

# THE HOUSE IN INDIA FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF SOCIOLOGY AND FOLKLORE.

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THE questions connected with the house and house-building are of special importance to the student of sociology and folklore. The building and occupation of the house mark one of the most momentous transitions in the social history of mankind--the abandonment of nomadic life; the more definite association of the members of the tribe or clan by the foundation of a village, involving the more intimate union of the individual with those who are his blood kindred; the beginnings of communal life, which, again, leads to common worship, to communion with the deity in sacrifice and feast. The construction and occupation of the house thus constitute a *rite de passage*, a break with long established tradition and with the customary amenities of life, the new environment exercising its influence on the inmates, and bringing with it new duties and responsibilities.

Hence it is inevitable that the new dwelling should be protected by a system of devices and taboos designed to avert the dangers which primitive man, surrounded by a host of spirits generally malignant, has constantly before his mind. To this are added the fears inspired by the Evil Eye or by witchcraft. Dangers such as these naturally centre round the house and its tenants, and

the ingenuity of man is ever devising special modes of protection.

The house, again, in its form and adaptation to the use and convenience of its inmates, represents a continuous process of evolution, from the rudest form of shelter which satisfies the wants of the nomad, to the abode which the well-to-do classes provide to secure the comforts and amenities of life, ending with the mansion of the nobleman and the palace of the prince. In civilisations such as ours this process of evolution is often obscure; many of the links in the chain are absent or unrecognisable. It is only by a study of the domestic life of more primitive societies that the facts can be grouped in any semblance of order. Fortunately, in the teeming population of our Indian Empire, with its multitudinous tribes and castes, each more or less completely isolated from the other by differences of race, belief, and culture, we are able to study the successive phases of the evolution. It is, then, mainly to questions connected with the Indian house that I now venture to direct your attention.

A survival of the stage at which houses of any kind were not generally known may be detected in the habit of celebrating sacrifices and other ceremonial rites in the open air. The temple in India is intended merely as an abode for the god, not for congregational worship. As a natural consequence of this we find that most rites and social meetings take place in the open air, without the erection of a special building, and people engaged in the service of the gods or those who adopt a religious life, like many of the ascetic Orders, during their wanderings shelter under trees and never enter a house except perhaps during the torrential rain of the monsoon. This feeling is illustrated by a story told by Mr. Rose of the saint Bahāu-l-haqq tearing away the tapestry from the roof of the tomb of the saint Shaikh Farīd Badru-d-dīn Shakkarganj, by which apparent sacrilege he enabled that saint to attain the highest

heaven, into which his entry had hitherto been impeded by the roof over the shrine.<sup>1</sup>

The materials of the oldest Indo-European houses consisted of wood, basket-work, and clay.<sup>2</sup> In the early period of Indian history brick was used for the foundations and plinths of houses, the upper structure being of wood, which possessed the advantage that wide spaces could be roofed which could not be spanned by masonry arches.<sup>3</sup> The use of stone for architecture dates from the age of the great Emperor Asoka (B.C. 273-32). Even at the present day the hut roofed with straw or reeds is the normal type of house, and there is a remarkable taboo in some places against the use of bricks or tiles for building. In Bengal brick walls are supposed to attract the Evil Eye because such buildings indicate prosperity and naturally attract Nemesis; but some well-to-do people defy the risk because they secure some protection from burglars.<sup>4</sup> In Khândesh, up to recent times, tiled roofs were proscribed, and the failure of some rich merchants who violated the taboo was quoted as an example to sceptics.<sup>5</sup> In the Panjāb, in some

<sup>1</sup> For hypaethral altars in Greece, see Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 3rd ed. ii. 783; among the Hebrews, Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, i. 75 *et seq.*; in Europe, G. L. Gomme, *Folklore Relics of Early Village Life*, 69; for the Panjāb, H. A. Rose, *Glossary, Tribes and Castes, Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, vol. i. (still unpublished), p. 534, referring to his paper on hypaethral shrines in the Panjāb (*Punjab Historical Society Journal*, 1914, 144 *et seq.*). Temples dedicated to the Sun in India often have no roofs, in order to allow the luminary to visit his shrine (Rose, *op. cit.* i. 193 note).

<sup>2</sup> O. Schrader, *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples*, trans. F. B. Jevons, 342. The references to the construction and materials of the house in Vedic times have been collected by A. A. Macdonell and A. B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, i. 229 *et seqq.*; P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Life in Ancient India in the Age of the Mantras*, 45 *et seqq.*

<sup>3</sup> Vincent A. Smith, *History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Census Report, Bengal*, 1911, i. 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, xii. 129, 443 note. Similar cases are quoted from the Panjāb, *Punjab Notes and Queries*, i. 97.

of the submontane tracts, tiled houses are taboo, and in some Muhammadan villages it is the rule that a house is not to be built of brick until the village mosque has been finished. Here, as is not uncommon, practical convenience reinforces the taboo, because, as Mr. Rose points out, mud buildings are much healthier, cooler, and better suited to the wants of the people than those of a more expensive kind.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, again, as the result of a curse, Rājputs in the Pānjab refuse to build brick houses, and a violation of the taboo is supposed to cause death or ruin to the builder.<sup>2</sup> Hindus who revere the Musalmān saint Miān Mitthū will not use bricks in their houses because the saint's shrine is built of this material, and the Chāhil tribe have a tale of the Swan Maiden type, in which the fairy wife escaped through an opening of a house; so, quite naturally, they do not make openings in their roofs to this day.<sup>3</sup> In Kanara most peasant houses are thatched, not on account of poverty, but because established custom, the law of the Medes and Persians, confines the use of tiles to Brahmans and the higher classes.<sup>4</sup>

In early days side by side with the use of the simple hut, for which alone materials are generally available in the great alluvial plains, caves were occupied in the mountainous and hilly tracts. The small cells cut in the rocks of Orissa are said to be among the earliest dwellings hitherto discovered in India.<sup>5</sup> These developed into the great series of Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical cave temples which are the glory of Indian architecture. Even at the present day the use of caves as dwelling-places has not quite disappeared. The Pathāns of the North-West frontier often live in caves, and use them for hiding their families

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report, Panjab, 1901, i. 27.*

<sup>2</sup> *Punjab Notes and Queries, i. 97.*

<sup>3</sup> *Rose, op. cit. i. 628, ii. 146, iii. 67, ii. 164.*

<sup>4</sup> B. H. Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community, 63.*

<sup>5</sup> W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, i. 182.*

and goods in times of danger.<sup>1</sup> The Baloch will find a place to lay his head in any cavity in the hillside.<sup>2</sup> Valentine Ball found a group of troglodytes in Central India and in the hills below Simla, and he remarks that it is extraordinary how little such people do to protect themselves from the inclemency of the weather: in one case their only protection from the keen hill air was a lean-to of loosely twined branches, such as Palaeolithic man may have used.<sup>3</sup> In Burma groups of ascetics still occupy caves on the cliffs of the Irawadi, and Mr. Nesfield suggests that the Musahars of Bengal, perhaps as a survival of cave life, prefer a hut into which they can barely creep.<sup>4</sup>

The most usual, if not the most ancient, form of the European hut was circular, and Schrader suggests that it was an imitation of the felt-covered, circular tent of the nomad.<sup>5</sup> The Ilyāt hut in Persia consists of a wooden frame of laths in a circular form covered with large felts which are fastened with a cord.<sup>6</sup> The process of converting this into a hut is shown in that of the Turkomāns, where oblong walls about four feet in height are built up of loose stones, and the whole is covered with a black cloth of goats' hair elevated on one or more posts about eight feet high in the middle of the enclosure.<sup>7</sup> The Indian examples seem to indicate that the circular form of the hut was ultimately derived from the habit of bending down, in a circular shape, the branches of some flexible tree like the bamboo. Mr. V. A. Smith has shown that the conical

<sup>1</sup> Sir T. H. Holdich, *The Indian Borderland*, 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Census Report, Baluchistan*, 1911, i. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Jungle Life in India*, 588 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, i. 169; *Calcutta Review*, lxxxvi. 36; see below the account of the Juāng and Orāon huts.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* 345.

<sup>6</sup> J. J. Morier, *Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 251, with illustrations.

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, 636.

form of the stupa, the solid cupola intended for the safe custody of relics, or to mark a spot sacred in Buddhist legend, originated in the curved bamboo roof built over a circular hut-shrine.<sup>1</sup> The origin of the barrel roof of the Buddhist chaitya appears in the Toda hut, "shaped like a half barrel, with the barrel-like roof projecting for a considerable distance beyond the first partition containing the door"; while that used for funereal purposes is rectangular, with a rude thatch supported by a ridge-pole, and end and side posts.<sup>2</sup> A survival of the same kind has been traced in the curvilinear form of the roof in some Bengal buildings of the present day.<sup>3</sup> In the same way, the tents of black wool, woven by Bedawi women, are generally supported by three parallel rows of poles lengthways and crossways—the highest line being the centre—and the covering is pegged down. The result is that the outlines of the roof form two or more hanging curves, and these, as Sir R. Burton remarks, are a characteristic of the Tartar and Chinese architecture; they are preserved in the Turkish, and sometimes in the European kiosque, and they have extended to the Brazil, where the upturned eaves, often painted in vermilion below, at once attract the traveller's notice.<sup>4</sup>

Circular huts are not uncommon in India. In Mallāni, in Rājputāna, the people live in bee-hive shaped huts, each family having a separate enclosure fenced by hedges of thorns, and in the time of the Emperor Akbar the inhabitants of Ajmer used to live in similar huts.<sup>5</sup> In Car Nicobar the huts have the main portion of the building covered by

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* 17.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Rivers, *The Todas*, 28, 583 f., 339, with photographs; E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, vii. 129, with photograph.

<sup>3</sup> J. Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1899), 474, 545 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, ed. 1893, v. 307.

<sup>5</sup> *Rajputana Gazetteer*, ii. 274; *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed. H. S. Jarrett, ii. 267.

a conical roof made of the mid-ribs of the coco palm or laths of the areca, and with the leaves of the latter the floor is carpeted. These houses have not a nail or peg in the entire structure, the joints being neatly fitted and tied with wisps of cane. In spite of their fragility they stand the violent gales of the monsoon.<sup>1</sup> In Masulipatam that observant traveller, John Fryer, remarked that the poorer houses, "both in their High Streets and Allies, are thatched, cast round as Beehives, and walled with mud."<sup>2</sup> In unsheltered places and at the headquarters of septs the Andamanese built circular huts with eaves nearly touching the ground.<sup>3</sup> The same form is adopted by some of the nomad tribes. The pastoral Baloch, for instance, use a number of long slender poles, bent towards each other, over which are laid pieces of coarse camel-hair felt.<sup>4</sup> Among the same people only the well-to-do use even sun-dried bricks in house building; most of them build with stone and mud with rafters covered with palm leaves, and on the top thick layers of plaster. But one of the tribes will not plaster their roofs because an ancestor died under a plastered roof. Many have merely a "lodge in a garden of cucumbers," but the most characteristic shelter is the hut made of a few bent poles and goats' hair matting.<sup>5</sup>

This early form of circular hut, owing to hieratic conservatism, survives in round temples, like that of Vesta in Rome, and in some Christian Churches, like that of the Temple, St. Sepulchre at Cambridge, Little Maplestead in Essex and St. Sepolchro at Bologna, besides several in Rome, derived from the round temple of pagan times.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Journal Anthropological Institute*, xxxii. 236 f.

<sup>2</sup> *A New Account of East-India and Persia*, ed. 1909, i. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Census Report*, 1901, 61.

<sup>4</sup> A. W. Hughes, *The Country of Balochistan*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Census Report, Baluchistan*, 1911, i. 27.

<sup>6</sup> S. O. Addy, *The Evolution of the House*, i. *et seq.*; L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, v. 99; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. iv. 178, xxiii. 609.

This round circular form of temple was derived from the round shepherd's huts in the Campagna, which are in use to the present time.<sup>1</sup>

Another primitive type of dwelling is used by the Gypsy-like vagrants and by some jungle tribes. An encampment of Sānsiyas or Hābūras in Northern India consists of rude shelters of mats or blankets suspended on short poles. They supplement these in the rainy season by booths made of grass, leaves and branches. But the true vagrant, like the Magahiya Dom, makes no hut of any kind; he lives in the open, and it is only in the very worst weather that he seeks shelter under the house eaves in some neighbouring village. The Kilikets, a wandering tribe in Bijapur, live in flimsy reed booths, so small that the inmates cannot stand upright. In obedience to tribal custom they must move to another place every three months, but sometimes, for the sake of convenience, instead of moving the hut, the fireplace is shifted from one corner to another.<sup>2</sup> The huts of the Sholigas of Mysore consist of bamboos with both ends stuck in the ground, so as to form an arch, which is covered with plantain leaves.<sup>3</sup> General Dalton describes the houses of the Juāngs, one of the most primitive tribes of Bengal, who up to a short time ago were clothed only in leaves and are perhaps so still: "They are the smallest that human beings ever deliberately constructed as dwellings. They measure about six feet by eight, and are very low, with doors so small as to preclude the idea of a corpulent householder. Scanty as are the above dimensions for a family dwelling, the interior is divided into two compartments, one of which is the storeroom, the other used for all domestic arrangements. The Paterfamilias and all his belongings of the female sex huddle together in this one stall not much larger than a dog-kennel; for the

<sup>1</sup> *Journal Roman Studies*, iii. 245.

<sup>2</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, xxiii. 198.

<sup>3</sup> F. Buchanan, *Journey through Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, ii. 178.



males there is a separate dormitory."<sup>1</sup> The doorway of an Orāon hut is about five feet high, and above it is a log which supports the roof, called by the significant name of "the forehead-breaker."<sup>2</sup>

In the Hill Tracts of Eastern India we meet another type of house. The people "build their houses of bamboo, raised from the ground about ten feet, with numerous smaller bamboo props supporting the floor, the roof, and the walls, in every conceivable direction. The floor and the walls are made of bamboo split and flattened out; the numerous crevices give access to every breeze, and render a hill house one of the coolest and most pleasant of habitations. The roof is of bamboo cross-pieces, thatched with palmyra. . . . This forms an impervious and lasting roof, which need only be renewed once in three years, whereas the ordinary grass-thatched roof has to be repaired every year."<sup>3</sup> In Orissa the Khond house is made entirely of wood, not a single nail being used, and its owner erects it himself, his only tools being a hatchet and a chisel.<sup>4</sup> In South India the Malāyālams and Ullādans build their houses raised above the ground on clumps or short posts of bamboo to avoid damp.<sup>5</sup>

When we come to the houses of the peasantry and of the artizans and labourers in towns, the form varies from the mere shed, open in front, with three mud walls, and roofed with a sloping thatch of grass and reeds, up to the more pretentious house in which the landlord or his more prosperous tenant lives. If you see a good brick house in a

<sup>1</sup> *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 153 *et seq.* In Persia a poor man's door is scarcely three feet in height, the object being to prevent servants of the nobles from forcing their way in on horseback, Morier, *op. cit.* 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Census Report, Bengal*, 1911, i. 47. The beam over the door in the Orāon hut is known as *Kāpārphora*, "skull-breaker," P. Dehon, *Memoirs Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1906, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South-eastern India*, 42 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> *Census Report, Bengal*, 1911, i. 47.

<sup>5</sup> L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer, *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, i. 29 *et seq.*, 59.

village it probably belongs to the money-lender. There are few climates in the world where, except in rainy season, the peasant less needs shelter than in India. He generally lives, works, and sleeps in the open air, and the house is little more than a storehouse for his cattle, grain, implements, and scanty furniture, or for his women folk when he reaches the stage of respectability which allows him to seclude them. To describe a few houses of this typical class.

In Bengal you enter with your face to the east a small door opening on the village street, and thence into an open yard, on the west side of which is the "big hut," with walls of mud, and the roof thickly thatched with rice straw. The middle beam of this thatch is of palm wood, and the floor is raised at least four or five feet from the ground. The hut is divided into two compartments, the one a sleeping-room, the other a store-room. The verandah forms the family sitting-room, while in the sleeping-room are kept the family brass vessels and other valuables. On the south side of the yard is a smaller, ruder hut, used to isolate the wife at her confinement, while at other times the farm implements are kept in it. Other similar rooms are occupied by the owner's brothers or other relations who live with him. Besides these there is a cowhouse with large earthen mangers holding the animals' food, and near it is a granary, in which the grain is protected by ropes of twisted straw, with a straw-rick which supplies fodder.<sup>1</sup>

In Bombay the house of the village headman has walls made of clay mixed with chopped grass and kneaded by the feet of buffaloes. The flat roof rests on beams, the whole covered with clay which is beaten hard and smoothed, a shelter against the pitiless sun, with a slope to carry off the rain water. The poorer tenant occupies a shed partially enclosed with clay walls or wattled boughs, the roof of grass or millet-stalks.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lal Bihari Day, *Bengal Peasant Life*, 28 et seqq.

<sup>2</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, xii. 130.

In the northern hills the house assumes the type of the Swiss chalet, the walls of rubble masonry rising sometimes to as many as four stories to make up for the scantiness of the site on the hillside ; the floors boarded, with on two sides strong verandahs ornamented with carved and painted woodwork. The roof is made of shingles of pine or of bamboo, laid over a framework of wood, and kept in their places with heavy stones to prevent damage from storms. Immediately under the roof is a store-room, the floor formed of clay rammed hard, which forms a second roof if a leak chance to occur in the outer roofing.<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly necessary to describe the type of house used in towns, occupied by landowners and wealthy merchants. Such are the fine houses of the Seth merchants at Ajmer and other cities in Rājputāna, Delhi, Agra, or Benares, marvels of decoration in wood or stone, or those of Poona, where from a stone plinth rises a series of stories with verandahs ornamented with woodwork decorated with geometrical figures and flowers in ivory or painted wood. You will generally notice that a bit of the house is left unfinished to avoid the Evil Eye.

When we come to the religious development of the hut, we recognise in the marriage shed or pavilion an ancient model preserved by the spirit of religious conservatism. At the epoch of the Atharvaveda the Indian house was merely a wooden structure. " Pillars, four in number, were erected in the solid ground, and stays were placed obliquely against them. The corner pillars and foundation pillars were fastened together by roof beams. On these were placed long bamboo rods, to act as spars for the lofty roof. Between the corner pillars various posts, according to the size of the house, were also erected. Straw or reeds were used in bundles to fill the interstices in the walls, and to a certain extent to line the whole. Nails, clamps,

<sup>1</sup> Sir R. Temple, *Journals in Hyderabad, Kashmir, Sikkim, and Nepal*, ii. 163.

cords, and straps were used to hold the whole together.”<sup>1</sup> In general pattern at least the marriage shed conforms to this model. The Bhilālas of Central India, when they set about erecting a marriage pavilion, dig nine holes in three rows in front of their dwelling-house. In the four corners holes are dug in which bamboos are fixed, each hole having some coloured rice, a copper coin, and some betelnut placed in the bottom. This done, the bamboos are removed and teak wood posts, this being the sacred tree of the tribe, are substituted, similar posts being placed in the other holes, fixed by cross-pieces of teak, and the roof is covered with bamboos. Then the booth spirit is invited to enter its dwelling, and it is duly installed.<sup>2</sup>

Two classes of house illustrate progress in the direction of communal life: the long house of Eastern India, and that occupied by the joint family in Bengal. The long house of the Garos shelters the owners and his relations. It has three divisions: the first, with a floor of bare earth, holds implements, grain, and sometimes cattle; two or three steps higher is the public living-room, which, without partitions, is divided into well-defined areas—the abode of the house spirits, the liquor-store, the place where the unmarried girls sleep, and in which meals are taken. When a daughter of the house is married, a space is partitioned off for her and her husband in the main room.<sup>3</sup> In the Chittagong Hill Tracts the house is raised about six feet above the ground, access being gained by means of a ladder. In front is a verandah, behind it the bachelors' quarters; at the back of these are the rooms of the married members of the family, separated by mat partitions. These are apportioned according to seniority, one being reserved for

<sup>1</sup> H. Zimmer, quoted by Schrader, *op. cit.* 345.

<sup>2</sup> Major C. E. Luard, *Ethnographic Survey Central India*, art. Bhilāla, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, 35 *et seq.* For other accounts see *Journal Anthropological Institute*, xvi. 368, xxii. 244; *Gazetteer Upper Burma*, part ii. vol. i. 244; Dalton, *op. cit.* 10, 61.

the eldest married member, another for the second eldest, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

In Bengal the remarkable institution of the Joint Family necessitates a special form of house, in which the family group of relatives lives. When one of the sons marries, a new series of rooms or sheds is added to the existing building for his accommodation. The house is ruled by the Karta or family manager, each group often messing apart, while the worship of the family god is carried out in common.

In Northern India traditions of war and rapine exhibit themselves in the form of the village, with narrow, winding lanes, the population crowded within the smallest possible area. In recent times the reign of law has encouraged the foundation of hamlets, an arrangement which results in more general distribution of the manure supply over the area of the village, and brings the cultivator nearer to his fields. In some towns we find a division into wards, each occupied by a special trade, with heavy wooden gates barred at sunset to protect the residents from robbers.<sup>2</sup> In some cities, like Baroda, where the memories of unrest still survive, the houses of the merchants are hidden away in back streets so as to divert attention from their wealth.<sup>3</sup>

The jungle-dwelling Bhils build their houses apart, partly because their next door neighbour may be a witch, and may bring some calamity upon them; partly through fear of infection attributed to evil spirits; partly from the practical consideration of avoiding risk of fire.<sup>4</sup> In Bengal the result of long ages of peace is shown in the straggling villages and scattered huts of the rural population. In

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report Bengal, 1911*, i. 47. Compare the large common house occupied by the members of the Nayar Taravād, or joint house, of a matri-archal household, L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer, *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, ii. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Similar arrangements are found in other oriental countries, like Egypt and Persia, E. W. Lane, *The Modern Egyptians*, 5th ed. i. 5; S. G. W. Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, 93.

<sup>3</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, vii. 122, 521.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 26.

Madras, again, the intense dread of personal pollution shown by the Nambūtiri Brahmans and Nāyars causes them to build isolated houses, each enclosed in its own compound, with tank, temple, and snake-shrine, where the inmates live safe from the pollution of low-caste neighbours. With the same object an outer porch is often built where such undesirable visitors may be received.<sup>1</sup> This isolation has sometimes a practical result. In the hill tracts of Mysore "human dwellings are few and far between. A cottage here and there, picturesquely situated on the rising ground bordering the rice fields, and hidden amidst plantations of areca palm and plantains, marks the homestead of a farmer and his family. Towns there are none, and villages of even a dozen houses rare. The incessant rain of the monsoon months confines the people to their own farms. Hence each householder surrounds himself with all he needs, and succeeds in making himself independent of the external world. The conditions of this isolated life are insupportable to immigrants from the plains."<sup>2</sup> A Hindu dreads nothing so much as to be separated from his kinsmen and to be deprived of the protection of his local gods.

Again, among the Mughals, the splendid halls of audience, marvels of work in marble and mosaic, open rooms, the roof supported by lines of delicately carved pillars, follow the traditions of the great reception tents used by the Mongols in Central Asia. This was the pure pan-Asiatic type, common to Nineveh, Persepolis, the palace of the Great Khan who received Marco Polo, and the Winter Palace at Peking. When these Central Asian people settled in the Indian plains, the conditions of zenana life, and in some cases the dread of assassination or outrage, caused them to adopt the plan of building small rooms,

<sup>1</sup> E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, v. 172 et seqq., 361 et seqq.; L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer, *Tribes and Castes of Cochin*, ii. 178 et seqq., 273 et seqq.; *Bombay Gazetteer*, xv. part i. 141.

<sup>2</sup> B. I. Rice, *Mysore Gazetteer*, ed. 1897, i. 3.

with narrow, winding passages, crowded together like a rabbit-warren. The Khwābgāh, or "Dream Chamber," of the Emperor Akbar in his splendid palace at Fatehpur-Sikri, where the monarch and his ladies enjoyed a siesta, is a square of less than fifteen feet. Of the palace of Firoz Shāh Tughlaq, built at Delhi in the latter half of the fourteenth century, we are told by a contemporary native annalist that "one of the arrangements was that any person, having a general acquaintance with the palace, after passing through several apartments, would arrive at the centre. This central apartment under the palace was very dark, and the passages were so narrow that if the attendants did not guide the visitor he would never be able to find his way out. Indeed, it is said that a servant once went into that place, and after he had been missing for some days, the guards went in search of him and rescued him from the darkness."<sup>1</sup> The same model was adopted by the princes of Rājputāna, where the entrances of their forts are narrow passages capable of defence against a host. In the palace of the Mahārāna of Udaipur there is not a room into which a moderately sized man could enter without stooping, and access is gained by steep staircases. Louis Rousselet describes the palace at Baroda as "entered by a dark staircase, nearly perpendicular, and so narrow that I could easily touch both walls with my elbows. It was closed at the summit by a heavy trap-door, which a servant opened and then closed behind us. 'How,' I asked myself, 'can people who, as I am informed, live surrounded by almost supernatural luxury, condemn themselves to go up and down such a break-neck affair?' The captain explained the reason of this singularity. The Mahratta nobles came into this country as usurpers; mere peasants' sons, they had expelled the ancient nobility. Being exposed to the vengeance of the dispossessed land-

<sup>1</sup> Sir H. M. Elliot, J. Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, iii. 299.

owners, each of them made his palace difficult of approach. Afterwards, their constant quarrels with the sovereign induced them to retain, as a measure of precaution, a system established as a protection against the dagger of the assassin. The stair-case always opens into a guardroom; and surprise is impossible, for one man could easily defend the passage against a hundred." <sup>1</sup> Any one who examines a ground plan of the palace at Knossos will understand why it came to be called the Labyrinth, and will recognise a common feature with the Indian palace.<sup>2</sup> In ancient Greek forts a similar arrangement of the passages caused them to turn from right to left, so that an attacking force would be compelled to expose its right or shieldless side.<sup>3</sup> In the modern Indian house used by the lower classes the entrance has a sharp turn in order to ensure the seclusion of the women.

The Indian house, then, in its plan and materials, is infinitely varied. It plays an important part in the social life of the people, and it is only natural that many taboos and superstitions centre around it.

First comes the selection of the site, a matter of primary importance. This form of divination goes back to early Aryan times. The Matsya Purāna divides earth into classes according to its colour: white and sweet-tasted, called Brāhmana; red and astringent, Kshatriya; yellow, hot and astringent, Vaisya; black, Sūdra—the four original "colours" or classes into which the Indo-Aryans divided the people. For the site of a house Brāhmana is obviously the best, Sūdra the worst. To decide the character of the soil, the builder is advised to dig a pit a cubit in

<sup>1</sup> *India and its Native Princes*, ed. 1882, 89.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. and H. B. Hawes, *Crete the Forerunner of Greece*, 48; R. M. Burrows, *The Discoveries in Crete*, 107 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> C. Schuchhardt, *Schliemann's Excavations*, 103 f.; J. B. Bury, *History of Greece*, 13; W. Ridgeway, *Early Age of Greece*, 3 *et seq.*; J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias*, ii. 10.



depth, to smear the sides of it with clay, and to place within it a lighted lamp. If the lamp burns uniformly and brightly, the ground is fit for building, otherwise it is bad. Another method was, after excavating the pit, to replace the earth in it. If it should fill the hole and leave a surplus, the omen, according to the rules of sympathetic magic, was favourable; if it barely filled the hole, it was indifferent; if it proved insufficient to fill it, the site was positively bad. The presence or absence of certain trees, again, was a good test of the suitability of the site. If bones, especially those which proved to be those of Chandāla or outcast were found on excavating the foundations, the omen was highly inauspicious. Even if no bones were found, the wise man was advised to perform a special act of expiation to avoid the chance of such dangerous things being found later on.<sup>1</sup> In North India it is believed that if when the excavation is being made the first stroke of the spade turns up charcoal, which savours of the funeral pyre or suggests that fire may destroy the building, the masons will soon die; if broken tiles appear, their wives will die; if ashes are found, the owner will die; if bones, his wife will die.<sup>2</sup>

The jungle-dwelling Savaras place on the proposed site as many grains of rice as there are married couples in the household, and cover them over with a coconut shell. These are examined next day, and if none are missing, the site is approved.<sup>3</sup> When the Shans of Upper Burma are fixing the site of a house, ten baskets of rice are brought to the place, and a grain from each is laid in the middle of the ground, and covered with a mat or basket. Next morning if they are found to be uninjured by ants, grubs, or other creatures, the omen is favourable.<sup>4</sup> In Madras, if the owner should fall ill while the work is going on, no one would

Rajendralala Mitra, *The Indo-Aryans*, i. 90 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *North Indian Notes and Queries*, v. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Thurston, *op. cit.* vi. 311; cf. *Census Report Bengal*, 1911, i. 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Gazetteer Upper Burma*, part II, vol. i. 441.

dream of taking over the building and completing it.<sup>1</sup> This explains the state of dilapidation into which houses, even if they belong to wealthy people, are allowed to fall. This is not due to the indifference of the owners, but because they believe that the original builder has exhausted the good luck, and that any one who repairs or adds to an existing temple or other building of the kind gains no merit from his expenditure. At the same time, in more progressive parts of the country, like the Panjāb, it is said to be lucky to be always adding to and repairing a house; but in Bahāwalpur this is qualified by the rule that the extension should be to the front and not to the rear.<sup>2</sup>

In many places, for the same reason, it is held unlucky to build a new village on a deserted site. In such a case it is a good plan to call the brethren together—thus indicating that the matter concerns the group and not the individual, and that the ill luck will not fall upon any single person,—and to plant a pole to the north of the site, the Himālaya being the abode of the gods. Rice, betelnut, sugar, and a piece of red cloth are buried at the base of the pole. If the pole takes root, it is a good omen, and the tree which springs from it becomes the holy tree of the community.<sup>3</sup> In Gujarāt, in some places, the site itself is worshipped, and a wooden peg besmeared with red is driven into the ground and worshipped with an offering of red lac—which looks as if it symbolised a sacrifice, perhaps human—sandalwood ointment and rice; the peg is called that of Shesh Nāg, the world serpent, on which the earth is believed to rest.<sup>4</sup>

In South India, as might have been expected in a Brahman-ridden land, the regulations are more precise. The site should abound in milky trees and flowers; its shape should be quadrangular; it should be smooth and

<sup>1</sup>J. E. Padfield, *The Hindu at Home*, 5.

<sup>2</sup>*Census Report*, 1901, i. 28.

<sup>3</sup>*North Indian Notes and Queries*, iv. 35.

<sup>4</sup>R. E. Enthoven, *Folk-Lore Notes*, vol. i. Gujarāt, 68.

level, sloping to the east, producing a hard sound when struck; there should be a stream close by running from left to right; the earth should be sweet and fertile, of uniform colour, with water a cubit from the surface—a curious rule which shows how little questions of health affect the matter. Dangerous symptoms are that the ground is circular or semi-circular, in shape like a trident, the back of a fish, an elephant, a turtle, or the face of a cow. It should not be near a place abounding in human skulls, stones, worms, anthills, slimy soil, ashes, or other unclean things.<sup>1</sup>

The site is often fixed by a process of divination. When the site of the city of Mandalay was being selected, a few persons were chosen who had to purify themselves by prayers and incantations. They were sent out at night in various directions, usually to the south. When they arrived at the point fixed they were ordered to wait till they heard someone speak. Whatever was said was carefully recorded and taken to an expert, who interpreted the purport.<sup>2</sup> A common belief is that when one of the local animals shows extraordinary bravery, the site is lucky. When Rāja Darrāva was hunting, a hare turned and killed one of his dogs. Admiring his bravery, he chose the spot as the site of the town of Dhārwar. He thought that a place which bore brave animals would bear brave men.<sup>3</sup> Some Kallans, a vagrant tribe in Madras, were once out hunting, when a peacock attacked their dogs. They believed the land to be so fortunate that they migrated there in a body.<sup>4</sup> A man in Ratnagiri vowed that he would build a mosque wherever a bull that he let loose stopped. Hence the mosque at Bālapur was built on its present site.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anantha Krishna Iyer, *op. cit.* ii. 11. For similar customs in Northern Europe see P. B. Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, ii. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazetteer Upper Burma*, part i. vol. i. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, xxii. 707 note.

<sup>4</sup> Thurston, *op. cit.* iii. 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, x. 320 note; cf. W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, 2nd ed. ii. 50.

It is important to link the new settlement with the old home of the emigrants. It is a common practice, when a new hamlet is founded, to take a brick from the shrine of the parent village, and make it the foundation of a new home for the local gods, just as Greek emigrants took fire from the public hearth of their city to light the fire on that of their new home.<sup>1</sup> Naaman, the Syrian, asked for two mules' burden of earth on which he might worship Yahveh in his own country, and David, when driven into exile, complained that he would be unable to worship the god of his own land.<sup>2</sup>

The foundation-laying is naturally an important crisis. In Gujarāt the owner pours water into the first pit which is dug, sprinkles lac and red powder, puts in a betelnut and coins and digs a clod himself to share in the risk.<sup>3</sup> This is because the earth spirits are disturbed by the excavation. In Khāndesh the day is selected by a diviner; the owner worships the ground, and digs a little earth before the labourers start work. When he lays the corner-stone and fixes the post in it, he does worship by pouring melted butter on it till it trickles into the soil, ties a yellow cloth filled with rice and millet round the pole, and lays holy grass on the top.<sup>4</sup> In South Kanara a large square is marked out with lines of whitewash on the ground, with magical symbols in the corners, and a roughly drawn human figure in the centre, round which flowers and boiled rice are laid: this is done on the spot selected for the site,

<sup>1</sup> The temple of Ākās Devi was removed from its original site in obedience to a dream vouchsafed to the village headman. The goddess ordered him to remove five bricks from the original to the new shrine, that she might find a resting-place there (Rose, *op. cit.* i. 330). When a Jew is buried in Holland "a handful of earth, said to have been brought from Palestine, is placed in a bag under the head of the deceased, or spread over his eyes, that he may sleep the sleep of the Just, and recollect his country," A. Esquiros, *The Dutch at Home*, 2nd ed. 1863, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings, v. 17; 1 Samuel, xxvi. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Enthoven, *op. cit.* 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, xii. 130 *et seq.*

and the figure represents the earth-spirit supposed to be dwelling in the ground : if this rite is omitted, it is believed that there will be no luck about the house.<sup>1</sup> In the Central Provinces an astrologer calculates the direction in which Shesh Nāg, the world serpent, is lying, and plants the first brick or stone to the left of that direction. The explanation of this is that snakes and elephants are believed to turn, not to the left, but always to the right. If this is done, the house will be more secure and less likely to be shaken down by the movements of Shesh Nāg, which cause the phenomenon known to us as an earthquake.<sup>2</sup> When a Buddhist king laid the foundation of a stupa, he entered the holy site, bowed to the Bhikshus or mendicants, marked out a circle with a pair of silver compasses, placed in the centre eight gold or silver coins surrounded by eight gold or silver bricks, and then laid the eastern brick in a fragrant cement made of jessamine flowers.<sup>3</sup>

Various precautionary rites are done while the house is being built. The door posts are specially important. The Nāgas call the two front posts of the Morang male and female, and attribute sanctity to them.<sup>4</sup> The Lingāyats, when setting up the main door, do the " door consecration " rite, and drive an iron nail into the frame to keep out evil spirits.<sup>5</sup> When the Meitheis fix the first post they bind round the top cloth leaves and flowers, and on its base they pour butter, milk and sugarcane juice, being careful to drop a little gold and silver into the hole in which it is placed.<sup>6</sup> The Kammālans of Madras, when the carpenters

<sup>1</sup> E. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in South India*, 327 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> R. V. Russell, *Tribes and Castes, Central Provinces*, iv. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Sir A. Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes*, 170 *et seqq.*

<sup>4</sup> *Journal Anthropological Institute*, xxxii. 452. Compare the two posts, Jachin and Boaz, erected in the porch of Solomon's temple—1 Kings, vii. 21, 2 Chronicles, iii. 17, Jeremiah, lii. 21, 22 ; J. Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, i. 308 *et seq.* ; *Encyclopædia Biblica*, ii. 2304 *et seq.*

<sup>5</sup> Thurston, *op. cit.* iv. 2 *et seqq.* ; Crooke, *op. cit.* ii. 11 *et seq.*

<sup>6</sup> T. C. Hodson, *The Meitheis*, 122.

begin the work on a new house, kill or cut the ear of a sheep, and smear the blood on the wall or on one of the pillars ; when the house is finished, the owner supplies the workmen with at least four goats, one of which is sacrificed at each corner, and a number of fowls, the blood of which is rubbed on the walls and ceiling.<sup>1</sup> The Shans will not begin building a new house until on his birthday the owner offers sacrifice to the earth-spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Particular care is taken to fix the direction in which the house should be built. A Nāyar house may face east or west, never north or south, the east, the region of the rising sun, being generally preferred.<sup>3</sup> Some Nāgas will not build their houses facing west because this is the direction in which the spirits go to deathland. But, as Mr. Hodson observes, the rule has a practical value, because the prevailing winds blow from that direction.<sup>4</sup> So the aspect of all the houses at Delos was regulated by the prevailing north-east winds.<sup>5</sup> The south, possibly because it was the region occupied by the Dravidian tribes hostile to the Indo-Aryans, is generally avoided by orthodox Hindus. But here, again, practical convenience overrides superstition, and in parts of Bengal the doors of houses face south, to avoid the sharp cold north wind in winter, and to get the benefit of the soft south winds in the summer months.<sup>6</sup> In the Central Provinces the Brahmanical rule prevails, and a house should face north or east, not south or west, because the south is the land of Yama, god of death, and the west the quarter of the setting sun.<sup>7</sup> In Madras, again, a house should not be built in front of a temple of Siva, as the eye of that god disperses an evil influence, nor should it be

<sup>1</sup> Thurston, *op. cit.* iii. 113, 127.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. L. Milne, *The Shans at Home*, Introd. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> *Bulletin Madras Museum*, iii. 301.

<sup>4</sup> T. C. Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal Hellenic Studies*, xxi. 298.    <sup>6</sup> Lal Bihari Day, *op. cit.* 258.

<sup>7</sup> R. V. Russell, *op. cit.* iv. 88.

behind a temple of Vishnu ; a site between two such temples is preferred.<sup>1</sup>

The shape of the house is also carefully regulated. According to the Agni Purāna, the ground-plan of every building should have four equal sides ;<sup>2</sup> but modern practice varies, and in Bengal the oblong shape, with a rectangular courtyard in the centre, is preferred. The Meitheis say that the number of bamboos forming the thatch-frame should not be equal on the north and south ; luck lies in odd numbers, and if they were equal trouble would befall the owner.<sup>3</sup> In the Panjāb a house with the front narrower than the back is called *gaumukha* or "cow-faced," and is lucky ; one with the front wider than the back is *sherdahān*, or "tiger-mouthed," and is unlucky ; the number of the stairs should be uneven, and when you go upstairs you should place the left foot on the lowest step.<sup>4</sup> In parts of Bengal there is a prejudice against square houses ; they should be oblong, and the two longer sides should run north and south.<sup>5</sup>

Omens naturally play a part in such beliefs. The Ghasiyas of Mirzapur abandon a new house if on the first night of occupation they hear the bark of a female jackal.<sup>6</sup> In the Central Provinces, if the main beam cracks it is a very bad omen, and if a vulture or a kite perches seven days running on the roof sickness or other misfortune is sure to follow.<sup>7</sup> In Madras if a goat climb on the roof of a house trouble is sure to follow. One way to avoid this danger is to cut off the ear of the animal and throw rice soaked in the blood on the roof ; another way is to drag the beast round the house and kill it with a club ; others burn a handful of the thatch as a mode of expiation.<sup>8</sup> A

<sup>1</sup> Padfield, *op. cit.* 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rajendralala Mitra, *op. cit.* i. 53 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> Hodson, *The Meitheis*, 122.

<sup>4</sup> *Panjab Notes and Queries*, i. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Census Report*, 1911, i. 46.

<sup>6</sup> *North Indian Notes and Queries*, ii. 28

<sup>7</sup> R. V. Russell, *op. cit.* iv. 89.

<sup>8</sup> F. R. Hemingway, *Gazetteer of Tanjore*, i. 66.

dog barking on the roof is equally dangerous, because if this happens in dry weather it portends an epidemic ; if in wet weather, an excessive fall of rain ; when a man comes to ruin, a common proverb says : " he is like a dying dog climbing a roof." <sup>1</sup> In the Panjāb, if a buffalo has been possessed of the devil to such a degree that it has got up on the top of a house, not a difficult feat in the hills, it is so unlucky that the beast is given to a Brahman.<sup>2</sup> Petronius speaks of *asinus in tegulis*, and " until the ass ascends the ladder " is a phrase of the Rabbins for what will not take place. *Si ascendit asinus per scalas, invenietur scientia in mulieribus*, which I leave as it is found in Buxtorf's Latin version.

The danger attending entry into a new house is everywhere recognised.<sup>3</sup> It is a serious crisis accompanying a new departure, and the damp of the walls, emanations or microbes disturbed in the course of excavation are a source of evil which primitive men translate into a visitation of demons or evil spirits. The Emperor Jovian is said to have been " suffocated in his sleep by the vapour of charcoal, which extracted from the walls of his apartment the unwholesome moisture of fresh plaster," says Gibbon.<sup>4</sup> People now attribute it to carbon monoxide gas.<sup>5</sup> Among the Izhuvans of Madras, after a new house is finished, the head carpenter does worship, and a few days before the date fixed for occupation sacrifices of

<sup>1</sup> Id. *Gazetteer of Trichonopoly*, i. 87 ; E. Thurston, *Omens and Superstitions in Southern India*, 57.

<sup>2</sup> H. A. Rose, *op. cit.* ii. 141 note. Once, when a tiny fig-tree sprouted on the roof of the temple in the precinct occupied by the Arval Brethren, a solemn service, in which all kinds of piacula were offered to the gods, was held. W. Warde Fowler, *Religious Experience of the Roman People*, 436 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> E. Westermarck, *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, i. 462 *et seqq.* ; Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. ; *Taboo and the Peril of the Soul*, 63 *et seq.* ; J. T. Bent, *The Cyclades*, ed. 1888, p. 45 ; J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, 264 *et seqq.*

<sup>4</sup> *Decline and Fall*, ed. W. Smith, iii. 232.

<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. xxi. 895.



goats and fowls are offered to demons of the lower order who are supposed to have been dwelling in the wood used in the building. This is said to be a survival of tree worship ; more probably a propitiation of demons. The rite is followed by a clan feast, showing that the matter concerns the tribe, and that the kinsmen share in the risk.<sup>1</sup>

The rite practised by the Tiyan tribe is intended to propitiate *Vastu-purusha*, the local spirit, the *genius loci*. The *Gulikhan*, a troublesome spirit, is appeased. All the workmen walk thrice round the house, breaking coconuts on the walls, and howling to drive away any lurking spirits. The house is then put in charge of a man who is not the owner. It is not easy to get a person to undertake this dangerous office, for *Gulikhan*, the ejected spirit, is believed to possess him. Hence the "scapegoat" is usually a poor man who undertakes the duty for a consideration. After the workmen have given over charge to him, he is taken into the middle room, and made to stand facing the door, with one foot on a plantain leaf, apparently a primitive mode of insulation. Pieces of the thatch are tied to his clothes, and he shuts the door, opens it, and shuts it again. From outside the head carpenter asks him if he has taken over charge. He replies evasively : "Have the workmen got their wages?" The carpenter does not answer, because, if he did, the danger would be transferred to himself. So he replies : "I did not ask you about our wages. Have you taken charge?" He answers : "Yes." Then he opens the door and with the plantain leaf in his hand makes his escape without looking back. The people pelt him with bananas, and hoot at him as he runs. After this, cow's milk boiled with rice is cooked in the house, of which everyone partakes, and the owner is able to occupy his house.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anantha Krishna Iyer, *op. cit.* i. 281 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Thurston, *op. cit.* vii. 91 *et seq.*. The rite known as *Vastu-yāgam*, practised at the foundation-laying by the Nāmbūtiri Brāhmins of Cochin, shows more

We have an account of a similar "scapegoat" rite from Northern India, known as *Griha-pravesa*, or "house-entering." A Pandit is sent for and does the usual worship. At its close the householder calls in a barber, whom he worships with an offering of water and washed rice, and asks him to light an oil lamp and set it with some flour in a cup. The barber moves the cup and lamp five times over the head of the house-owner, thus taking the ill luck on himself, and the Pandit tells him to run away at full speed taking with him the cup and its contents. While he is running the people pelt him with grains of rice. When he has escaped he appropriates the contents of the cup and flings the lamp into a pool of dirty water. The lamp is said to represent Bhairon, an old earth god, whose priest is the barber. The moving of the lamp over the head of the owner is said to signify that Bhairon has abandoned his rights over the site.<sup>1</sup>

Among the Shans, when the owner comes to take possession of a new house, he is met by an old man who wishes him safety from all misfortune; the old man here probably represents the "scapegoat," though this fact is not clearly stated. Then a fire is kept lighted for seven days in the centre room; this is to "air" the house, in other words to drive out evil spirits. When the house is first occupied, it is a good plan to bring in pots full of water, cooked rice, and green leaves which do not easily wither. The pots should not be cracked, and none of the contents should be spilled—a piece of sympathetic magic to produce good luck.<sup>2</sup> In Bombay dancing girls are invited to dance in a new house, because "without the jingling of the bells on their feet a house does not become pure," or rather, because the bells scare evil spirits.<sup>3</sup> In the Panjāb an

priestly influence. L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer, *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, ii. 179 *et seqq.*

<sup>1</sup> *North Indian Notes and Queries*, iv. 4 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. L. Milne, *op. cit.* 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Panjāb Notes and Queries*, i. 74.

earthen pot is sent into the house before the owner and his family take up their quarters there. Sometimes husband and wife enter with their sheets knotted together, as was done on their wedding day, doubtless to mark the new departure and as a fertility charm. The gods who control luck are worshipped, and the rite ends with the lighting of the sacred fire as a protective.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Rose<sup>2</sup> quotes, on the authority of Dr. Francke, a more drastic method used in the Sutlej valley, where a Lama recently beheaded his father while asleep in order to make his house habitable. When the Orāons build a new house, the ancestors are invited to enter it, and a sacrifice is always offered on the first day the house is occupied.<sup>3</sup>

I have not been able to procure much in the way of parallels to these customs in this country. Mrs. Leather kindly informs me that in Herefordshire, on entering a new house, the paws of the family cat are buttered and she is put in through the window backwards. It is held unlucky to move in the furniture before coal, bread and salt are taken in, and on the Welsh border it is said to be very unlucky to go into a new house. Why is the cat put in tail foremost? Miss Burne kindly suggests that the cat represents a sort of foundation sacrifice, like the dog which was passed over the Devil's Bridge as the first passenger, and she notes that things done backwards are an element in various charms and spells. This may be so, or perhaps the cat is sent in backwards to show that she is not under duress, and that she can come out when she likes by "following her nose." From Ireland it is reported that when you are moving it is unlucky to take your cat with you, and hence in Dublin many cats are left derelict, and suffer terribly.<sup>4</sup> In Lancashire, when moving into a new house, the wife brings with her a Bible, salt and oatmeal,

<sup>1</sup> *Panjab Notes and Queries*, i. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* 1. 64.

<sup>3</sup> P. Dehon, *Memoirs Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1906, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 4th series, lii. 359.

and puts them into one of the cupboards ; the Bible is said to act as a protective, and the meal and salt are emblems of prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

When this primitive "scapegoat" rite passes into the hands of the Brahmans, it rapidly develops into an elaborate piece of ritual. In Bombay this is known as *Vastu-sānti*, or "Vastu-quieting," Vastu being the house spirit. The owner of the house and his wife bathe, and sit on wooden stools within a circle drawn with quartz powder, into which no demon can penetrate. The host, taking water in his right hand, says : " I perform the rite of Vastu-soothing so that in future I and my family may live safely in our new house." He throws the water on the ground, while the priest says : " Let those Bhūts or evil spirits which live on this site depart, and let all evil spirits be destroyed by the Lord Siva ! " Then a mound symbolising an ant-hill, the abode of snakes, is raised, and surrounded by a thread of cotton fixed on posts. The owner makes an offering and prays : " May the Nāgas or serpent gods go to the depths of the earth, and let the Lokapālas or benign guardians of the four quarters, who prolong life and strength, abide in this dwelling ! " After this Vastu, the site spirit, and Dhruva, the polar star, emblem of stability, are worshipped. At the foundation pillar of the house, known as the " Lucky Post," a pit is dug and filled with water, on which a little oil is poured. If the oil on the surface of the water takes the form of a tortoise, on which the earth rests, it is believed that the house will last long and that the owner will prosper. Then a golden image of Vastu is buried face downwards in a box and worshipped.<sup>2</sup> The burial face downwards, which is often done in the case of dead scavengers whose ghosts are dreaded, seems to be intended to hold the earth spirit safely entombed and incapable of doing mischief.

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 4th series, iv. 505.

<sup>2</sup> *Bombay Gasetteer*, xx. 524 *et seqq.*

The rites here described are closely connected with the Foundation Sacrifice, which is familiar to all students of folk-lore, and need not be further discussed.

The house is liable to pollution in various ways, even by trifling accidents, such as bees hiving on it or any kind of fungus growing inside. These necessitate minor forms of purification. Worst of all is a death occurring inside the house. Hence a dying person is removed into the open air. Semi-nomadic tribes, like the Bhils, when a death occurs, permanently abandon their huts, and make a new settlement elsewhere. They also believe that the best cure for a man who has been long sick is to change his house. This is not what we call "change of air"; but a long-continued illness is supposed to be due to some dangerous spirit influence attached to the site. It is obvious that the idea of "pollution" is secondary; the primitive idea is that the place is occupied by some sulky, malicious spirit, irritated at being disturbed from his accustomed abode, and ready to give vent to his ill will on the occupants if they are lax in doing the necessary suit and service.

Almost every part of the house has its special sanctity, or is subject to some special taboo. The most vital question in a caste-ridden country is the preparation of food. Hence the cooking-place is carefully guarded, and even its position and orientation are regulated because it might offend the spirit world if its opening was fixed in the wrong direction. But it is remarkable that the Hindus seem never to have impersonated the hearth spirit, like the Greek Hestia, who played no small part in the developed polytheism, but was never established as a separate anthropomorphic personality. Neither of the sacred trees, varieties of the fig, should be planted in the yard, lest the leavings of food may fall upon them, and thus offend the deities who reside in them. It is also dangerous to plant the Nim tree there, because it is the tree of ascetics, and contemplation of it by the householder may rob him of his desire for offspring,

and thus lead to the extinction of the family. Bananas should not grow near a house, because it is dangerous to hear the sound of the bursting of the pods. Best of all is the holy basil, because it sanctifies the air as it passes into the house.<sup>1</sup>

The door is carefully guarded and the archway is regarded with veneration, as is the case in China and Japan.<sup>2</sup> In Madras the principal doorway is called the "Lions' Gate," and over it the crosspieces, like the Lions' Gate at Mycenae, are carved to represent lions, elephants, horses or parrots, according to the taste of the owner in devising means of protecting his house. The erection of the door-frame is a serious business, the woodwork being smeared with saffron and red powder, and flowers or strings of mango leaves hung above it.<sup>3</sup> If a death occurs in the house, the corpse should not be removed by the front door, lest the ghost should find its way back. So a hole is broken in the back wall through which the body is taken out.<sup>4</sup>

The main pillar, as we have seen, is erected with due ceremonies, and probably represents the tree round which tribes like the Argippaeans built their houses. "Each of them," says Herodotus,<sup>5</sup> "dwells under a tree, and they cover the tree in winter with a thick white felt, but take off the covering in the summer time." This reminds us again of the olive tree round which Odysseus built his bedchamber.<sup>6</sup>

The threshold marking the division of the spirits without and the spirits within, is a holy place. It is the abode of

<sup>1</sup> R. V. Russell, *op. cit.* iv. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese*, 3rd ed. 36; B. H. Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 3rd ed. 407 f.; W. G. Aston, *Shinto*, 231 f.

<sup>3</sup> Padfield, *op. cit.* ii. *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> This was done when the body of the Emperor Akbar was removed from the Agra Fort for burial. Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar, the Great Mogul*, 1917, p. 327, where other references are given.

<sup>5</sup> iv. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Odyssey*, xxiii. 190 *seqq.*; W. Ridgeway, *Early Age of Greece*, 111.

Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and good luck, and any one else who sits there is likely to be plagued with haemorrhoids. When a woman in Central India dies after delivery her body is carefully removed, and an iron nail is driven into the threshold of every house which her body passes.<sup>1</sup> In North India when a man is suffering from stone in the bladder, he gets up very early in the morning, rolls seven times on his own threshold, eats a couple of radishes which have been exposed all night to the dew, and the cure is certain.<sup>2</sup>

When the poor souls of the dead wander about feeble and lonely till their funeral rites are done, they may be heard moaning and twittering on the ridgepole. Hence it is a place under taboo, and it is wise to protect it by setting up an old discarded earthen pot, decorated with a streak of whitewash. In Madras the ridgepole is worshipped while lying on the ground across two pieces of wood; it is decorated with flowers and garlands, and worship is done to it before it is placed in position.<sup>3</sup> In parts of Upper Burma the belief prevails that if a house be built without a ridgepole the inmates will be attacked by a tiger.<sup>4</sup> In pictures of houses among some tribes of Assam and Burma the beams forming the gables are prolonged into a fork, or a rude representation of something like the Cross of St. Andrew is made. In Lāhul the roof is surmounted by a ram's head, the symbol of creative power.<sup>5</sup> In some cases this has come to be purely decorative, but in its original form it serves as a protection against the Evil Eye and other spirit dangers.<sup>6</sup>

Similar protectives are those which the Nicobarese call

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report Central India*, 1911, 63.

<sup>2</sup> *North Indian Notes and Queries*, v. 178.

<sup>3</sup> P'adfield, *op. cit.* 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Gazetteer Upper Burma*, part ii. vol. ii. 647.

<sup>5</sup> Rose, *Glossary*, i. 91.

<sup>6</sup> *Journal Anthropological Institute*, xi. 27, 64; T. C. Hodson, *The Meithais*, 8.

“spirit scarers,” life-size figures of human beings armed with spears, animals such as fish, crocodiles, birds, or pigs, and similar objects connected with their animistic beliefs, painted in colours on spathes of the areca palm ; just above the house ladder a figure of an armed man is often painted. A row of pigs’ jaws often forms part of the decoration, but these are talismans or mementoes of sport, but are designed as a proof of the skill of the housewife in rearing large pigs for food. Models of ships, often seen on their houses, are only signs to traders that the owner is ready to deal in coconuts.<sup>1</sup>

In Northern India you will notice many devices of the same kind—an image of Ganesa, god of luck, or of Hanumān, the monkey god, the emblem of virility ; gods or goddesses at work destroying demons, and so on. Often you will see a figure of Mr. Thomas Atkins standing in a truculent attitude, but in the true spirit of conservatism in religious art, he is dressed not in khaki but in the red uniform of John Company, and carries the old Brown Bess musket which he used in the wars of the eighteenth century.

Sir James Frazer has exhaustively discussed the sanctity of the head, and the danger resulting from a person being over you in an upper story. There are various *ex post facto* explanations of the prejudice against building second stories in a house ; that, as the Meithei say, some people were once watching a boat-race from a bridge, the structure gave way and some one was drowned ; that, as the Burmese think, a private house should not be higher than a monastery, and so on.<sup>2</sup> All this is beside the point, and besides the idea about the sanctity of the head, people like the Hindus who are sensitive about personal pollution, naturally dislike placing themselves in a position where they are subject to such risks.

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report Andaman Islands, 1901, 216.*

<sup>2</sup> Hodson, *op. cit.* 79 *et seq.* ; H. Yule, *Narrative of a Mission to the Court of Ava, 163.*



This long discussion does not exhaust a very complicated subject. But I have perhaps said enough to show that the study of the house in India is of some interest from the point of view of sociology and folk-lore; that it is the result of a process of evolution, and that in India these successive stages are more clearly traceable than in many other countries. The superstitions connected with it bring us back to the basis of the animistic beliefs of the Hindus, the constant danger to which they are exposed from ubiquitous hosts of evil spirits, the Evil Eye, and witchcraft. The precautions adopted to repel such dangers rest on well-established principles, and it is interesting to watch how these primitive rites, when they come into the hands of the Brahman priesthood, rapidly develop into an elaborate system of ritual on which endless labour and exorbitant sums of money, which the peasant often finds it difficult to provide, are expended.

W. CROOKE.