

RELIGION & FOLKLORE OF NORTHERN INDIA

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are known as Yakka.¹ The modern pair, the Jākh and Jākhni, or, as they are sometimes called, Chor, Chorni, 'the thieves', or Chordeva, Chordevi, 'thief godlings', are said to live apart in adjoining villages. The Jākh is an uxorious husband, and he robs his own village to supply the wants of his consort. So if you see a comparatively barren village next one the crops of which are thriving, you may be sure that the Jākh lives in one and the Jākhni in the other.²

Even the great gods take their share in the protection of the fields. Thus Krishna is closely connected with agriculture, and his title Dāmodar, 'belly-rope', which legend says was applied to him because his mother tied him up to prevent him from doing mischief, has been interpreted to imply that he was originally a sheaf of wheat.³ The same may be said of Bala-rāma, brother of Krishna, called Phāla, 'ploughshare', Halabhrī, 'plough-bearer', Lāngati and Sankarshana, 'ploughman', Mūrali, 'holder of the pestle' with which rice is husked.⁴

Rohīmī, the Gāro Mother of Rice, has been already referred to, and when an Orāon has threshed his rice and is carrying it home, he leaves three or five handfuls on the threshing-floor, this rice being called Būrhi Khes, 'Old Mother Rice', who guards the floor until the next harvest and is represented as covered with straw, possibly, it has been suggested, to guard her from the Evil Eye or evil spirits, but she probably represents the powers of vegetation; and to guard his Jack-fruit trees till the next season of fruit he leaves on the tree the last Jack-fruit of the year as the Tree Guard.⁵ Bhainas of the Central Provinces worship the godling of cultivation, Thākurdeo, 'Divine Lord', on the day before the autumn crops are sown.

'On this day all the men in the village go to his shrine taking a measure of rice and a ploughshare. At the same time the Baiga or village priest goes and bathes in the tank and is afterwards carried to the assembly on a man's shoulders. Then he makes the offering and repeats a charm, and then kneeling down he strikes the earth seven times with the ploughshare and sows five handfuls of rice, sprinkling water over the

¹ E. R. E. xii. 599 ff.

² Compare the Rangsi of the Lhota Nāgas.

³ Growse, 52 f.; J. R. A. S. 1913, pp. 147, 149.

⁴ Dowson, 41.

⁵ Sarat Chandra Roy, 442.

seed. After him the villagers walk seven times round the altar of the god in pairs, one turning up the earth with the ploughshare and the other sowing and watering the seed. While this is going on the Baiga sits with his face covered with a piece of cloth, and at the end the villagers salute the Baiga and go home.'¹

Possibly the Baiga is carried on a man's shoulders after acquiring magical power by bathing because he is too 'holy' to be allowed to touch the ground, and his 'holiness' accounts also for his being veiled during the rite.

Hos in Chota Nāgpur celebrate a special festival to protect the rice crop. This, known as the Damurai, is held in May, or at the time for sowing the first rice, and it is observed in honour of the deceased ancestors and of other spirits who, if not propitiated, would prevent the seed from germinating. The offerings to them consist of a he-goat and a cock. Then follows in June the Hero Bonga, or as the Mundas call it, Harihar, 'greenery'. It aims at the propitiation of Desauli, the village tutelary godling who abides in the sacred grove. Every Munda household plants a branch of the Bhelwa tree, probably *Semecarpus anacardium*, in his field, and contributes to the general offering made by the priest in the grove of a fowl, a pitcher of beer, and a handful of rice. In July each farmer sacrifices a fowl, and after some mysterious rites one of its wings is torn off and fixed in the rice-field and dung-heap. If this be omitted it is supposed that the rice will not come to maturity. The festival corresponds to the Karam of the Kols.² Lhota Nāgas bury a piece of rhinoceros bone near their fields to make the crops grow.³

A good illustration of agricultural magic is found in what have been called the Gardens of Adonis.⁴ In the northern plains this is known as Jāyi, Jawāra, Bhūjaria, the barley festival, held in conjunction with the women's feast of the Salono in the rainy season, at the full moon of Sāwan (July-August), when women tie the Raksha or protective amulet round the wrists of their male friends to guard them during this unhealthy season. Under the name of Suninon or Sunonia, derived, like Salono, from that of the month Sāwan, it is described in the

¹ Russell, T. C. ii. 231.

² Dalton, 198.

³ Mills, 169.

⁴ Frazer, G. B. 'Adonis, Attis, Osiris', i. 236 ff.