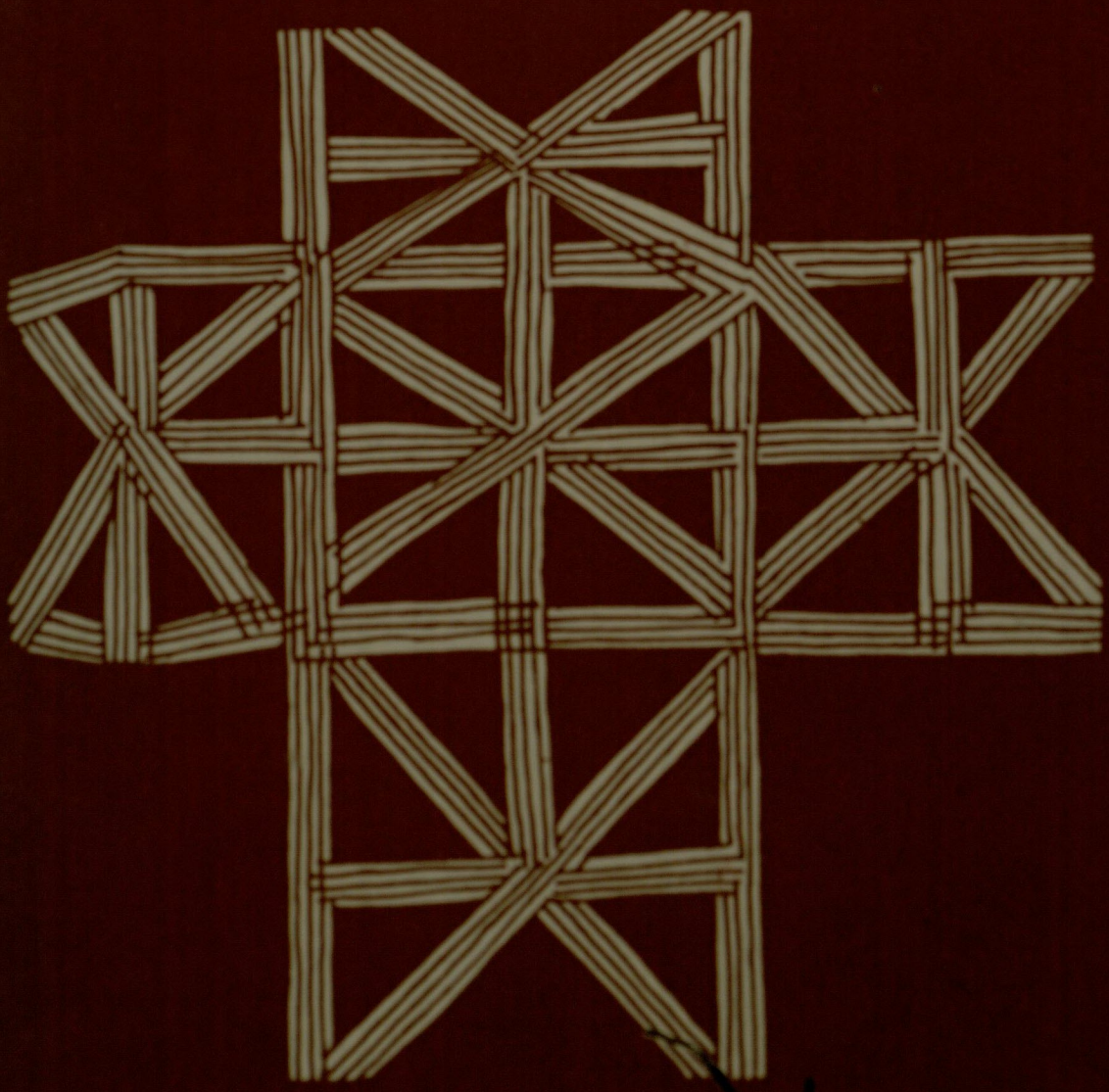
THE GONDS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf



The Gond are the largest tribal group of India. Close on four million strong, they constitute a prominent element in the complex ethnic pattern of the contact zone between Dravidian and Indo-Aryan populations. A rich mythology and many epic tales, carefully preserved by oral tradition, reflect past glories, but since the beginning of the 20th century the fortunes of the Gonds have seriously declined. Economically more advanced populations infiltrated into their habitat and much of the Gonds' ancestral land fell into the hands of new settlers.

The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh by Professor Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, the internationally recognized authority on the subject of tribal India, presents a comprehensive account of social and cultural life as observed over a period of thirty-eight years in Adilabad district which used to form part of Hyderabad state. The author's long-standing familiarity with many individual Gonds enables him to draw an intimate picture of the life of a village community, and to trace the fates of men and women over a long stretch of time. The book contains graphic descriptions of seasonal festivals, weddings, funerals and the rites in honour of the clan deities, but special emphasis is laid on the economic and social changes which have transformed the character of Gond society in recent years.

While the book is no doubt of great moment to the student of anthropology, it can just as well be read by the intelligent reader as a fascinating travelogue.

Rs 175

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf was born in Austria. He studied anthropology in the Universities of Vienna and London, and later specialized on research among the tribal populations of India. In 1936 he began his long career as a fieldworker with a study of the Konyak Nagas, and this was followed by research among several aboriginal tribes of the Deccan. In 1944 and 1945 he served the Government of India in the Northeast Frontier Agency, and from 1945 until 1950 he was Adviser for Tribes and Backward Classes to the Government of Hyderabad state.

In 1951 he was elected to the Chair of Asian Anthropology in the University of London and until 1976 he served as Head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology in the School of Oriental and African Studies. Between 1953 and 1976 Professor von Fürer-Haimendorf and several of his students carried out extensive research in Nepal which resulted in the publication of such standard works as *The Sherpas of Nepal* and *Himalayan Traders*. He is an authority on problems of tribal administration and welfare and upon his retirement from teaching duties in 1976 he took charge of a research project involving the study of recent developments among tribal populations both in Peninsular India and Arunachal Pradesh.

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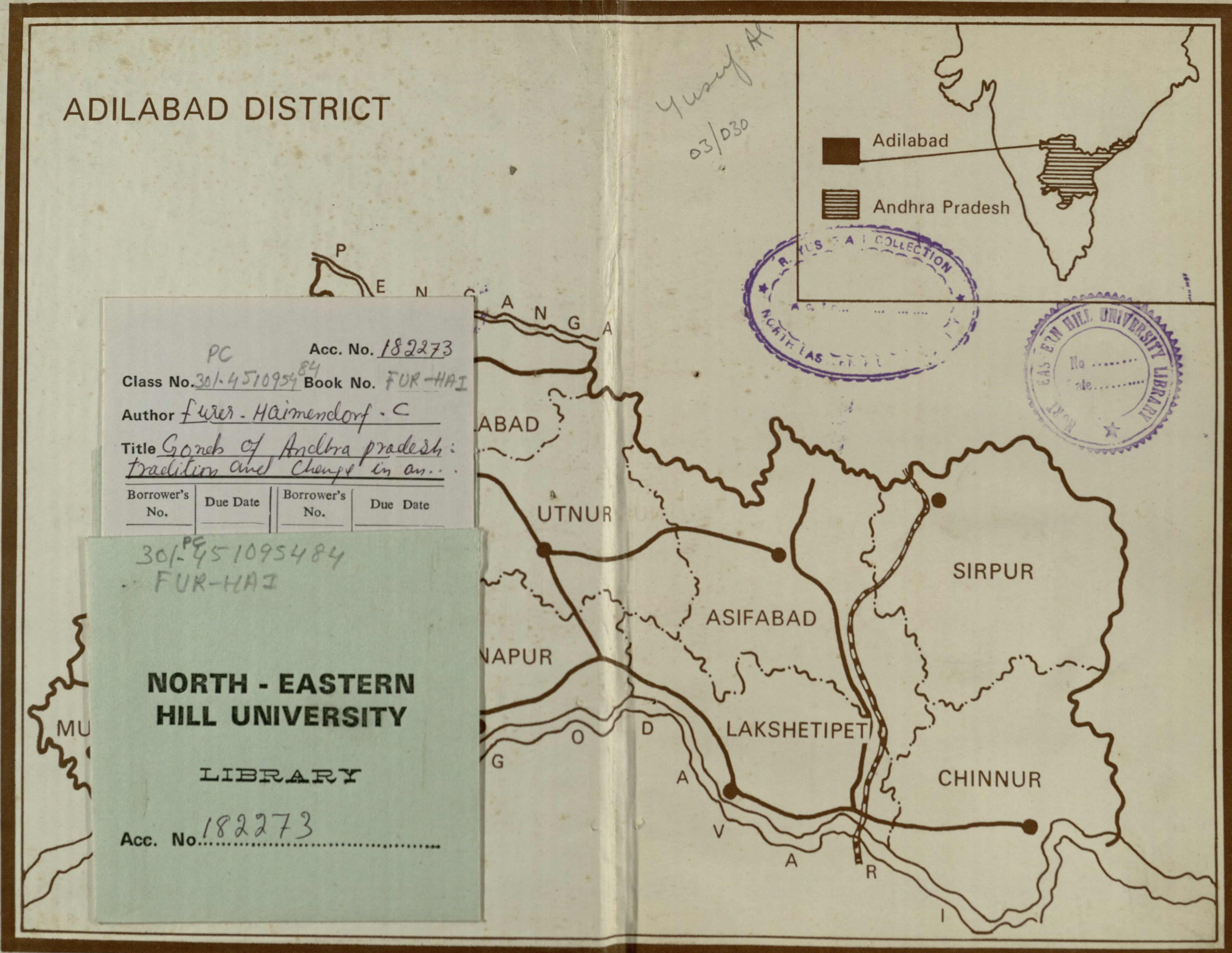

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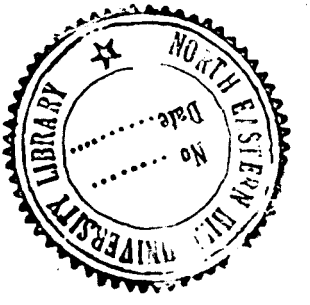

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The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh

Tradition and Change in an Indian Tribe

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf
in collaboration with
Elizabeth von Fürer-Haimendorf

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To
RABINANDAN PRATAP
and my other friends
of the Hyderabad Tribal
Research Institute

PREFACE

When I left India in 1949 after a virtually unbroken stay of ten years the series of anthropological monographs, published under the auspices of the Government of His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar, and entitled *The Aboriginal Tribes of Hyderabad* had remained incomplete. While Vol.I, *The Chenchus* (London, 1943), and Vol.II, *The Reddis of the Bison Hills* (London, 1945), were self-contained works, Vol.III, *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad*, Book I: *Myth and Ritual* (London, 1948), was left as a torso. I had planned to complete this work as well as the series with the publication of Book II: *Social Structure and Culture Change*, and had optimistically allowed this book to be advertized on the jacket of Book I of *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad*. My preoccupation with the establishment of a department of anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies and my subsequent involvement in the anthropological exploration of Nepal prevented me from concentrating any further on an analysis of the data I had collected among the Gonds of Hyderabad state. Several brief visits to the scene of my earlier research only intensified my sense of guilt caused by my failure to complete the monograph on the Raj Gonds of Adilabad. As the years passed the possibility of producing a second volume on the basis of data collected in the 1940s became more and more remote, and I realized that *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad* would have to remain incomplete unless I had an opportunity of refreshing my memory and studying the changes which have affected the Gonds since the time when I had first come to know them.

Fortunately such an opportunity has now arisen. In the course of a research project devoted to the study of the development of Indian tribal societies during the past thirty-five years, I returned to the highlands of Adilabad district, now forming part of Andhra Pradesh state, and stayed once again in some of the Gond villages I had known so well in the 1940s.

The study of economic and social change among several tribal populations of India will extend until the end of 1979, and a comparative analysis of my own findings and those of my colleague, Dr Michael Yorke, will form

the subject of a book to be jointly written after the completion of the project. In the meantime, I have set about to compile, check and amplify my data on the Gonds of Adilabad district, and the present book is the result of this enterprise. As the entire series, *The Aboriginal Tribes of Hyderabad,* has long been out of print, there is little point in writing and publishing Book II of *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad* without reprinting Book I. Yet, a re-issue of so dated a work seemed inadvisable, and I have decided therefore to recast the entire work by combining old and new material, and in doing so sketch the process of change which has affected some features of Gond culture while others have remained relatively static. Thus, in the spheres of mythology and ritual, there have been only minor changes of emphasis, and this has made it possible to retain part of those chapters of *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad* which deal with myths, legends and the performances of rites—all expressions of traditional Gond ideology. The sequence of chapters, however, has been changed and an entirely newly written account of the social structure, comprising Chapters 3-10 precedes the record of Gond mythology.

My recent field research aimed at tracing the development of Gond society over the past thirty-five years has been made possible by generous grants from the British Social Science Research Council, the Leverhulme Trust Fund and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Their support enabled my wife and myself to spend the time from November 1976 to April 1977 in Andhra Pradesh. By our joint efforts we succeeded in collecting within this relatively short period a great deal of information on the conditions prevailing throughout a large part of Adilabad district. The very adequate funding of our project alone would not have assured its success had it not been for the support of the Government of Andhra Pradesh which provided us assistance and facilities on a scale far beyond the level foreign scholars can reasonably expect. Though it is impracticable to mention individually all those who have earned our gratitude by placing the resources of the district administration at our disposal, I wish to record my deep indebtedness to the following officials for all they have done to promote our research: S.R. Sankaram, IAS, Secretary to the Andhra Pradesh Government Tribal Welfare; my old friend and former colleague, D.R. Pratap, Director of the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute; Abdul Rawoof of the same Institute; C.D. Arha, IAS, Collector of Adilabad district; and last but by no means least, M. Narayan, then Special Deputy Collector Tribal Welfare. Among the local Gonds and Pardhans there were dozens of old friends who welcomed us with touching warmth and affection. In appreciation of the time and effort they spent in giving us information I would like to mention specifically Raja Bhagwant Rao of Kanchanpalli; Torosam Gangadra, Headmaster of the Ashram School at Kanchanpalli; Mesram Somji. Headmaster of the Ashram School at Marlavai, and Kanaka Hanu whom I knew well as a boy of sixteen and who is now the most prominent man of Marlavai. Our work greatly benefited from the assistance of Kova Manohar and Maravi Tukaram, both of whom acted as our research assistants and interpreters for Gondi, a language in which we could no longer

freely converse though a limited understanding had fortunately survived the passage of time.

Apart from the facilities afforded to us by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, we also benefited from the sponsorship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the encouragement kindly extended by Dr B.D. Sharma, Joint Secretary to the Government of India in the Home Ministry, whose knowledge and interest is an inspiration to all those concerned with the welfare of tribal populations.

As our research project progresses we may gain further insight into the process of social change among the Gonds of Adilabad, but, determined to make amends for my earlier failure to complete the monograph on the Raj Gonds, I am anxious to avoid all further delay and I therefore present this volume as a descriptive account of traditional Gond culture as it developed in the highlands of Adilabad over a span of half a century.

Last but by no means least I would like to thank Gabrielle and Wolfgang Schallanberg for the warm welcome and splendid hospitality they accorded us on many occasions in their home in New Delhi. After long months spent in Gond villages their company and the luxury of the Austrian Embassy never failed to restore us in spirit and body.

C. VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

School of Oriental and
African Studies
University of London

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Chapter 1

THE GONDS IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

No aboriginal people of India has attained greater prominence on the political scene of past centuries than the large group of tribes commonly known by the generic term Gond. When the mist that still veils long periods in the history of the Deccan finally lifts, Gonds appear not only as the main population of wide areas in the very heart of India, described after them as Gondwana, but also as a ruling race equal in power and material status to many contemporary Hindu princes. Lacking unity and leadership the Gond states collapsed before the successive onslaughts of Mughal and Maratha armies, but the Gond populations remained, the old feudal system continued to function in many remote tracts and several Gond rajas enjoyed until 1947 the status of ruling chiefs. But besides the advanced sections of the Gonds who vied with Hindus in the fields of war and statesmanship, there were and still are the great masses of primitive peasants and forest dwellers on a cultural level no higher than that of other aboriginal populations in the central Indian zone. Of their economics, social organization and religion, historical sources tell us next to nothing, and the study of Gond culture, as a distinct element in the culture pattern of India, falls to the anthropologist, who finds an almost overwhelming wealth of material among the many vigorous branches of the Gond family.

Spread over an area considerably larger than the British Isles and extending from the Godavari gorges in the south to the Vindhya mountains in the north, the Gonds are neither racially, nor culturally, nor linguistically a homogeneous population. So great are the differences in custom and material circumstances between many of the widely scattered tribal groups that one may well wonder what causes them to be considered, and indeed to consider themselves, as members of the same race. Wherever we find Gonds, unless they are totally detribalized and merged with Hindu populations, they describe themselves as Gonds or, if speaking Gondi, as Koitur, the universal equivalent of that name in all Gondi dialects. Were it not for those large groups of eastern Gonds, who speak Chhattisgarhi Hindi, the Gonds in the north-west of what is now Madhya Pradesh, who

Chapter 2

THE MATERIAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The territory inhabited by the Raj Gonds of Andhra Pradesh is easily defined. Its boundaries coincide almost exactly with those of the Adilabad district and are, except for a stretch of about sixty kilometres in the west, formed throughout by rivers: the Penganga from the great Sasarakunda falls down to its confluence with the Wardha to the west and north, the Wardha and Pranhita to the north-east and east, and the Godavari to the south. Only the western border of the Gonds' habitat, running from the Sasarakunda falls southwards to the Godavari, cuts across hill and plain without following a water course. While south of the Godavari, in the adjoining districts of Karimnagar, Raj Gonds are found only in a few villages close to the river bank, they extend north and north-east deep into Maharashtra.

The Adilabad district comprises several of the main landscape types of the Deccan: wide cultivated plains with little tree-growth other than an occasional group of mango or tamarind trees that mark a village site; rolling uplands where broad valleys, chequered with fields, alternate with low, wooded ridges; and finally the higher hills, which form the backbone of the district and are today the main domain of the Gonds; they extend roughly from the railway line between Mancherial and Balharshah westwards to the Nirmal-Adilabad road, and gradually losing height, stretch across the road almost as far as the Penganga.

Geologically, the area consists of a basement of Archaean granite on which rest unconformably sandstones, shales and limestones belonging to the Penganga group of the Upper Pre-Cambrian. To the east the low ground is occupied by faulted bands of Gondwana (Permian to Jurassic) near the base of which two or three coal seams are worked. The Deccan trap overlies all these formations and is responsible for spreads of laterite on the tops of highest hills round Manikgarh and for the rich black cotton soil in most of the depressions of the deeply dissected plateau.

Apart from the great rivers enclosing it on three sides, there are few perennial streams in the district, and the only three of any importance are the

Chapter 3

THE SETTLEMENT PATTERN

In the last chapter I have sketched the physical features of the Gonds' habitat and outlined the motley of ethnic groups peopling the plains and highlands of Adilabad district. We must now consider the manner in which the Gonds have made it their home and fitted their settlements to the natural forms of the landscape. Is there such a thing as a typical Gond village? The answer to this question must be in the negative, and I could point to three villages, each radically different from the other, yet all unmistakably Gond settlements. If in times when the Gonds had full freedom to choose their villages sites they evolved a standard type of settlement, such a time must lie far back, and the variety of settings in which we find their villages today is as great as the country's colourful scenery. For Gonds live on the edge of the Utnur highlands from whose southern rim one looks down on to the Kawal forest and across hazy lowlands to the silvery ribbon of the distant Godavari; they live in hamlets tucked away in bamboo-filled valleys, and they live in large compact villages of the plains amidst long stretches of chequered fields and groups of old tamarind and mango trees.

There are villages such as Madura in Asifabad taluk, seat of a Gond raja, which occupies a large, broad valley surrounded by forested hill ranges rising abruptly some 250 metres. Tree-lined streams, carrying water most of the year wind through fields of fertile black cotton soil, and it is not surprising that for many generations this valley has harboured a prosperous Gond village.

Madura consists of eight settlements. Five stand close together and form a unit which functions in ritual matters as one entity, but three outlying hamlets have each their own village deities, and celebrate feasts and ceremonies as separate communities. Tradition tells us that when a raja of the Atram clan, representing a collateral branch of the royal house of Chanda, founded Madura, the valley was empty, but in the nearby hills Kolams were living and cultivated in forest clearings. The Atram men built

Chapter 4

THE VILLAGE AS A SOCIAL UNIT

The character of the Gond village as a social unit was shaped at a time when land was plentiful in relation to the population. Traditionally a Gond was free to sever his connection with the village of his birth whenever he chose to do so, and to settle in any place where he could obtain land for cultivation and acceptance by the headman of an existing village community. Indeed, even one generation ago there were few Gonds who had spent all their life in one village, and it was not unusual for a man to dwell successively in half a dozen villages. Today this mobility has been restricted by the increasing scarcity of land, and the Gonds' growing appreciation of the value of land ownership, and their resultant reluctance to abandon land held on *patta*, that is, permanent tenure recognized by the revenue authorities.

In the past, however, a village community was a unit of little permanence, its composition liable to frequent changes; a period of expansion and prosperity would often be followed by sudden dissolution and the desertion of the village site. Hence, on the Survey of India maps of 1928 numerous village sites, long since reoccupied were marked with the symbol for "deserted village."

Though ephemeral in its composition the village community was, and still is, a very real social unit providing for closer and more consistent cooperation between its members than any of the more permanent units of the social structure, such as phratries and clans.

What then are the distinctive traits of a traditional Gond village? We have seen that in the topographical sense there is no such thing as a typical Gond village. From an anthropological point of view, however, a village can be defined as the sum total of households that consider one Aki post the visible symbol of the community's divine guardian, recognize one headman (*patla*) as their secular head and one village priest (*devari*) as their ritual representative, and combine in the performance of certain annual rites. It is of no consequence that in the course of years some families leave the village while new settlers join the community. As long as there is continuity in the occupation of the village land, and in the performance of the rites in honour

Chapter 5

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Every Gond village is part of a social and territorial unit consisting of a cluster of villages linked by ties of tradition, ritual and kinship. But unlike an individual village with its clearly pronounced features and sharply delineated territory such a unit cannot be defined with precision either geographically or sociologically. There is no Gondi word in use today comparable to the term *nar* (village) to describe such a loosely structured unit but the Urdu term *patti* is sometimes applied to groups of closely linked villages. The English word neighbourhood, which covers most of its aspects and aptly implies a certain informality in its functioning, will be used here for want of a more exact term.

The limits of a neighbourhood are fluid. The marginal villages overlap with contiguous neighbourhoods like the segments of interlocking circles so that the inhabitants on the periphery of one neighbourhood have part in two neighbourhoods, or, expressed in another way, a marginal village of a neighbourhood may form the centre of a neighbourhood of its own. Topographical features play a considerable role in the formation of territorial clusters. Deep gorges and steep hill ranges tend to isolate groups of villages, whereas a line of easy communications such as a much used cart track leading to the nearest market fosters casual social contacts. Frequent intermarriage, ceremonial visiting at Dandari time and cooperation in certain judicial procedures and ritual pursuits are, however, more reliable criteria for the cohesion of the villages forming a neighbourhood. These are the formative forces which are instrumental in the establishment of a neighbourhood's individuality. The observance of common social customs and recognition of the same ritual idiom by the inhabitants determine the cultural homogeneity of a neighbourhood.

This divergence of cultural individuality of widely separated neighbourhoods was forcefully demonstrated when, in 1948, Gonds from the taluk of Kinwat, an area under strong Maratha influence, came to settle in the newly opened up area in the highlands of Utnur. Both the local people and the new settlers were surprised at the cultural divergence which

Chapter 6

PHRATRIES—THE MAIN PILLARS OF THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

While appearing to the outsider as a homogeneous and self-contained whole, distinct from all other ethnic groups, Gond society is elaborately structured. Indeed, no aspect of the social and ritual life of the Gonds is explicable without an understanding of its basic structure. The invariable and permanent elements of this structure are four exogamous patrilineal descent groups known in Gondi as *saga*. Using a term current in anthropological writings on American Indians and Australian aboriginals I described these groups as phratries. They constitute the framework within which traditional social forces operate, and the immutable contours stand out clearly at almost every major social or ritual occasion. Seen from the Gond's perspective the phratries are not divisions in the sense of separate entities, but the essential and complementary parts of a social organism which functions through their constant interaction in a long sequence of reciprocal obligations. Mutual inter-dependence lies in the very nature of the four phratries; they share not only a common mythical history, traced back to their very origin, but their members stand to each other in the relationship of traditional marriage partners.

Tribal opinion unanimously regards Kalikankali as the ancestress of almost the entire Gond people. The myths recorded in detail in Chapter 11, tell how, after conceiving in a miraculous way and without the intervention of a biological father, Kalikankali gave birth to a large number of children, the divine ancestors of the Gonds. They were nurtured by the goddess Parvati—a figure borrowed from Hindu mythology—and consequently imprisoned in a cave by her consort Sri Shambu Mahadeo, the Gond version of Shiva. The primeval Gonds were ultimately liberated by the culture-hero Pahandi Kupar Lingal with the assistance of Jangu Bai, a goddess well disposed to the Gonds and still regularly worshipped.

When the primeval Gonds, referred to as the Parenda Khara Koya Wasi Penk—literally the "twelve threshing floors of Gond gods"—emerged from the cave, they appeared in four batches, and this division into four groups

Chapter 7

THE CLAN SYSTEM

The phratries or *saga* are firmly rooted in Gond mythology, and their establishment as the principal exogamous units is described in a myth which forms part of the spiritual heritage of all Gonds and Pardhans. The *pari* or clans, on the other hand, do not figure in the cycle of myths which deal with the birth and liberation of the Gonds' divine ancestors, their settlement at Dhanegaon and the institution of the social order by Pahandi Kupar Lingal. Nor does the dispersal legend that tells of the settlement of the four *saga* at Bourmachua, Jamtokorvelikinagur, Gudmasur Patera and Ramtek Bamni contain any direct reference to individual *pari*. It is only in the four parallel cycles of myths (*see* Chapter 11), which relate the fortunes of the seven-, six-, five- and four-brother folks after their arrival in these legendary localities that we meet with references to some of the principal clans.

Gond tradition attributes the emergence of *pari* to the incidental occurrence of a certain number of sons or grandsons in the family of a prominent member of the phratry and the names of these sons are prepetuated in the names of the clans descended from them. But not all clans are able to trace their descent from legendary ancestors occupying a definite place in the *saga*'s mythical past. Moreover, there are many contradictions and inconsistencies in the genealogical data handed down by oral tradition.

Each of the *pari* known to the Gonds and Pardhans of Adilabad, though not necessarily occuring in the district, has a recognized place in the system of exogamous phratries and sub-phratries set out in the following Table 1.

Table 1 demonstrates the uneven composition of the individual phratries. In the Sarpe or Atwen Saga and in the Yerwen Saga the number of clans current in Adilabad tallies with the figure—eight and seven respectively—implied in the designation of these phratries. The clans of the Pandwen Saga and the Siwen Saga, on the other hand, have increased beyond those believed to stem from the original brothers. And the ranks of the clans of the four-brother phratry have swollen to such an extent that it is difficult to keep track of even the names of the clans, most of which do not occur in Adilabad at all. It is only some Pardhans who can recite the whole list of these

Chapter 8

THE FEUDAL SYSTEM—PAST AND PRESENT

We have seen that the Gond village community is essentially a free association of equals. Neither in the foundation nor in the subsequent development of the average Gond village can we discern any manifestation of class differences. The headman and the village priest are the elected secular and religious representatives of the villagers, who can withdraw their mandate from either of these dignitaries. The fundamental equality of status which prevails among the inhabitants of a village manifests itself also in the relations between the members of such permanent social units as phratry and clan, and a superficial view of present day conditions in the majority of Gond villages might indeed lead us to the conclusion that Gond society, like other segmentary system, is divided solely along vertical lines. Such a conclusion would be erroneous. A feudal system, today largely obsolete, used to cut at right angles across the vertical division into phratries, clans and sub-clans, and divided Raj Gond society horizontally into a small aristocratic class of raja and other chiefly families and the great mass of commoners.

The principle of fundamental equality of all Gond clans and within the clans of all clan members, and the existence of a feudal system and various aristocratic lineages of Gond rajas are in theory irreconcilable and contradictory. But the average Gond is unaware of any inconsistency in a social structure which comprises such classless segmentary units as phratry and clan as well as a hierarchy of feudal chieftains who occupy a place in a rank system additional to their ascribed status as members of their clan and phratry.

The coexistence of the two systems becomes understandable if we realize that they lie on different planes. The segmentary organization of clans and phratries is nowadays without territorial implications and is concerned mainly with the regulation of marriage and the maintenance of the Persa Pen cult, whereas the feudal system had until recently a territorial and political basis.

The mythology which explains and validates the system of exogamous

Chapter 9

PARDHANS—THE BARDS OF THE GONDS

As bards and guardians of the religious tradition the Pardhans have for long played a vital role in Gond society, and the ritual life of the tribe is unimaginable without their cooperation. Ironically, they are not true members of the Gond community and are not accorded equal social status. Both racially and linguistically the Pardhans are distinct from their Gond neighbours and patrons with whom they have lived in close symbiosis since time immemorial. Among themselves the Pardhans speak Marathi, but with the exception of a few Pardhan communities separated from Gonds by historic accident Pardhans are equally familiar with Gondi. Indeed Gondi is the language of the epics and hymns which they sing at feasts and for the entertainment of Gond audiences, and we have here the unusual case of poets and performing artists whose main medium of artistic expression is a language other than their mother-tongue. The difference of language affects also the name of the community. When speaking Marathi or Hindi, a Pardhan invariably refers to himself as Pardhan, but as soon as he speaks in Gondi he describes himself as Patari, and this is the term used in the texts of myths and epics. The word Pardhan (or Pradhan) is of Sanskrit origin and means literally minister or agent.

The Pardhans' association with the Gonds must be of long standing, for it is sanctioned by an elaborate mythology sacred to both communities and preserved by the Pardhans by oral tradition. The myths relate that at the time when the culture hero Pahandi Kupar Lingal established the ancestors of the Gonds in their legendary home Dhanegaon, they were in need of an adviser and helper for the performance of sacred rites and for the quest for brides. According to one myth the assembly of heavenly and terrestrial gods decided that Daniyevdan Guru's youngest son, Hirasuka, should be appointed as servant to Pahandi Kupar Lingal with the special mandate of assisting in the cult of the Gond's tribal gods. Thus Hirasuka became the first Pardhan and Lingal provided for his sustenance by entitling him to collect from the Gonds birth fees, marriage fees, abduction fees and death fees.

Chapter 10

TRIBAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL VALUES

In the foregoing chapters I have discussed the main structural features of the Gonds' social order, but only fleeting reference has been made to the mechanism by which social controls are exercised and the way in which moral values determine Gond conduct. Like most other pre-literate tribal populations the Gonds never had codified laws, and their attitudes to social values can be deduced only from the functioning of tribal justice and from casual remarks of individual Gond men and women. The obvious starting point for such an exercise is a closer look at the working of the traditional panchayat system.

We have seen that in the Gond judicial system the court of first instance is the village council (*panch*). A meeting of the village *panch* may be called for two reasons. There may be the suspicion that one of the villagers has committed an act causing pollution and thus endangering the well-being of the village community. Such an action is considered a cognizable offence, and the village elders must act in order to prevent the pollution from spreading. Alternatively, a dispute between two villagers may have reached a stage where one of the parties seeks the intervention of the headman or another leading man of the village. If the quarrel is serious enough to warrant action on the part of the community and the man appealed to is prepared to sponsor the cause of his client he will summon a gathering of the householders of the village.

The summoning of a *panch* is done in an informal way, and if a dispute erupts at a time when all villagers are busy with their agricultural work, or engaged in absorbing ritual activities there may be considerable delay. But once the members have gathered either in the open or on the verandah of a prominent man, the procedure follows a more or less standardized pattern.

The first aim of the *panch* is to elucidate the facts of the case. If both litigants are present, as normally they will be, the meeting opens with a detailed statement of the complainant, and this is usually followed by an equally lengthy reply of the accused. As the two versions of the causes and course of the dispute are usually contradictory, one of the elders then puts questions

Chapter 11

THE MYTHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

The Origin of the Gonds

The social norms regulating the tribal life of the Gonds are firmly rooted in mythology. They derive their validity from the rulings of culture-heroes and from the actions of defied ancestors recounted in epics and countless songs. The myths that tell of the origin of the Gond race and the establishment of the phratries are more than history or folk lore; they are the pragmatic sanction for institutions that determine the behaviour of every Gond towards his fellow tribesmen, they are the vital force inspiring the performance of the great clan feasts, and they define and authorize man's relations with the divine powers on whom his welfare depends. A relationship of mutual enlivenment links myths and ritual: as the myths lend significance and power to ritual acts, so the symbolic enactment of mythical occurrences during the cardinal rites of the clan feasts endows the myths with reality.

A large part of the Gond's cultural heritage is contained in his myths. To him they are of never fading actuality; they sanction his own doings, they are quoted by his elders when expounding tribal custom, and in their dramatization his religious urges find expression and he feels himself one with untold generations of forefather and with his divine ancestors. It is in the sacramental rites based on the clan myth that the unity of his clan attains realization.

All Gond tradition is oral and consequently subject to almost as many variations there are narrators. Guardians of the sacred lore are not the Gonds themselves, but the hereditary bards, the Pardhans and Totis, who recite at each of the major annual feasts the appropriate myths ar legends; it is largely the manner of recitation by a principal bard and his two assistants which must be held responsible for their successful transmission from father to son.

From a common stock of myths and traditions, Pardhan families of different clans and localities have evolved their own version of various epi-

Chapter 12

THE EARLY PHASES OF LIFE

In the last chapter we have seen that the framework of Gond society is explained with reference to events believed to have occurred in the mythical past when the ancestors of the present Raj Gonds instituted rules which ever since have provided the guidelines for socially acceptable behaviour. Just as the interrelations of such groups as phratries and clans are determined by patterns of conduct traced back to the formative period of Gond protohistory, the progress of each individual through the phases of life is also chalked out in conformity with beliefs rooted in the distant past. As human existence is insolubly bound up with sex it is not surprising that in a society linking every activity with a mythical or legendary prototype the mysteries of sex and procreation are also explained by myths.

In the following sections attempt will be made to deduce from the Gonds' own myths and stories, the ideas and basic beliefs underlying presentday usage and custom governing the interaction of individual men and women.

The Myth of the Function of Woman

"Sri Shambu created woman. In the age of Kali he created her. Now man and woman were in the world. Maru, the man, and Laldevi, the woman; their children were to people the earth. From them would descend all the men of this world. But how should this be? All trees put forth blossoms and from the blossoms grew fruit from the fruit sprouted new trees, and so trees multiplied. But from Laldevi the woman came forth no flowers, Laldevi the woman could not bear fruit. The conception of woman had not been ordained. The years passed, the woman grew to twelve years, she could not conceive, she was unyielding, she did what she liked. Sri Shambu saw her, pondered, considered the woman whom he had created, considered her shape and considered her sex. He thought of the vulva as a nest for the egg, but discarded the thought and placed the blood flower close to her womb. Each month should she flower, and from the flower would grow seed, thus should the seed of man multiply. But because woman was wilful

Chapter 13

AVENUES TO MARRIAGE

Marriage, the preferred and normal state for every adult Gond, is a social condition which in some cases overlaps with childhood. The majority of boys and girls however marry only after reaching maturity. Yet there is no recognized phase when adolescent boys and girls can mingle in the light-hearted free atmosphere of youth societies or share the intimacy of such institutions as the youth dormitories (*ghotul*) of the Bastar Gonds.

The routine of everyday life involves a sharp division of labour and with it a certain segregation of the sexes. Even at feasts and weddings girls and women keep largely to themselves, and an unmarried girl will seldom be seen talking to a young man. There is no provision for leading the natural attraction between young people into channels sanctified by custom and contact between the youth of both sexes is outwardly only superficial. But despite the decorum observed in public, there are many opportunities when boys and girls can meet in field and forest, and while the traditional etiquette demands segregation, village opinion regards friendships between the unmarried of different exogamous groups with tolerance, provided always that a measure of decorum and discretion is observed.

Unlike the Murias of Bastar, the Gonds of Adilabad consider youthful attachments only as stepping stones to permanent unions. Marriage rather than adventure is the aim of courtship; and romantic love has no acknowledged place in the value system of present day Raj Gond culture. Even the songs are poor in references to sexual passion and amorous sentiments. Love songs of a lyrical character are rare and most songs dealing with proposals of marriage or other advances to a girl are prosaic in tone. The contrast to the love poetry of the Hindi speaking Gonds of Madhya Pradesh is striking, and for a long time I was doubtful whether I had not altogether missed certain types of poetry. Extensive collections of songs convinced me, however, that romantic elements are few, and that sexual passion is not a common subject for poetic expression. Indeed, some of the songs strike a somewhat satirical note, and describe the scorn which a girl may pour on the advances of a suitor.

Chapter 14

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND INHERITANCE

Few Gond couples start married life on their own, inhabiting a separate house and cultivating land over which they have exclusive rights. Such a situation may arise in the case of a mature man marrying again after being widowed or divorced, but it is exceptional, and most spouses begin their marriage in the household of either the husband's or, more rarely, the wife's parents. As Gond society is basically patrilineal the majority of young married couples live for some time with the husband's parents and this means that a newly married bride, if already mature at the time of the wedding, enters her parents-in-law's house and has to adjust herself to the routine of her husband's family. In the days when more than two-third of all first marriages were between cross-cousins most young wives did not have to live among strangers, for a girl's mother-in-law was likely to be either her father's sister or her mother's brother's wife whom she had known since childhood.

The birth of children is often, but by no means invariably, the occasion for the setting up of a separate household even if the husband continues to share in the cultivation of his father's land. It is only when the spouses have established themselves in a home of their own that their relationship crystallizes on a basis which allows the unfolding of the individual characters free of any interference by other members of a joint family.

In theory men are held to be superior to women, and no Gond, whether man or woman, will dispute the accepted view that the husband should play the dominant role in a marriage. In public men are generally more articulate than women, and a wife is expected to defer to her husband. In practice, however, relations between spouses do not always conform to this model, and many women are the equal partners of their husbands, while some of strong personality may even dominate the whole household. Yet, in all ritual undertakings women are overshadowed by men, and the rules of inheritance discriminate against women whether married or unmarried.

In the day to day running of the household the wife enjoys great freedom

Chapter 15

THE KINSHIP SYSTEM

Every Gond is born into a phratry and a clan and nothing short of expulsion from the tribal community can modify his position vis-á-vis all the other members of these immutable social units. In the same way he starts life on a definite place within a system of relationships determining his behaviour towards a large percentage of the people with whom he comes normally in contact. In so far as consanguinous kinship is concerned, this place is not of his own choice, for the incident of birth alone creates social ties which bind an individual throughout his entire life. Apart from standardizing his relations to his immediate cognate and agnate kinsmen, the system, with its extension of certain kinship terms to all members of the relevant phratry, gives concrete expression to the fiction that phratry and clan are unilineal descent groups. Relationship terms which primarily designate a biological link, such as the sibling link, are employed also to describe relationships which cannot be defined with accuracy in biological terms though they have a concrete reality on the sociological level. Thus a Gond calls "brother" not only his own siblings of male sex, his father's brothers' sons and all those other members of collateral lines which stand on the same generation level but also any member of his clan of approximately similar age. A social relationship replaces here the biological link, for the term brother is being used even though a reconstruction of genealogies might prove that the two men calling each other brother may belong to different generations in the biological sense.

The kinship system of the Raj Gonds, like that of any other people, seizes upon those elements of the biological structure which are socially important and ignores distinctions which are of no relevance to a person's location on the kinship map. It consists of isolating, descriptive and classificatory terms, the latter constituting the majority of all kinship terms. Isolating terms, which designate one person only, are confined to the words for husband and wife, both applicable only to a person's actual mates and not to any of the latter's relatives. All other terms are classificatory and cover several persons standing to the speaker in different biological relations.

Chapter 16

DEATH AND THE CULT OF THE DEAD

In the mind of the Gond society does not consist of only those who live on this earth. The dead members of the clan, dwelling in the company of the Persa Pen, form part of a community which remains a unit even though divided by the line between life and death. For according to the Gond world view this dividing line is not unsurmountable. The living can reach across it and influence by ritual acts the fate of their departed kinsmen, and the dead are believed capable of bringing weal and woe to their surviving relatives.

The funerary rites, which rival and sometimes exceed in their complexity and costliness even the marriage ceremonies are the visible expression of this belief in the community of the living and the dead. As a *rite de passage* the Gond funeral is in many respects a sequel to the marriage rite. For the Gond who died unmarried the full rites may not be performed, and he remains for ever outside the company of the clan god and the departed clan members. On the other hand, even a virgin boy or girl who has undergone the wedding rites is eligible for cremation and ritual introduction to the god and the departed of the clan. And it is on the occasion of the wedding and the funeral that the interaction and reciprocal obligations of patrikin and affines take the most concrete shape: the wedding admits the young Gond to the fellowship of two intermarrying clans and, in the case of the girl, invests her with the status of a member of her husband's clan, and at the funeral rites both *saga* and *soira* cooperate to gain for the departed a place among those who have preceded him to the land of the dead.

The funeral rites relate far less to the disposal of the corpse, which may be either buried or burnt, than to the passage of the spirit from the dwellings of the living to the world beyond. Gond eschatology is complicated and by no means entirely consistent, but an appreciation of its basic features is essential for an understanding of the mortuary rites.

The Gonds—like most aboriginals of middle India—ascribe the inception of life in a human embryo to the entrance of a *jiv*, a lifeforce sent there by Bhagavan, the supreme god whom the Gonds identify with Sri Shambu

Chapter 17

FARMING—THE BASIS OF GOND ECONOMY

The life of the individual Gond and indeed of the whole tribal community is sustained almost entirely by the tillage of the soil and the whole nature of Gond culture can be understood best when seen against the background of the agricultural activities which absorb so much of everyone's time and energy. However, in the eyes of the Gond the material aspects of his work in field and forest or only one side of a process which involves also the action of supernatural forces. Their cooperation, so essential for the success of all human endeavour, can be attained only by the performance of complex rites, which interlock closely with the practical side of the raising of crops. Gonds believe that any mistake or omission in ritual has as damaging consequences as bad judgment at sowing time, faulty rotation of crops or careless weeding. Even the festivities and celebrations which fill many of the days of the slack agricultural season, when the Gond is free from the daily toil in the field, are partly directed towards the attraction of supernatural aids, and the fertility of the seedgrain is reinforced by the blessing of gods and sprinkled blood of sacrificial animals.

Though agricultural work and the cult of deities and spirits is inextricably interwoven, the two will be described separately, and this chapter deals mainly with the techniques and economics of cultivation and animal husbandry and the storage and marketing of crops. The many seasonal rituals linked with the various phases of the agricultural cycle will be described in Chapter 18.

The months of the Gond year do not coincide with those of the Gregorian calendar, and in order to indicate as precisely as possible the timing of ceremonies and ritual the Gondi names of the months will be used. The year begins with the month of Durari, which corresponds to February-March. The subsequent months are Chait (March-April), Bhawe (April-May), Bur Bhawe (May-June), Akari (June-July), Pola (July-August), Akurpok (August-September), Divali (September-October), Karti (October-November), Sati (November-December), Pus (December-January) and Mahon (January-February). The Gondi, like the Hindu year, is a lunar

Chapter 18

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

In the mind of the Gond the world consists not only of human beings, animals and the tangible and visible objects of nature, but also of a multitude of beings that are not normally visible, though on occasion seers and priests can see and hear them in trance and in dreams and their impact on human life is felt in a number of different ways. It is debatable whether these beings should be described as "supernatural," for the Gond considers them as part, and indeed a vital part of nature. He thinks that they move freely in the same sphere which is the orbit of men, and that the invisible world is an extension of the visible world. For an outside observer it is not easy to appreciate how very real and actual the gods and the host of minor deities and spirits are to the average Gond. The fact that he cannot see them does not seem to impair in the least the consciousness of their presence at many a rite. Gonds will describe in detail not only the goings and comings of gods but even their appearance. The frequency of states of trance and possession, when the gods speak through the mouths of seers (*bhaktal*), are to the Gond irrefutable proof of their presence and their concern for human affairs.

The Gonds' elaborate seasonal rituals, which will be described presently, are based on the assumption that powerful divine beings can influence the course of nature and that man's fate depends largely on their favour or disfavour. The approaches to the various deities differ widely, but underlying the somewhat confusing variety of cult acts is the belief that all gods expect and desire to be worshipped by men, that they are accessible to prayers and offerings, and that they have the power if not always the will to grant the applicants' requests. This basic belief is by no means incompatible with a wide range of emotional attitudes evinced in the cult of different deities and the distinction between those gods who are invariably benevolent and those whose evil designs must be bought off by heavy sacrifices.

The differences in the nature of the various gods have probably historical reasons, for it is obvious that not all deities nowadays worshipped by Gonds have their origins in the same cultural sphere. Besides tribal gods,

Chapter 19

THE CULT OF THE CLAN DEITIES

The myths recounting the origin of the clan deities and the deeds of divine ancestors form part of an elaborate cult which is one of the most vital elements of Gond culture. In this cult the myths recorded in Chapter 11 are sung and recited by Pardhan bards on prescribed occasions and they link the ritual with the past in much the same way as the reading of scriptures links a Christian service with historical events. Though the deities propitiated by the Gonds on one or the other occasion are many, it is mainly the cult of the clan deities, the Persa Pen, which derives sanction from the sacred epics.

While it is more than probable that in the old days, the sacred objects whose prototypes were given to the four phratries by Pahandi Kupar Lingal were kept in the midst of the forest, far from human habitation and the round of daily life, such seclusion is no longer practicable, and today the ritual objects are generally housed at no great distance from the village. If the Persa Pen is still located on the traditional clan land, you will find the shrine attached to the settlement where the priest (*katora*) and the guardian of the god reside. The shrine may lie in a field or in the nearby jungle and in many cases the tombs of prominent clan members are to be found in the vicinity. This shrine is of a traditional pattern which does not allow of much variation. It is a small oblong shed with a thatched roof, too low for a man to enter upright, the ridge pole supported at either end by two stout posts, and the eaves by six or eight posts; in some of the older shrines the floor is built up of stone slabs, but in others it is a low earth dais, the surface plastered with cowdung. The shrine is open on all sides and contains a low forked wooden post carrying between its three or more, rarely four, prongs a large earthen pot, covered with an upturned earthen saucer. This post (*kuṭe*) consists usually of the natural triple crutch of a teak tree, which is stripped of bark but otherwise unworked. Recent innovations, however, are squared carved posts decorated with incised patterns, the four arms jointed by mortice and tenon. The earthen pot contains ritual objects used during the main cult acts: the whisk (*chauwur*), the brass bells, the red or white cloth and various smaller articles. Close to this post on a long board

Chapter 20

THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF THE ADILABAD GONDS

The traditional pattern of Gond life described in the preceding chapters developed at a time when tribal communities lived in relative isolation in the highlands and wooded plains of Adilabad rarely disturbed by close contact with other populations. That time is long past, and recent decades have been marked by an unrelenting struggle between the Gonds endeavouring to retain their ancestral land and economic independence and newcomers intent on exploiting the rich agricultural and forest resources of the region. On the whole the Gonds were fighting a rearguard action, and it was only during some limited periods that government intervened on the side of the Gonds and attempted to redress the balance by giving Gonds and other tribal populations legal protection against the alienation of their land and the erosion of their economic and social independence.

In this chapter I shall outline the sequence of events affecting the position of the Gonds as I observed them between 1941 when I first came to Adilabad and 1977. A detailed account of the changing trends of tribal policy on the part of succeeding governments could well fill a whole volume, and a full analysis of the present situation will indeed form part of a comparative study extending to several tribal populations of Andhra Pradesh. Here I propose to highlight only those aspects of the tribal problem which are of direct relevance to the Gonds' ability to maintain their distinctive style of life.

In the early 1940s the Gonds of the Adilabad district had already been ousted from many villages and large areas of land once held by their forefathers. Whereas in the interior of the highlands and particularly in Utnur taluk there were still compact blocks of purely tribal villages, in the lower lying county and above all in the riverain tracts drained by the Penganga in the north and the Godavari to the south Gonds had lost much of their land to Hindu as well as Muslim settlers. The outlines of this process which began in the early decades of the 20th century can still be reconstructed. At that time Adilabad was a thinly populated region lacking modern com-

GLOSSARY

Aki Pen (G)	Divine village guardian
Amaldar (U)	Obsolete title of official in charge of a district
Arti (H)	Oil lamp used in worship
Auwal (G)	Mother Goddess; for example, Nat Auwal: Village-Mother
Ayak (K)	Kolam god corresponding to Bhimana
Bari (G)	*Panicum italicum*, a small millet
Bhaktal (G)	Seer, shaman capable of entering states of trance and possession
Chauwur (G)	Ritual flywhisk made of yak's tail and symbolizing female aspect of Persa Pen
Dandari (G)	Dancers, both male and female, dressed up in special costumes and visiting neighbouring villages in the month of Divali
Demsa (G)	Dance of a special type danced at weddings and other ceremonial occasions
Deshmukh (H)	Marathi title of hereditary official in charge of a group of villages
Devari (M)	Village priest
Dhoti (H)	Loincloth worn by men; usually made of white cotton
Goni (T)	Measure of weight approximately 240 kilograms
Gram panchayat (H)	Statutory council of elected members representing one or more villages
Gusari (G)	Dandari dancers wearing body paint and peacock feather crown or pointed hats
Inam (U)	Gift; particularly land granted free of revenue
Jagir (U)	Estate assigned by ruler to landlord on special terms
Jagurla (G)	Cremation rite involving dancing round the pyre and animal sacrifices
Jatra (H)	Fair, religious festival
Jawari (H)	*Sorghum vulgare*, great millet
Jiva (H)	Soul, life principle
Kamk (G)	Wooden posts symbolizing male ancestors
Karun (G)	Memorial rite performed after the funeral
Katora (G)	Clan priest
Khaja (M)	Betrothal ceremony
Khandan (U)	Sub-clan
Khati (M)	Blacksmith; member of Marathi caste of blacksmiths
Kingri (G)	Pardhan's fiddle

Kita (U)	Lineage within clan or sub-clan
Komti (T)	Telugu merchant; moneylender
Kor mara (G)	Mahua tree (*Bassia latifolia*) of importance in funeral ritual
Kotwal (U)	Village watchman
Kunbi (M)	General term for farmer; member of the Marathi Kunbi caste
Kutma Kita (H-U)	Lineage of agnatic kinsmen
Kutum (H)	Agnatic kinsman
Lamsare (G)	Son-in-law resident in the house of his wife's parents
Larvi (G)	Female mourner with special function at funeral
Mandwa (U)	Sunshelter, booth
Mandwa surusval (U-G)	"Seeing the marriage booth" formal visit of bride's parents to groom's village
Mantra (H)	Magical formula; spell
Maqta (U)	Estate assigned by ruler to landlord on special terms
Marming (G)	Formal marriage celebrated with full rites
Maund (H)	Measure of weight, approximately 96 kilograms
Mokashi (M)	Hereditary chieftain of a rank inferior to that of raja
Munda (G)	Wooden post, usually square with pointed top, put up as symbol of deity or deceased person, or as memorial for ritual event
Niwot (H)	Sacrifical food which is first offered to deity and then eaten by priest and selected worshippers
Nowon (G)	The ritual eating of first fruits
Panch (H)	Village council; literally, council of five
Panchayat (H)	Village council; tribal council
Parampok (U)	Type of temporary tenure of government land
Pari (G)	Exogamous clan, usually divided into several *khandan*
Pari kapra (G)	Price paid for bride
Patel (H)	Village headman
Patla (G)	Village headman
Patta (U)	Title deed to land
Patti (U)	Region, revenue circle
Patwari (H)	Village accountant
Pen (G)	God, goddess, deity
Pen komta (G)	God's corner; corner in Gond house used for domestic rites
Pepre (G)	Double reed instrument played by Pardhans, similar to the biblical shawm
Persa Pen (G)	Clan deity; literally, Great God
Puja (H)	Religious rite
Rakshasa (H)	Demon
Rota bhiri (G)	Clan legend
Saga (G)	Phratry, largest exogamous division; the term saga also denotes agnatic kinsmen
Sahukar (T)	Merchant; moneylender
Sanad (U)	Patent or document usually relating to grant bestowed by ruler
Sanal (G)	Spirit of departed; plural, *sanalir*
Sale (G)	Sacred spearhead symbolizing male aspect of Persa Pen
Sare dhan (G)	Fee paid by newly married husband to the House Pardhan of his father-in-law
Sarpanch (H)	Elected chairman of gram panchayat

Sar patla (G)	Hereditary village headman of special status
Seer (H)	Measure of weight, approximately 1 kilogram
Siwa-i-jamabandi (U)	Type of temporary tenure of government land
Soira (G)	Affinal kinsman
Sor babat (G)	Divorce fee payable to panch
Suin (G)	Midwife
Survertal (G)	Ceremonial guide and helper at formal wedding
Tahsildar (U)	Official in charge of the revenue administration of a taluk
Taluk (U)	Administrative unit forming part of a district
Talukdar (U)	Official of Hyderabad state in charge of a district corresponding to present collector
Tangedula (G)	Fee received by Pardhan from a man who marries the widow or divorced wife of a *soira*, that is, of a *saga* other than his own
Tapu (T)	Ritual pollution
Tum (G)	Goat sacrificed for Persa Pen and the departed of the clan on the occasion of the introduction of the *sanal* of a recently deceased kinsman to the clan deity
Vitar (G)	Ritual pollution
Watan (U)	Hereditary estate; poetically, homeland
Watandar (U)	Owner of *watan*; owner of hereditary right
Wen (G)	Divine being; divine ancestor, specifically used with reference to the primeval ancestors of the Gonds
Wojari (M)	Brass founder
Zamindar (U)	Landowner

G—Gondi; H—Hindi; M—Marathi; T—Telugu; U—Urdu

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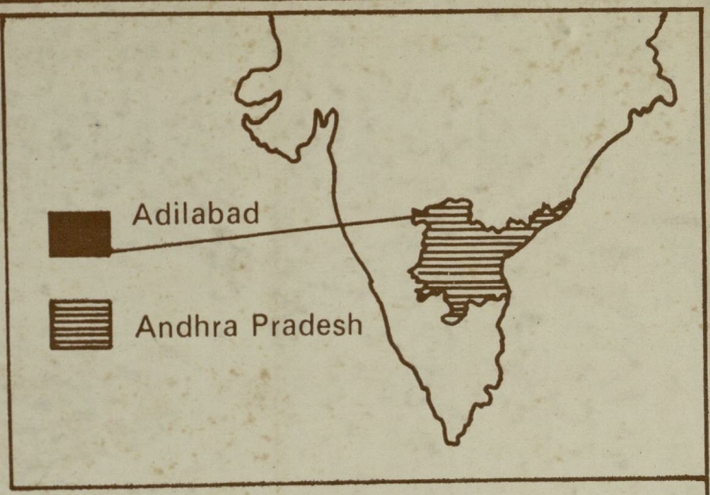

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