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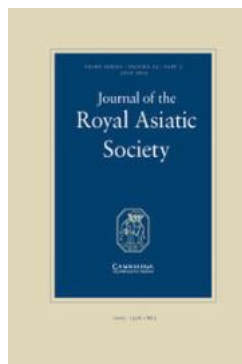
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## Art. IX.—Report on some of the Rights, Privileges, and Usages of the Hill Population in Meywar

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Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland / Volume 8 / Issue 15 / January 1846, pp 176 - 192

DOI: 10.1017/S0035869X00142790, Published online: 14 March 2011

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### How to cite this article:

W. Hunter (1846). Art. IX.—Report on some of the Rights, Privileges, and Usages of the Hill Population in Meywar. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 8, pp 176-192 doi:10.1017/S0035869X00142790

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ART. IX.—*Report on some of the Rights, Privileges, and Usages of the Hill Population in Meywar ; by CAPTAIN W. HUNTER, of the Meywar Bhil Corps.*

[*Read February 25, 1843.*]

RESPECTIVE RIGHTS OF SOVEREIGN CHIEFS AND SUBJECTS ON THE HILLY TRACT BETWEEN SIROHI AND DOONGURPORE.

THIS question appears to have been first seriously agitated in 1826, in consequence of a reference from the Acting Political Agent in Meywar, Capt. Sutherland, to Sir C. Metcalfe, regarding certain Grasya chiefs of the Hill principalities, nominally independent, but from whom allegiance was claimed by the Oodeypore Government.

In reply to the above reference, Sir C. Metcalfe expressed himself of opinion that those chiefs whom he found independent when our mediation was established in this part of India, and who might be able to show that they had not for a considerable period prior to our mediation acknowledged submission to any power, should be recognised as still independent; and that in that case we ought not to lend our aid to reduce them: this was the general principle established by Sir Charles Metcalfe, upon which to regulate our conduct towards these states; but for a more particular solution of the question in each case, the Political Agent at Oodeypore was desired to have recourse to an investigation of the claims to allegiance set up on the one hand, and of the grounds of denial on the other.

Consequent on these instructions, Capt. Cobbe, in the course of conversation with the Minister of Rana Bheem Sing, endeavoured to ascertain whether, within the period of his Highness's existence, any chout, tunkhwah, or other tributary payment, had been made to the durbar by the chiefs of the Grasya tribes of Joora, Meerpoor, Oguna, and Panurwa, and whether any engagements of the kind had existed during the same period.

The Minister's answer was such as to satisfy Capt. Cobbe that the claims of the Rana to supremacy over these chiefs had been in abeyance for a period far exceeding the term adverted to. The Rana Bheem Sing disavowed the collection of any revenue from them during his long reign of nearly half a century, and admitted that during that

period the Grasya chiefs had never voluntarily afforded, nor had he been able to enforce any service or tribute from them. Capt. Cobbe therefore considered that the Oodeypore chief had failed in substantiating a claim to supremacy over the chiefs of Joorra, Meerpoor, Oguna, and Panurwa; and that, on the principles laid down in Sir Charles Metcalfe's letter of instructions under date 9th December, 1826, the independence of these chiefs was indisputably established.

Assuming this point to be fully settled, the next subject of consideration was what course it might be prudent and necessary to adopt to oblige these chiefs to afford protection to travellers against the violence and outrage of those over whom they claimed unqualified jurisdiction, and to induce them, whilst respecting the rights of their neighbours, to afford every encouragement to the cultivation of such resources as they possessed within the limits of their respective territories.

Capt. Cobbe, in consequence of the poverty and weakness to which these chiefs had been reduced by a long period of anarchy and confusion, recommended that to carry these views into execution, some assistance should be afforded them by the British Government, more especially as in their unsettled and disorganised state, if left to themselves, they were avowedly and manifestly unable to control their subjects, or to obtain from them anything more than a scanty and uncertain income, granted rather to hereditary claims than exacted by the power of the chiefs.

In common cases of real or pretended inability on the part of the chiefs to repress the outrages and aggressions of their subjects, the power to whom the general tranquillity is confided, Capt. Cobbe argued, was entitled to assume the management of the estate; and though, owing to the extreme poverty of the country, such an assumption would in all probability prove anything but profitable to the paramount power, still, from the position of the states bordering on Edur, Gujarat, Sirohi, and Palhanpore, it was, in Capt. Cobbe's opinion, of the highest importance that such arrangements should be adopted by the British Government as would effectually insure the suppression of the constant predatory irruptions of the Bhils, and oblige the chiefs themselves to refrain from committing aggressions on the neighbouring principalities.

In reply to these observations, Sir Charles Metcalfe, in a letter dated 18th December, 1826, remarked, that as the Grasya chiefs were independent, and did not acknowledge allegiance to Oodeypore, or any other state, it would be necessary to negotiate with them on our part: that it did not, however, appear to him that the chiefs in question had

any claim to our assistance, and that they were not even entitled to our protection: that we required nothing from them but the security of our own subjects and allies against the predatory irruptions of the people over whom they professed to have sovereignty, and a safe passage through their territories for travellers and merchandise.

The first of these demands, if not both, Sir Charles observes, we are entitled to, and even bound, in justice to others, to insist on; and should the chiefs be unable to give us satisfaction on that point, we have an unquestionable right, in defence of our subjects and allies, to subjugate the country of the offenders.

Such Sir Charles Metcalfe conceived to be the proper and only principles of any negotiation to be opened with these chiefs. "We hereby," he says, "ask nothing but what we have a right to require: if, therefore, they withhold it, they become public enemies: if they be unable to effect it, they virtually abdicate the sovereignty to which they pretend over all whom they cannot restrain from outrage."

In conformity with these principles, Sir Charles recommended that the Grasya chiefs should be called on to state distinctly what portion of territory they could be responsible for, and what portion was beyond the exercise of their efficient sovereignty. He did not think it desirable that the expectation of assistance should be encouraged, but in the event of their soliciting it, they were to be called on to state in what particulars, and for what purposes, it would be wanted; as also what equivalent they might be prepared to pay for assistance which they could not in equity expect gratuitously.

On the above principles, as far as they could be acted upon without involving a violation of any manifest rights appertaining to the Rana of Oodeypore, Capt. Cobbe was authorised to enter into negotiations with the Grasya chiefs, himself directly, or to entrust the business to Capt. Black as a part of the duties of a deputation on which he was about to be employed under the orders of the Political Agent.

Capt. Black proceeded towards the Hills in January, 1827, but unfortunately owing to the rebellion of the celebrated Dowlut Singh, the manager of Jowass, all his efforts to overcome the disaffection of the Grasya chiefs proved unavailing, and nothing was accomplished till the cold weather of 1828, when Capt. Speirs, supported by a force of upwards of 2000 of our own men from Neemuch, under the command of the present Major-General Burgh, succeeded in persuading Dowlut Singh, together with the chiefs of Joora, Oguna, and Panurwa, to render their submission, and to acknowledge the supremacy of the British Government.

The claims of the Grasya chiefs to independence were at this period

fully established on the principles laid down in Sir Charles Metcalfe's instructions, and the justice of a claim thus recognised by the Governor-General's Agent for the affairs of Rajpootana, and afterwards ratified by the Supreme Government, would seem to be supported by the authority of Capt. Tod, who, in regard to the states under discussion, remarks as follows:—

“The principalities of Oguna, Panurwa, and Meerpoor, are inhabited by communities of the aboriginal races, living in a state of primeval and almost savage independence, owning no paramount power, paying no tribute, but with all the simplicity of Republics<sup>1</sup>.” “Oguna Panora is the sole spot in India which enjoys a state of natural freedom; attached to no state; having no foreign communications; living under its own patriarchal head, its chief, with the title of Rana, whom one thousand hamlets scattered over the forest-crowned valleys obey, can if requisite appear at the head of 5000 bows. He is a Bhoomia Bhil of mixed blood, from the Solanki Rajpoot on the old stock of pure (oojla) Bhils<sup>2</sup>.” “The descendants of Baleo and Deeva, the Oguna and Oondree Bhils, celebrated as the faithful guardians and companions of the fugitive Bappa Rawut, the great ancestor of the Oodeypore royal family, still claim the privilege of performing the teeka on the inauguration of a new sovereign, on which occasion, besides making the teeka of blood drawn from the finger of a Bhil, the Oguna chief is entitled to take the prince by the arm, and seat him on the throne<sup>3</sup>.”

Though the Rana of Panurwa disclaims the feudal supremacy of the Rana, owing to the long time it has been in abeyance, as well as on account of the uncertain and indefinite nature of such claim when it has been temporarily recognised, still he acknowledges to Capt. Speirs that his ancestors, many generations back, had a certain gate in the Hills entrusted to their charge, where they were bound to keep up a stipulated number of horse and foot, and for the performance of this duty the Rana of Oodeypore bestowed upon them several villages. These villages at a subsequent period having been resumed, the above service was discontinued, and their dependent condition again wholly disappeared.

The Oguna Rawut is a younger branch of the Panurwa family, and acknowledges the supremacy of its chiefs. No member of the Oguna house can take his seat on the Gaddi till placed therein by the chief of Panurwa, who girds on his sword, and receives the usual fine of investiture. Whether any engagements have been entered

<sup>1</sup> Tod, Vol. I., p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

into subsequent to the treaties settled by Capt. Speirs in 1828, I have not had the means of ascertaining.

The valley in which Joorá is situated, as also the villages of Oguna and Panurwa, extends from north to south about fifteen coss, varying in breadth from five miles to three and two. The population is considerable, and the soil extremely fertile, producing as fine fields of wheat and barley as are to be seen in any part of India. The inhabitants cultivate the sugar-cane and ginger, and many valuable drugs used by native physicians are also produced on these Hills. The chiefs themselves are said to derive little benefit from all these advantages, their share of the revenue or produce being very much in the proportion to the power they possess of exacting them from their subjects, the more powerful of whom have been in the habit of giving what they do, more as a benefaction to the chiefs, than from any acknowledged or inherent right on their part to enforce it.

The country is by nature exceedingly strong, and the difficulty attending military operations is much enhanced by the great scarcity of water, the absence of every species of cattle and carriage, and the difficulty of procuring supplies and information. March and April are perhaps the most favourable months for military operations, when, in consequence of the scarcity of water in the Hills, the Bhíls and their cattle are compelled to descend to the valleys; and on these occasions they are easily surrounded; but this, owing to the scattered site of their hamlets, is very difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish when they once get to their Hills. Nothing alarms the Bhíls more than the probable loss of the Indian corn, or Kharíf crop, which is cultivated during the rains, and on which they chiefly subsist. Their dread on this score has often induced the rebellious Bhíls to surrender, and to give hostages or security for future good conduct, when all other means have failed to reduce them to subjection.

In the Grasya Hills, as well as in the Jowass District, there exist numerous petty chiefs of the same caste as, and acknowledged by the population; which, with the exception of a few Baniyas in the principal villages of each chief, consists almost entirely of Bhíls and Grasyas. The whole body of the governed are there naturally connected with their rulers; and were these only more solicitous of the public welfare, and more disposed to exert themselves, their influence and power would no doubt avail much to suppress the indefensible outrages so frequently committed by their turbulent and unruly subjects.

In Chupan and Doongurpore the relations between chief and subject are on a very different footing. In those tracts, no chief of

Bhil or Mína extraction is to be found. The people have there been for ages in partial subjection to the Rajpoot chiefs, between whom and the Bhíl no bond of union or attachment, except that of community of crime, ever appears to have existed. Moreover, owing to the constant residence of these chiefs on their estates, the population in that quarter has naturally become very mixed—so much so, that in some parts of Chupan, it is supposed that the Bhils are outnumbered by the other classes of inhabitants,—Rajpoots, Baniyas, artisans, traders, &c.

Amongst the tribes which had made themselves particularly conspicuous by their predatory habits in these Hills are the Moghías. They are mercenary foot soldiers, usually armed with tulwars and matchlocks. They have the reputation of being a bold, hardy, and enterprising, but very debauched race: trained to plunder and fatigue, and at all times willing to sell their services to the highest bidder. They are originally from Joudpore, whence they were expelled about seventy years ago by Raja Bajee Sing. They eat every kind of flesh, even to the cow and jackal, and are sadly addicted to strong liquors. Their Jamadars or leaders, whom they obey implicitly, are usually mounted, and, like most Hindus, they have the reputation of being true to their salt, or employers, but never fail to return to their plundering habits the moment they are released from service.

A strong party of Moghías, under the orders of their leader Humauth, were in the service of Dowlut Singh, the Manager of Jowass, during the period he was in rebellion in 1827-28. In April 1828, information was received of the death of Humauth, in a plundering expedition he made into Gujarat. He had long been one of the most dangerous and turbulent characters in this quarter, and had, on various occasions, given much trouble to the Government officers.

#### GENERAL REMARKS REGARDING THE BHIL TRIBES.

The fabulous traditions of the Hindus have supplied us with the following extravagant account of the origin of the Bhils. Mahadeo, when sick, was one day reclining in a forest, when a beautiful damsel appeared, the first sight of whom effected a complete cure of all his complaints. The result of this interview was the birth of many children, one of whom, distinguished for his ugliness, slew the favourite bull of Mahadeo, for which crime he was expelled to the woods and mountains; and his descendants have ever since been stigmatised with the names of Bhil and Ushaster, or Outcast.

The Bhils, it has been remarked, have ever been considered a degraded race, the very refuse of society; and the estrangement and despair which such a notion is sure to generate, whilst it tends to cut off all those more kindly and humane feelings which, in other classes of even the Indian community are generated between man and man, naturally prompts them to acts of outrage against their fellow-creatures, and reconciles them to those habits of rapine and plunder which their traditions teach them they were created to follow, and which for ages have rendered them a scourge to society.

Without any fellow-feeling for the rest of the community, who hold them so low and so degraded, with such an impression as to their destiny from their birth, inured to hardships, especially to live in the open air, and to the use of arms, and caring little for a life which, under the most favourable circumstances, affords few comforts and little gratification beyond that enjoyed by the brute; the course of reckless violence, and wanton cruelty they have always pursued cannot excite much astonishment.

The Bhils are usually divided into two classes,—the village or the cultivating, and the wild or Mountain Bhils. They generally, however, preserve the same usages, and the same forms of religion; but in those parts of the country where the Bhils appear more humane and less reckless of their own and others' lives, it has generally been found that they are not so destitute of the means of existence; and that in proportion to the abundance, or otherwise, of these essentials, they are generally more or less disposed to live in peace and quietness.

A vicinity to the Hills in every country has invariably been found favourable to the systematic aggressions of plundering tribes possessing retreats among fastnesses of mountains and extensive jungles; and to repress the outrages of such local banditti has at all times proved a task of no common labour and difficulty. It has been very justly remarked, that it is no reflection on the irresistible nature of the power and policy of the Indian Government, that we have not succeeded at once in this object. In more civilized countries, in Greece, Spain, and Italy, the best efforts of Government have failed in effecting the extirpation of such illegal communities; and even England does not consider herself disgraced, notwithstanding all the efforts of her navy, —all the activity and discipline of her trained bands and military on shore, have been ineffectual to put down the system of smuggling.

We can therefore but too well conceive that among clans such as the Bhils, plunged as they are in the grossest and most debasing ignorance; unshackled by any laws; in many parts of the country



recognising no Government; and accustomed to set every principle but that of violence at defiance, it must prove a very difficult and delicate task, even by the application of the wisest and gentlest measures, to replace with the forbearance of civilized life, that desire for feud, and that lust for unlawful possession which is common to all barbarous tribes. Plunder, to a Bhíl, has hitherto been the charm of his existence: plundering they designate *shikar*, sport; and the prospect of driving off a few bullocks, possessing themselves of the property of travellers, or of a field of ripe grain, has hitherto, in the estimation of these strange people, been found to outweigh all the advantages which have at different times been held out to them by the offer of regular employment. I trust, however, that in the disinterested experiment which, under the authority of the British Government, is now being made to ameliorate their moral and physical condition, we are in a fair way to establish a better order of things. The mild and humanizing spirit of these measures, aided by the cementing influence of good and regular pay, can hardly fail to produce the usual effects in this quarter; and after the several Bhíl corps shall have been successfully organized, as we gradually succeed in bending the people to our sway, by giving a new aim, character, and interest to their existence, as we gradually succeed in soothing their exasperated passions, and in awakening them to habits of discipline, industry, and sobriety, we may hope to obtain a very powerful pledge against future irruption, and that constant disturbance of the public tranquillity which has hitherto been the bane of this misgoverned country.

That the Bhíls in this tract, by long giving license to the most lawless and predatory habits, should have rendered themselves obnoxious to the severest penalties, can hardly excite surprise, when we reflect on the moral and political disorganization—I may say, the almost irremediable confusion of every portion of the Rana's dominions at the period of our mediation. Captain Cobbe, in adverting to this lamentable subject, does not hesitate to affirm that, in his time, from the prince to the peasant, all were thieves and robbers throughout the province; and remarks, there is no security for person or property. The Government is a tissue of cheating and oppression, without even the semblance of law and justice; and its influence and example are but too glaringly manifest in the shocking depravity and demoralization of all classes of the people.

Thus the Bhíls and Grasyas, occupying the tract between Sirohi and Doongurpore, as also those in Chupan, have at one time been encouraged to the commission of outrage by the example of those

whom they have been accustomed to recognise as their chiefs, and to whom they have been obliged to surrender a portion of the fruits of depredations. At other times, they have been goaded into rebellion by the violent and oppressive administration of the Rana's Kamdars, as well as by the overbearing, and often cruel conduct of the irregular troops which, under the control of those state harpies, have been stationed at the different *thannas* to enforce the orders of the Durbar.

Another cause of the violent and vindictive spirit which has occasionally hitherto exhibited itself amongst the Bhil population, may be traced to the attempts on the part of the Durbar to deprive the Bhils of the privileges of levying rakhwalee, or black-mail, on travellers and merchandize. The Bhils have the reputation of being particularly tenacious regarding this privilege; and hitherto any attempt to abolish it has been productive only of disastrous consequences. When their dues are paid the Bhils seldom commit depredations: when withheld, no native power has yet been able to coerce them. Travellers and merchants pass through their Hills without molestation or interference, after paying the usual tax, and property under their charge is rarely plundered or touched. On the other hand, if any attempt be rashly made by travellers to force a passage without paying the dues, they are certain to be pillaged. Thousands of these warlike spirits, as their war-scream is re-echoed from hill to hill, will immediately collect from every hamlet in the neighbourhood to resist this, or any other innovation.

PRIVILEGES, CUSTOMS, AND HABITS OF THE BHILS, MORE PARTICULARLY THOSE INHABITING KURRUCK, KHAIRWARRA, AND THE HILLY PORTION OF CHUPAN BETWEEN DOONGARPORE AND OODEYPOOR.

As I have before observed, one of the most important privileges to which the Bhils lay claim, is a right to levy a tax denominated indifferently rakhwalee, chowkee, and bolæe, on all travellers and traders passing through their country, in return for which they are responsible for their safety and protection. The sum paid on these occasions appears never to have been exactly defined: it varies in different parts of the country, and has sometimes been regulated by the known or supposed wealth of the parties.

When the Rajpoot chief was powerful enough to keep the Bhil population in due subjection, this tax was levied by him directly, either at the borders of his district, or in the town where he resided: but such Bhil Pals as did not acknowledge obedience to the Rajpoot

chief (though nominally his dependants), assumed the right of enforcing the above tax on their own account; and this custom now obtains over a great portion of the Hill Districts.

In addition to the above tax, the Chief has been in the habit of exacting customs on all grain and merchandize passing through his districts; as also the Mafra, which is a tax on all produce taken from one village to another within the district.

The Bhíls of powerful Pals, who are in the habit of plundering the villages in Meywar, Doongarpore, Pertabghur, Sedur, &c., frequently enter into engagements with certain Ryot villages to receive chowkee or rakhwalee. By this arrangement the Bhíls are secured a certain quantity of grain, or a specified number of cattle from the village, in return for which they are under an engagement, not only to abstain from the future plunder of its inhabitants, but likewise to afford them protection against the depredations of others. This protection is not secured on all occasions by the Bhíls keeping a watch for the protection of the Ryots, but by the power which the Bhíls receiving the rakhwalee possess of attacking and forcing the members of any other Pal to make restitution of all property plundered from the village under their guardianship. The Ryot villages, however, have sometimes been under the necessity of paying two or more Pals for this protection; and in addition to the above tax, the Ryot villages often give a quarter of their crops to the Rajpoot chiefs, either in money or kind; provide also for the maintenance of a certain number of horses; pay a fine for the marriage of any individual of the family; supply funds for the repair of the Chief's house, wells, &c., and are, besides, subject to other compulsory fines.

The Rajpoot chiefs also claim a fourth of the agricultural produce of the Bhíl Pals; but this is seldom paid in kind by any of the Bhíl communities, excepting those in the immediate vicinity of the Chief's residence. The sum claimed in lieu thereof it has been usual to discharge every two or three years from a portion of the cattle they for that purpose may have driven from the adjoining states. Frequently, however, in order to obtain his dues, the Chief has himself been obliged to attack the rebellious Pals; on which occasion everything his followers can lay hands upon is seized and carried off: but women, children, and cattle are generally restored, on the payment of a sum of money, amounting to about five rupees per head. A certain portion of all property, such as money, jewels, cloths, captured by the Bhíls is also claimed by the Chief, who, in some instances, has with his followers been known to accompany the marauding parties.

In the year 1818, in consequence of the alliance of Meywar with

the British Government, the Rajpoot Chiefs having been summoned to the Durbar by Captain Todd, they were induced to submit to His Highness; who, on redeeming that portion of the Khalisa-lands which had been forcibly usurped, and granting them sunnuds for their original estates, thought fit to prohibit these chiefs from exacting the rakhwalee and tax which had only been submitted to by the Khalisa villages in consequence of the inability of the Rana's government to afford them the protection to which they are entitled.

The engagements entered into between the Rana and his chiefs, on the above occasion, are detailed in the following treaty :—

Charter given by the Rana of Meywar, accepted and signed by his Chiefs, defining the duties of the Contracting Parties, A.D. 1818.

Seid Sree Maha Rana Dheroj, Maha Rana Bheem Sing, to all the Nobles my brothers and Kin, Rajas, Patels, Jhalas, Chohans, Chondawuts, Pawars, Sarangdests, Suktawuts, Rahtores, Rawuts, &c., &c. Now, since Samvat 1822 (A.D. 1776) during the reign of Sree Wur Singh-ji, when the troubles commenced, laying ancient usages aside, undue usurpations of the land have been made; therefore on this day Bysakh Badi 14, Samvat 1874 (A.D. 1818) the Maha Rana assembling all his chiefs, lays down the path of duty in new ordinances.

1. All lands belonging to the Crown obtained since the troubles, and all lands seized by one chief from another, shall be restored.

2. All Rakhwalee, Bhoom, Sagat (dues) established since the troubles, shall be renounced.

3. Dhan Bisioo (transit duties) the right of the Crown alone, shall be renounced.

4. No chiefs shall commit thefts or violence within the boundaries of their states. They shall entertain no Thugs, foreign thieves, or thieves of the country, as Mogeas, Baories, Shories; those who shall adopt peaceful habits may remain, but should any return to their old pursuits, their heads shall instantly be taken off. All property stolen shall be made good by the proprietor of the estate within the limits of which it is plundered.

5. Home or foreign merchants, traders, kafilas, brinjarries, who enter the country, shall be protected: in no wise shall they be molested or injured; and whoever breaks this ordinance, his estates shall be confiscated.

6. According to command, at home or abroad, service must be performed. Four divisions (Chokies) shall be formed of the chiefs, and each division shall remain three months in attendance at Court, when they shall be dismissed to their estates. Once a-year, on the

festival of the Dussera, all the chiefs shall assemble with their quotas, ten days previous thereto, and twenty days subsequent they shall be dismissed. On urgent occasions, and whenever their services are required, they shall repair to the Presence.

7. Every Pattawut holding a separate patta from the Presence, shall perform separate service. They shall not unite or serve under the greater pattawuts; and the subvassals of all such chiefs shall remain with and serve their immediate Pattawuts<sup>1</sup>.

8. The Maha Rana shall maintain the dignities due to each chief according to his degree.

9. The Ryots shall not be oppressed: there shall be no new exactions or arbitrary fines: this is ordained.

10. What has been executed by Thocoor Ajeet Sing and sanctioned by the Rana, to this all shall agree<sup>2</sup>.

11. Whoever shall depart from the foregoing the Maha Rana shall punish: in doing so the fault will not be the Rana's; whoever fails, on him be the oath (án<sup>3</sup>) of Eklinga, and the Maharana.

The result of the above arrangement, though not effected without much ill-blood, as was to be expected when so many conflicting interests were to be reconciled, was a temporary move towards peace and repose. But it was of short duration. Several of the turbulent chiefs, who, under various pretences had on the above occasion declined attending the durbar, continued to enforce the collection of the rakhwalee, or, in the event of non-payment, to plunder the villages; and as the chiefs who tendered their submission declared their incompetency to restrain their Bhíls, the country was soon thrown back into a state of anarchy; and to so dangerous extent as to render it expedient to aid the government of Meywar by the employment of a British Force.

The Bhíls, by these measures reduced to submission, and having entered into written engagements to deliver up all their arms, and to abstain from plunder, and from the exaction of rakhwalee, were in the first instance placed under the immediate control of his Highness' officers.

Shortly after this arrangement the greater portion of the Bhíl Pals were restored by the Rana to the Rajpoot chiefs, on their promising to

<sup>1</sup> This Article has become especially necessary, as the inferior chiefs, particularly those of the third class, had amalgamated themselves with the head of the clans, to whom they had become more accountable than to their prince.

<sup>2</sup> This alludes to the treaty which the chief has formed, as Ambassador to the Rana, with the British Government.

<sup>3</sup> An, oath of allegiance. Tod, Vol. I., p. 172.

be answerable for the conduct of the Bhíls, as well as for the protection of travellers and traders. It was very soon, however, apparent that the Rajpoot chiefs were neither willing nor able to fulfil their engagements; and several who were notoriously disaffected to the Rana's cause, hesitated not to aid in openly obstructing the measures of government. These circumstances, combined with the frequent defeats which the Rana's troops sustained from the rebel Dowlut Singh and his Bhíls, gave great confidence to the latter; the result of which was the re-establishment of the rakhwalee system on its former footing; when all traders and travellers refusing to pay his compulsory tax were invariably plundered, and sometimes murdered.

In 1828, notwithstanding the Bhíls were again reduced to submission by the force under the orders of Capt. Speirs, the abolition of the rakhwalee tax does not on that occasion appear to have been insisted on; and the system is now in force not only along the whole line of road between Oodeypore and Doongurpore, but I believe obtains in most parts of these hilly tracts. In bad seasons, it appears to be almost the only means the Bhíls have of supporting themselves without plunder; and, accordingly, as I have before observed, to deprive them of this privilege only tends to excite the flame we would wish to extinguish, and to render the Bhíls more intractable, and more determined to set the authority of their sovereign at defiance. In return for this tax the traveller is furnished with a guide and protection, the Pal in the receipt of the bolae becoming accountable for any loss.

#### APPEARANCE OF THE BHÍLS.

The Bhíls of the Vindya range have been described as a very hard-featured race. In this tract of the country many of the young men are particularly good-looking; and some of their women handsome, and remarkable for the elegance of their figures. They are said to be prolific, and very faithful to their husbands, whom they often accompany on their marauding excursions, and even to battle, carrying provisions and water, and sometimes themselves facing the enemy, and armed with slings, in the use of which many of them are very skilful. They cheerfully undergo great labour in these plundering expeditions; are generally, both men and women, very abstemious as regards food, though addicted to liquor; and have few wants which are not easily supplied by night attacks upon villages from any range of hills on which they may take up their position.

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## FIDELITY OF THE BHÍLS.

The fidelity of the Bhíls to their acknowledged chiefs is very remarkable. This feeling is quite independent of what we should consider the justice of their cause, the Bhíls, owing to their ignorance, being totally disqualified for the discussion or comprehension of such matters. The direction of their chief is all they look to; and so wonderful is the influence of the chief over this infatuated people, that in no situation, however desperate, can they be induced to betray him. If old and incapable of action they will convey him to places of safety. No hope of reward or fear of punishment affects them; and under the orders of their master they exult in the plunder of all those classes by whom they are considered and treated as the lowest of the human race.

During the period Capt. Black was employed in this quarter, though instant intelligence of all his movements was conveyed to the rebel Dowlut Singh, he was never himself able to obtain any information regarding the nature of the country, or the numbers, positions, and motions of the enemy. But on this subject I cannot do better than quote Capt. Black's own language, who, in reference to the proceedings in Kurruck and Chupan in 1827, remarks as follows:—

“Intelligence is not procurable for any sum of money; whilst not a single guard can quit this post without the strength and destination of it being instantly reported to the rebels, who remain concealed in the jungles or hills, ready to take advantage of the excellent information they receive. To counteract this, I frequently attempted to change the position of a guard during the night, but generally without success. In some instances my men refused to move till daylight; but whenever they did, the intelligence was instantly conveyed from hill to hill.”

Capt. Tod, in illustration of the faith which may be placed in the pledged word of the Bhíls, relates as follows:—“Many year ago one of my parties was permitted to range through this [Aravulli] tract. In one of the passages of their lengthened valleys the lord of the mountain was dead; the men were all abroad; and his widow alone in the hut. [My servant] Madarri told his story, and claimed her surety and passport, which the Bhílni delivered from the quiver of her late lord; and his arrow, carried in his hand, was as well recognised as the cumbrous roll, with all its seals and appendages, of a traveller in Europe<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Tod, Vol. I., p. 11.

In some of the Bhil districts, the arrows are used in lieu of drafts for money. The Selput Bhil chief, on the occasion of a visit from some of the Native Government Agents, wishing to make them a present, regretted that a fire had destroyed all his cloth, &c., &c. "But, never mind," he said, "take this,"—drawing an arrow from his well-filled quiver,—“take this to any village of Kotah, and demand nine rupees.” To another, he gave one on a second village to demand five rupees; which on being presented were honoured at sight; the Patels stating that they knew too well what would be the consequence should they refuse the arrows as drafts for money.

Owing to the impossibility of obtaining any authentic records regarding this strange race, the information which I have been able to collect from different sources is necessarily of a very cursory and superficial description; and the very defective communication which I now venture to make is not offered as one to be depended upon, but merely as a rough statement supposed to approach nearly to the truth; and which may, in some measure, serve as a guide, till a local investigation of the country, and a more thorough knowledge of the history, customs, and character of these tribes shall enable us to form a better judgment, and authorise my offering an opinion on this important subject with more confidence than I can presume to do with my present very limited experience.

*Khairwarra,*  
20th July, 1841.

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## APPENDIX.

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No. I.—Comprises copies of treaties with Grasya chiefs of Meywar made in the beginning of 1828, by mediation of Major Speirs. These are generally engagements to cease from disturbance and plunder, and from entertaining rebels; and to attend the government in its service when called upon; to hold themselves responsible for losses sustained by travellers and traders within their territories; and to collect their revenues according to a regulated system.

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## No. II.

*Miscellaneous Remarks on the Character and Customs of the Bhils; by Colonel Robertson, formerly Collector in Candeish.*

The Bhil banditti are a timid race; screening themselves in fastnesses, and only, like beasts of prey, venturing abroad under cover of the night, or in the absence of forces. The men as well as the women, are very hard-featured. The clothing of the men is often not more than the calls of decency require. They can live on the products of the wilds, for a considerable time; but generally they show every sign of being badly fed. This is not because they cannot find employment, for they can all cultivate if they choose, but because they are inveterately idle, and would rather eat half a meal of indifferent food, provided they are not obliged to work, than a good and substantial meal procurable by labour. In their plundering expeditions they often live in the fields, at their appointed stations, with their families; and all their stock and effects consist generally of not more than a wretched cow or buffalo, a few fowls, a small fishing-net, and now and then a sword or matchlock, with a bow and plentiful supply of arrows. They are very cruel and regardless of life; will, any day, become assassins for a trifling recompense, and are very revengeful; they themselves comparing their enmity to the bite of a snake. They are immoderately fond of liquor; and it is to the quantity expended that the marriage of a Bhil owes all its *éclat*. Rather than be deprived of this luxury for any time, they will resort to every excess. They kill and eat the cow, and have little or no religion. They share equally in plunder, except when under an hereditary chief, whose share is then a chowth.

The term Tarvi, applied to the Mohammedan Bhils, supposed to

have been converted to that religion in the reign of Aurungzeb, Sir J. Malcolm erroneously supposed to be a title.

The Mohammedan Bhíls are cleaner in their persons than the Hindu Bhíls; have better features; and are more civilised, speaking Hindustani.

The Patels often encourage the Bhíls in plunder, in order to share in their spoils.

The different classes of Bhíls are the Turvo, Nahallo, Bhílalas, Kokanis, Dorepass, Munchas. The latter race are very superstitious, changing their place of residence at the slightest ill-omen, such as the death of a dog or a fowl. Their honesty is surprising: on quitting a temporary residence, if they have been unable to pay the government dues, they have been known to send the sum the next year.

The Bhíls are kind and affectionate fathers, and great faith may be attached to their word. Their simplicity is extraordinary; if any offender is seized, he not only confesses his fault, but any others he may have committed; and details his adventure with the most apparent *sang froid* and innocence, stating the names of his associates, be they friends or near relatives. The seizure of their women is one of the best means of bringing the husbands to terms.

There is little religion among them. They keep all feasts, Hindu and Mussulman, with equal zeal; and the most solemn form of oath is that of mixing salt, cowdung, and jowarree, and lifting up the mixture: this is called the meat gowree. If a Bhíl perjures himself on this oath he is deemed execrable, and abandoned by his caste.

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No. III.—Consists of Extracts from Sir John Malcolm's Memoir on Central India, Vol. I., pp. 516, 517, 524, 526, 550, 576; Vol. II., pp. 155, 179, 450, 469.

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No. IV.—Is a treaty between the East India Company and the Maharana Bheem Sing, of Oodeypore, concluded at Delhi on the 13th January, 1818, whereby the Maharana entrusted his dominion to the protection of the British Government. See Treaties, printed by Parliament, February, 1819, p. 38.

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No. V.—Contains a statement of the dues levied by the Bhíl Pals between Oodeypore and Khairwarra, and a list of the Grasya Hill chiefs of Babul and Khairwarra.

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