti) may
 touch things of ritual significance but not a wife (boyadi).

Normally a woman is not allowed by her affines
 to sit on a cot used by men, or on a cart used to transport
 goods. For horses, the Sarsaar had either to give up his
 wife or leave his village. He chose the latter alternative.
 Further, a woman is not supposed to be interested in
 the welfare of her affinal joint family at all. Her
 interests are mostly limited to her husband and her
 children. Even then, a woman often runs away with another

son, without the least regard for the prestige of her husband, or her children. When a son dies early in life his wife may take another man, abandoning her children, to the care of her former husband's family. On the other hand, women, especially the newly married are always believed to sow seeds of discord in the joint family. A witch therefore is one who does not get along with her affines, who may be driven back to her natal family if she does not behave.

However, a person may not be accused of witchcraft without strong grounds. A number of untoward incidents occurring in close succession rouse suspicion. Suspicion may gather round certain people on purely circumstantial grounds, associating them in some way or the other with all the mishaps. Some people may notice that a woman goes out frequently at night without any apparent reason; that she was looking at some boys who were playing nearby and who subsequently fell ill, or a person may complain that when a woman looked at him, he was frightened and has been feeling ill thereafter. Even when suspicion against some persons runs high, nobody ^{directly} accuses the persons suspected. When they feel that matters have gone far enough, all the men of the affected household set out, accompanied by one male member from each of the other households in the village, to consult a witch doctor of established reputation (Plate XII). (Generally a witch-doctor works in secrecy, lest the police harass him. In the state of Bombay, it is illegal to accuse or to declare anybody as a

(witch or a sorcerer). When they reach his place, they greet him and sit silently, offering no information. It is expected that ^{if} he is really capable, he ^{would be} is able to divine all that he need know about them. Their identity, their purpose in going to him, the problem which worries them, all this and more he should come to know by divination, and announce it to them. Further, he is expected to demonstrate his ability by giving them information of which he could have had no prior information, such as the situation of their several houses, the number of ploughs and cattle, [✓] each of them, possessions, the money with each one of them and so on. When he has sufficiently convinced them of his powers, he is asked to find out if there is anything troubling them and if there is, to name it. He then sets about his task, and by an elaborate process - of which no details are available to the author, begins to examine the several influences ^s/at work in the area. It may take him many hours to find out what he seeks. Then he stands up before them and says, " You, there is something in your house. You want to know why such incidents happened (naming several incidents) and who is the cause. I know who it is. But if I tell you, will you promise not to quarrel about it here, but quietly go back to your village? You may do what you like there. If you promise me I shall tell you." When the assurances are given by the people now anxious to know the verdict, he declares in a loud voice, -

" There is one who lives in such-and-such a location in the village. In front of his house, there is a certain tree. In his house, there is a woman, who is the daughter of the



KAJALIO Deviating Witchcraft (Courtesy - Solanki)



Gathla Ritual: Acceptance of gathla by the spirit-in-possession.

lineage X of the Village Y. She is the daughter of such-
 and such a person and her name is " When the woman
 is named thus in public, the concerned person who may be
 her husband, a son or the father-in-law, hangs his head
 in shame and anger that there should be a witch in his
 home. But quietly the entire party returns to the village,
 unhappy and angry. Generally the relatives of the woman
 who has been named are restrained from going home for some
 time, lest they should kill her in their anger. But,
 X invariably people who act out as a united group, come back
 with gifts to them. For the close relatives of the accused
 women feel that the whole affair of divination might have
 been cooked up by somebody out of jealousy, and they often
 contest the decision. In one case, Copla of Siporo, refused
 to accept the decision of the witch-doctor that his wife
 was a witch, and when he was given the alternative of
 either sending his wife out of the village, or getting
 out himself, prosecuted the people of all the village in the
 X court at Daria, and had then jailed. But he was forced ^{himself} to
 leave the village for some years by the village assembly
 (Panch), for endangering the safety of the people.

X When a woman has been declared ^awitch, several
 courses of action may be resorted to, either to neutralise the
 evil in her, or to eliminate her. In most such cases, she is
 just banished out of her original village, and is asked to
 go where she will. She may seek refuge either with her
 father or a brother, or with a married daughter or a sister.

Here she is harmless and so may be allowed to live in peace. After the lapse of a few years, she may even return to the village of her husband and take up her residence there once more, as did Gopla and his wife recently. If her return is not followed by any fresh incidents, the people of the village raise no objection.

Sometimes when a woman denies being a witch, she is allowed to prove her innocence by ordeal. But ordeals are very painful and difficult, the accused having very little chance of emerging successful from it. Sometimes, a woman confesses to being a witch, and expresses her readiness to have the evil in her exorcised. This involves an exceedingly painful procedure. She is taken out of the village to the cremation ground. There her eyes are filled with powdered chillies and pepper, and are bound by a thick black bandage. She is then strung up by her feet to the overhanging branch of a large tree. A fire of green branches and leaves are built up beneath her, so that she is well choked by the smoke that pours out. Then the witch doctor begins to swing her violently to the rhythm of a ritual chant. Occasionally he stops to command the evil in her to leave her, and seek another home. For sometime, there is no response from the now unconscious woman. Then the response comes in a wailing chant, protesting against the harsh treatment and finally accepting surrender. Then the witch doctor is convinced that the evil is really subjugated, he allows the woman to be cut down from the tree. Water is sprinkled on her

face, to revive her. When she is fully conscious, she is asked to stand up facing a large rock. All the people are asked to get behind her, for the evil in her soul is now concentrated in her eyes and will expend itself during the first few moments of her eyes being unbound. Whatever is within range of her glance could be annihilated. Then her eyes are unbound, by the witch doctor who stands close behind, and she is ordered not to look behind till permission is given. All the evil in her eyes is expended on the rock. After some time, she is permitted to turn back. Normally, I am told, her eyes are not at all affected by the harsh treatment they have received.

It is rather significant to note here that a person so exorcised, tends to be treated more or less like a person recovering from a dangerous illness. No ill-will is held towards her even by those who earlier held her responsible for their misfortunes. Further it is regarded as very impolite and unkind to speak harshly of a woman who has been banished from her village on grounds of witchcraft and so has sought refuge elsewhere. "We cannot do us or mine any harm, so why blame her? Let her be in peace".

This attitude seems to indicate that a witch is not fully responsible for being one. It is some quality in her that makes her a danger to others. She is guilty only in as far as she consciously aligns herself with any evil spirit and engages in evil practice. But more often the evil is in her soul and she herself may be unconscious

of her dangerous qualities and therefore may not be held responsible for it. When a witch confesses to being one, and expresses readiness to be rid of the evil, even though it means undergoing a painful ordeal, she is absolved of all responsibility for her past actions. She is accepted as a normal member of the community. But the same courtesy is not extended to a sorcerer. He is a fully conscious agent, who turned to antisocial deeds for purely personal reasons and who is prepared to employ his knowledge to aid people in their covetous and anti-social deeds. Such a person is regarded with great contempt and dislike. If a man is found practicing sorcery, he is summarily driven out from his village, and a warning is sent to all the neighbouring villages not to shelter him. He is a conscious evil agent, and remains as such wherever he goes.

Sorcerers and witches who remain unrepentant are believed to pay for their misdeeds in this life only. When they grow old, they fall a prey to mysterious and terrible diseases that give them a very painful and prolonged death. Their skin erupts with running sores all over the body, and maggots feed on them while they are still alive. Such persons are cast out of their houses to die a lonely, lingering death. Evil is always repaid with evil. The sin they committed in their life-time must be met with punishment. They are held to deserve it. Their bodies are not buried but buried, even as those of persons who die from small pox, without any ritual. But while the latter are exposed

after a fortnight and cremated with all funerary ritual, the corpses of the sorcerers and witches are left untouched. Their ghosts swell the ranks of the numerous malignant spirits.

VI.

In the final analysis, the beliefs and attitudes described so far seem to have been built around the agnatic kinship group as a basic element in their social structure. Whether it is the ancestral spirit conceived of as the benevolent guardian, the malignant ghost and the witch, their actions are supposed to be of great significance for the agnatic kinship group.

When a person dies, only his bodily existence ceases to be. But his spirit continues to exist. This belief in the continuation of spiritual existence influences the survivors to a considerable extent in their conduct. Such a spirit continues to take an interest in the welfare of the agnatic kin group and the village, of which it was a member while alive. The more significant he was in life, the more influential a spirit he becomes. The loss of the corporeal body is a great disadvantage. The spirit can no longer participate in the deliberations of the living. But this is more than compensated for, in that the spirit would be able to serve the interests of its people in certain quarters, where no living being may have any access. It would be able to guard them against any evil spirit and intercede on their behalf with the deities. Further it is in a better position to guide its people, as its scope of comprehension widens considerably. Primarily,

it is interested in the welfare of the kinship group of which it was a member; but it is also kindly disposed towards the entire community. Malango is an ancestor of the Daxor clan. But he is the guardian of the entire Hill community.

But the malignant spirits concentrate their destructive activities mostly against their agnatic kin. They are motivated by jealousy and hatred. Having met an abnormal death, by either accident, murder, or suicide, they are bitter at the loss of life. Observing their lands, their houses and other property being enjoyed by their survivors, they seek to inflict injury on the latter. It is significant that they attack mostly children. Children symbolize the continuity of the group. Their destruction would mean the extinction of the kinship group as such. Hence it is imperative that the malignant spirits should be placated. Actually from a human sense point of view, it would seem as though the hypothesis of spirits provide an explanation for the existence of considerable infant mortality.

It has been pointed out in an earlier section, how an examination of the concepts of *visheṇ* and the witch, reveals them as having a considerable bearing on the structure of the joint family. It was seen how the concepts would appear to be rationalizations of actual conflicts.

These beliefs and attitudes significantly affect their behaviour towards one another within the framework of the family. The belief in ancestral spirits acts as an

integrative force holding together the several branches of the family even when they have migrated to different villages. So long as a person is aware that his ancestors belonged to a particular village and that their spirits are still resident in the ⁰grave of that village, he may not completely sever his connections with his clan fellows in that village. He goes there at least once a year, and in association with the branch of his lineage there, offers sacrifices of souls and goats to the ancestors. Sometimes, it might so happen that a person has gone over to a distant village and is therefore prevented from maintaining his contacts. But there are quite a few instances of people, who had to leave fertile lands in far-distant villages and return to the ordinary fields in their original village, as they were warned by their ancestors not to desert them. In a few cases, they did not return, but made special visits to their original villages to offer sacrifices and to erect memorial stones for their dead in that ancestral grave. Thus their beliefs in the ancestral spirits actually force them to maintain contacts with different branches of the lineage.

But their belief in witches and witchcraft lead them in an entirely new direction. Whenever an accusation is levelled against a 'wife' of the family, whether it is proved or not, it surely results in a rift in the family. A man is not generally prepared to believe that his wife, mother and son's wife is a witch. He always tends to regard

the accusation as an attempt to humiliate him. When the charge is proved, he may even yield to the majority opinion in the village and send the accused person out, so he may contest the decision going to the extent of fighting the other members of his family. The law is on the side of a person who is accused of witch-craft. Actually a man was able to get all his brothers and his father's brothers jailed on the plea, that they were slandering and harassing his wife. But he himself had to leave the village, because he was ostracised. The result however is the same. The solidarity of the joint family is broken.

Finally, the belief that most of their ills and diseases are due to the displeasure of the spirits and deities has resulted in an indifference to modern medicine. Even where facilities exist in Buriya and Kathiawar towns for an instance, very few Shils avail of them. One reason is that they distrust the system itself. The doctor who professes to heal, who should be able to find out what is wrong immediately he touches a person according to a Shil's code of efficiency, wants to be told everything, before he can prescribe the medicine. A Shil would rather ^eproffer the more miraculous powers of the Kâjalis or even the ordinary natius, who is apparently able to tell him everything - down to certain personal details which he does not remember to have even hinted at, and quality and size of his livestock etc.,

Secondly, a physician limits himself to curing the disease - which ^{is} a Shil is only a physical manifestation of a deeper ill.

Unless you tackle it at its very roots the disease is only apparently cured. It percolates and raises its head again, the moment the influence of the drug is removed. It is essential to know why the victim has been selected for visitation. Is it a punishment? If so, who is offended and why? Further, how best may such spirit or deity be warded off? These are the really vital issues. Once these questions are satisfactorily solved, the victim automatically recovers.

If on the other hand, emphasis is laid upon curing the manifest disease itself, the deity might well be offended and harass the corresponding victim and his relatives⁶.

VI.

Mal ritual complex has certain clear objectives—abundant crops, good health among the people and their livestock, and continuity of the lineage through many children. It was seen earlier, how dangers from malevolent agencies are apprehended as specially directed towards crops, livestock and towards the children. Their beliefs regarding witchcraft for instance, are closely related to their lineage and kinship structure, an expression of the affinal conflicts, through the women who marry into a family. The tutelary aspect of the ancestral spirits has significance especially in this context.

A Mal is practical enough to realise that though in the end, good and the virtuous may triumph, and the evil forces vanquished, plenty of mischief may be done during the short interval, when the forces of evil hold the sway. —

Therefore, the evil spirits must be propitiated and kept in good humor. In any village, the larger emphasis in their ritual complex has been on the ghosts and other malignant spirits.

The great ritual - referred to as gagabolen (lit. a ritual which does not permit any speaking) offers an interesting contrast to that associated with the deities and ancestral spirits (gala, lit. getting together). Generally, a gala is an annual event and is associated with an important phase of their economic life. Most of them are harvest festivals where an element of gratitude, coupled with a prayer for better harvests during the succeeding years, is evident. A few others mark the end of the post-harvest vacation, which occurs during the dry summer months and signalise the commencement of agricultural activities. Uli, Akhatrij and Divasa, may be mentioned as instances of this.

Some gala are not annual, but are associated with the prosperity and good health of a village or of a joint family. The gala of Indraj is an example of this kind. When for some years, a family or a village finds itself beset by a variety of misfortunes, then the headman (ladari) or the head of the family as the case might be, takes a vow that if during the next year all his troubles vanish, he would call a gala in honour of Indraj and offer him a sacrifice. In case his prayers are answered, he sends out invitation to all the neighbouring villages to sing and dance at his place in honour of Indraj, on a particular day. On that night, he would sacrifice a male buffalo calf (gajal), 8-12 goats and as many fowls. All the guests are fed

with the sacrificial meat and liquor and portions of meat are sent to all these affines who could not attend. The expenses would be heavy for the host if an individual. But its performance would also confer prestige.

A gala is characterized by a gay and carefree atmosphere. Men, women and children from far-away places come to take part in it. They are mainly interested in the singing and dancing that goes on all night. Only a few, such as the headmen of the village who is responsible for conducting the gala, a few devotees who attend for specific purposes (the childless couple who attend the gala of Badarje, for instance,) the worshippers and the priest, are interested in the ritual aspect of the gala. Even they, however, do not pay such close attention to all the minor details of the ritual ^{as} ritual ~~aspects~~. Slight infringements and violations are either overlooked or excused. For instance, some years ago, the priest officiating in the Akhatril gala discovered just before offering the major sacrifice, that the lavazis (pots of freshly distilled liquor) which had to be offered to Badarje, were not ready. The headmen of the four gadi villages concerned had decided that in view of the prohibition laws in force in the State, liquor ought not to be used. But the priest was furious that the laws of an alien power (which rarely regard the Bombay Government as their own) even to this day, should be allowed to interfere with their ritual life. He declared that unless the lavazis were provided in accordance with the tradition, he would

not proceed with the ritual. The headmen were worried. Only this particular priest had the traditional right to officiate in this gala. If the gala was to have any effect at all, the sacrifice must be offered before dawn, and it was already long past midnight. Further, they were afraid that the people who were gathered there, might start the riot if the gala was cancelled. They were also afraid of breaking the law. As the police who were there on security duty were taken into confidence. After much argument, the priest agreed to carry on, provided three covered pots were kept before the shrine, in accordance with tradition. It did not matter much, even if they contained only water. Nobody except those who had the right of gala (drinks of liquor offered by the spirit- in- possession, to the sponsors and guests of the gala after the major sacrifice, symbolizing commensality : would know the difference. and they were in the conspiracy, any way. The conventions were thus kept up, without breaking the law, and an unhappy situation was averted..

Another distinctive characteristic of a gala, is the large area of participation permitted to women. In the gala of Indraj and Akhatrij, women will be noticed singing and dancing happily all around the shrine. Women are permitted even to enter the gala sanctuary of the shrine on occasions, during the Akhatrij for instance, when a woman actually approaches the possessed priest to receive the five nange fruits of fertility from the spirit in possession (gala Indraj). In the Indraj gala, young women go in front of the dala (garden of Akhatrij),

when it is taken out in procession for the final immersion ceremony (Kaste XVII) singing songs in praise of Indraj and bearing the several auspicious objects on their heads. Further, an unmarried daughter is permitted to attain ritual purity and attend the needs of the main participants in the Indraj Yajna and even in the more sacred Babadeo ritual. ^{spirits} brooded over by the shades of ancestral. The main belief here being that in the presence of the deity or babadeo, whatever vulnerability or evil there might be in women, would be rendered ineffective.

As embolism on the other hand, takes place in an atmosphere of tense anxiety that yields place to relief for all concerned, once it is successfully terminated. It is not an annual feature in the sense, there is no specified day on which it should be performed. An embolism is prompted by a series of untoward incidents that take place in a family or in a village. Such rituals may be performed only during the dark (dark half of the lunar month), as contrasted to the light, which always takes place during the brighter half. One major ghost ritual - Sunderakudvanu (lit. cleaning the cattle shed), is a propitiatory sacrifice offered annually to all the positive and malignant spirits. No specific date is set for its performance; but unless it is performed first, sacrifices may not be offered to patides (the principal ancestral spirits in this case Nalarje).

A ghost ritual is strictly local ritual, restricted to a village or an agnatic kinship group. Outsiders are not invited. But if they happen to be there at that time,



Indraj: Chandio in progress
after the sacrifice to the
dal (garden of Adonis of
Frazer)



Dancing with dal, just
before its immersion in
the river.

they may be invited to remain as observers, and given a share in the sacrificial meat and liquor. Such a ritual always takes place on the outskirts of the village, but never inside, and in specified places. Rituals associated with visión and havi take place in the ancestral grove of the village; Gundara ^K ~~X~~ ^{takes place} ~~Gundara~~ in a clearing in the jungle, where the cattle of the village take their mid-day rest, and the ritual associated with havi, at a point of intersection of paths leading into the village.

Active participation in a ghost ritual is restricted to the headman of the village, the conductor of the ritual (pajara) and the officiating priest (balava) only. The others sit at a distance and observe silently. But collection of all the males of the village at the site of ritual is strictly enjoined. A few are left in the village from the sheer necessity to guard their cattle and property. But women, young as well as old, are forbidden even to approach the site of the ritual. While the ritual is in progress, a woman may not even move out of her house. At the site of the ritual, talking and moving is cut down to a minimum. It is this character of the ritual that gives it the name anabelkan.

In all gales high standards of ritual purity are enjoined upon the persons who participate directly or indirectly in the ritual. Maintenance of ritual purity would place a number of restrictions on a person. He has

to bathe and wash his clothes at least once a day. He may not move about, he sits in impure places. He may not even use a pot nor take food or drink touched or prepared by people who are impure or in a social ritual status. Further, he should avoid all intimacy with a woman, to such an extent that he may not even enter a house inhabited by a woman. When a person is in a state of ritual purity, liquor and meat are forbidden to him. In the case of a person who is about to perform an ^{important} sacrifice, he and the priest concerned will have to maintain ritual purity for ten days. They live in a hut built specially for their use, with a boy (or a girl) who remains actually pure to cook for them and attend to all their requirements. They never enter any hut, but talk to people from a distance only. A woman is ritually normal but pollution attaches to a menstruating woman. Death of any person in the village is again a pollution to the entire village. No ritual may be performed till the mourning is terminated by the funerary observances.

In an exorcism ritual the participants are all in a state of impurity. The very atmosphere is contaminated and rendered dangerous by the presence of the malignant
 x shades brooding over the ritual. To prevent contact with
 x the spirits and to draw their vengeance. All before the
 previous day and abstain from it till the ritual is over.
 When the observance has ended they abstain from it for
 to bathe to to avoid being contact with the spirits and to
 draw their vengeance. Women are not allowed to be present.
 x for they are a risk. There might be someone who is ^{infectious} ~~infectious~~.

"Don't women ever tell us such things!", and the spirits may get angry and attack them all. Further, there might even be a witch who might deliberately violate the sanctity of the ritual in order to ^Y make it futile. Even children are not allowed to be present as they may not be able to keep still and quiet and so might incur the wrath of the spirits.

The ritual sequence is elaborate, and every detail is adhered to with anxious care. Each detail is personally supervised by the priest. Much of the procedure involved in a ghost ritual is highly restricted and secret. The priest does not divulge it to persons not properly qualified. If any person is curious and tries to observe too closely, he receives an admonition that he is interfering in things that are properly the realm of a priest. "If do you bother? The priest know what he is doing (*"bawun luma bawun luma"*)"

The procedure and even the musical instruments employed at a gala are all still and collective/a pleasant atmosphere. In an ambolima on the other hand, everything tends to maintain an atmosphere of harsh violence. For instance, the instruments used are sakaka - a variety of rump, and chak, a small drum like instrument with a friction surface at one end and a percussion surface on the other. The sound produced is very harsh and is heard for miles around on a clear night, stirring terror into the hearts of the people.

This note of violence is evident & even in the tempo (time) of the ritual chant that is employed to induce spirit-possession and in the act of sacrifice itself. In Gudiara Kuvana, the priest who is possessed, takes a sword and makes a small cut in the neck of the goat that is to be sacrificed, and allows a few drops of blood to trickle on to the thiru (a broken potsherd in which the evil spirits are enshrined). Then he drops back and hands over the sword to an assistant. Another assistant picks up the goat in his arms, and followed by the spirit-bearer, and another carrying the thiru, runs right round the clearing once, and then rushes towards the end of the clearing. Just at that point, he throws down the goat violently. As it struggles to get up and tried to escape, it is cut down by the sword bearer. Immediately the carcass is taken up again and they rush off, followed by the entire assembly towards the boundary of the village, all the while drumming their mouths with their palms. They stop on the other side of the boundary and depositing the thiru and carcass of the sacrificed animal on the ground, wait for the priest (who is still possessed by Polina Mata) to approach, and wind up the proceedings.

Nothing that is used in a ghost-ritual may be taken back into the village, except the sacrificial sword. The sacrificial goat and the liquor should be consumed in silence outside the boundary of the village.

No part of it may be left unconsumed. Even the skin is stretched in fire and eaten and the bones are broken up and burnt. Only the head of the animal is left in the hikra and abandoned there. Not even the priestly men could dare touch it, for it is an offering to the malignant spirits.

Further, so long as the sacrifice is not over, pollution attaches to the entire village. No domestic work may be started till then. No hearth fires are lit. No women stir out of the house, and the cattle are not let out or the shed cleaned. After the sacrifice is offered X and the ritual has ended, the women come out and set about their daily activities. The cattle are let out and the cattle shed is thoroughly cleaned. Then they go out to the river and wash all their vessels and clothes, take a bath and bring fresh water to their houses. Then the flooring of the house and of the cattle shed is freshly plastered with cow-dung and earth. The hearth fire is lit at last and the food is prepared. However so can males feed at home that day. They get drunk and spend the rest of the day happily in singing and dancing. At least for the time being they are secure from the anger of the malignant spirits and ghosts.

Notes and References.

1. Following Evans - Fritchard, the term 'witch' is used to indicate persons "who suffer from hereditary pathological condition" and are impelled to harm other, because it is inherent in their nature. Often a witch might not even be aware of her dreadful powers, their activities being carried out by their spirits when their bodies sleep.
cf. Evans-Fritchard E.E. Witchcraft, Sorcery and Magic among the Azande. Oxford 1937.

also. I. Schapera, "Sorcery and Witchcraft in Bechuanaland", African Affairs 51-502, pp.43.
2. McKim Marriott quotes a similar belief current in eastern U.S. Probably some such beliefs are common for most peasant people of India cf. Ecology, Culture and Community. (Ed. Benjamin U.S. Mail) p.74.
3. Spirit of such a woman might be prevented from becoming malignant (vishen) by cutting open the womb and taking out the child and placing it for a moment in the lap of the corpse. If the child also comes out dead, its should be placed in her lap and cremated with her. However this practice is not common vogue for certain continental regions.
4. Shunwa. When in this state, a person is totally unconscious and all his reflexes are momentarily suspended. The entire body trembles with such violence that it is actually lifted off the ground. His head whips at a great pace and one is surprised that the spinal chord does not snap. His eyes are closed and he foams at the mouth. These along with his flying locks make him look scary and inhuman. Such a state is regarded as conducive for spirit-possession. After the spirit has receded, the trance is broken, and the priest emerges from it, utterly exhausted (See Notes of E. 1971).
5. I may define and state the exact sense in which this term are used in this paper. When a person is possessed and his words are identified with spirits, he is referred to as a medium. When one professes to foretell future events, or discover the causes either natural or supernatural underlying human ills and diseases by the aid of spirits or by ritual practices and observances, he is a diviner. A healer is a person who strives to give a relief from the several ills and diseases either by administering indigenous drugs or by ritual exorcision. When a priest specialises to a high degree in divination, exorcision

and elimination of witches and sorcerors, he is referred to here as a witch-doctor (Kajalio babava). Further by a worshipper (Pujara) is meant, a person who has been entrusted with the proper organisation and co-ordination of the several elements of a ritual complex. He may be compared more to a master of ceremonies than to an actual devotee.

6. For a similar situation see Mckim Marriot Loc.cite and also, Monica Wilson, Nyakusa Ritual and Symbolism, American Anthropologist, 56-2, 1, pp. 228-42.
7. Loc.cit. p. 237.