

CHAPTER - III
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

I

Bhils constitute the major element of the population in the highlands, where they normally occupy large tracts solely by themselves. Even in such regions, where there are other tribal or non-tribal groups in the neighbourhood, the inter-group contacts generally tend to be limited and superficial, as each group tends to move within its own orbit.

Yet in ~~the~~ one sense, this part of Limkheda taluka might be described as a borderland of the Bhil country. If a line were to be drawn from Dhanpur to Kanjeta, in the south, ~~large number of~~ Kolis (a congeries of tribes found in Western India) are found in large numbers to the west of this line, while the Bhils are found more to the east. In the border land are found a number of villages, containing both Kolis and Bhils in large numbers. Incidentally the country inhabited by the Kolis to the north and west of Ratanmal is traditionally known as Bārāh (from which the people are referred to as Bāriya Kolis) while to the east, stretching almost upto Jhabua, the territory is identified as Suvāl. To the south of the Ratanmal again, live the Nāika - a small, primitive tribal group settled in a narrow strip of territory along the southern slopes of the Pāvāgarh-Ratanmal spur, traditionally known as Nāiktappa. Another narrow strip of territory cutting east from the Ratanmal

right across the Bhil tracts into Madhya Bharat is inhabited by the Rāthia (or the Rāthvi).¹ To the east and north of Ratanmal live considerable number of Bhilāla - a group with a semi-tribal status. The Patlia - another group of mixed tribal and Rajput descent are found in only two villages of Limkheda and are concentrated in the neighbouring talukas of Dohad and Alirajpur (Jhabua District). Thus within a radius of about 20 miles, Bhils in this area are in contact with a number of tribal elements. Further, due to certain historical circumstances considered earlier, the Bhils have been forced to come into significant and extensive contact with a number of tribal groups and with some Hindu castes - such as the Rajput and Bania, who have exercised a considerably strong hold on their economic and political life.

Much of this part of Rewakantha was cut up into numerous 'agency' states and estates ruled over by Rajput princes and their jagirdars (feudal land holders). Most of them claim a Rajput descent today. However, local traditions point in many cases, to tribal origins of these ruling houses. For instance, I have it on very reliable authority² that the rulers of Baria and the now extinct houses of Ratanmahal were of a Bariya-Koli extraction. Even today the cousins of the last Thakur of Ratanmahal (he died without a heir and the estate was sold by the British to the neighbouring state of Baria) live at Kenjeta and are Bariya. So too are the Thakurs of Andarpura and of Taramkach - both claiming to be kinsmen of the present rulers of Bariya. There were as many as ten

Bhilala houses under British guarantee and many others under the guarantee of the Dhar and other native states.³ Principal Bhilala houses are of Bhargarh, Selani and Mandhata, where the ruler is addressed as Bhilala Rao.⁴ There must have been a large number of inter-group marriages in the early days of Rajput-Bhil contact. When Col. Tod wrote in 18 , Rajputs were still taking food from the Ujla Bhils (lit. Bhils of pure tribal descent) and all castes were taking water from them.⁵ It is also likely that a large number of the ruling houses of this area, which were originally of the Bhils, or of mixed Rajput-Bhil descent gradually managed to raise themselves upto a Rajput status by devious ways. Sufficient evidence is available to indicate that some Bards, (Charenas or Bhats who were the hereditary genealogists of Rajputs) were often bought over or intimidated into fabricating genealogies linking up these powerful houses with an obscure branch of a well-known dynasty.⁶ Then they would gradually force some of their weaker Rajput neighbours into accepting them as Rajputs, first through establishing commensal and then kinship ties. Little definite evidence is available to us. But it is now clearly indicated that a large part of the area was being ruled by rulers of Bhil or Koli extraction.

Coming back to our main argument, the Bhils seemed to have come into conflict with the Rajputs, who subjected them, often with treachery as much as with sheer might. Then with a view to consolidate their authority and to keep a better control over the tribal people, trusted followers

were placed in strategic villages as Jagirdars and Ankadidars.⁷ They were to pay certain taxes to the government and no questions were asked as to the ways and means adopted by them to extract these taxes from their tenants. The people who were placed in such positions of power were mostly Rajputs (Thakurs), Bhilsela and in such areas, where the ruling family was traditionally associated with them - the Kolis. Even today we find these non-Bhils living among the Bhils and holding special grants from the local Rulers. They form a very influential power group.

And another group which has entered the Bhil country and established itself in a secure position is that of the traders - mostly the Gujarati Bania and Muslim traders. They reside in the several small towns in this area. But they operate through a network of sales and purchase depots established in the most interior villages. Here they buy and sell goods at a large margin of profit, lend money at a high rate of interest (50-80% compoundable, often in each quarter), and by a complicated system of advance payments (on harvest and labour), they had acquired a stranglehold⁸ on the economic resources of the Bhils.

Thus in this area, we find the Bhils in significant and close contact with, (1) certain power groups consisting mainly of Rajputs, Banias and Muslim traders and (2) with a few other tribal groups, some of whom stand also in positions of authority, ^{at}any rate, influence their life

to a considerable extent. Because of the several intervening factors, inter-group relations in the area are likely to be more complicated than elsewhere, where the Bhils live by themselves.

II

We may now turn to a consideration of the inter-group relations in the area, and the type of adjustments that have been adopted by the several groups in their relation to each other.

Considerable differences may be noted among the several groups in their dress, manners, food habits, and in their general way of life. Some of them, the Patlia for instance, are skilled cultivators who have almost attained the status of a Hindu peasant caste. Some others (like the Dhanaka or Naika) are so poor and primitive that even the Bhils mock at them. A generally accepted social hierarchy governing inter-group relations, has come to be evolved during the course of centuries of contact with each other. Among other things, ranking seems to be based principally upon the type of animal food acceptable to the several groups. In this order, the Patlia come at the top followed in due order by the others with the Naika at the very bottom of the scale.

- (1) Patlia may eat only goat's meat and the meat of certain game animals such as the deer.
- (2) Bhilala, Rathia and the Koli (have a similar status with reference to the Bhil and the Patlia), - may eat the

flesh of goats and game animals such as the wild boar, deer, etc. The Bhilala of the badi jāt (purer strain) eschew the domestic fowl, probably because it eats human ordure.

(3) Bhils, eat the flesh of buffalo on certain ceremonial occasions only. Most wild game are acceptable to them.

(4) Rawal, presents no considerable divergence from the Bhil in his food habits and way of life. Probably the lower status is a consequence of his functional role as a priest and a barber to the Bhils and Kolis.

(5) Dhanaka, differs but little from the Bhil and Rawal in his food habits. But he is very poor, shiftless and considerably dirtier in his way of life.

(6) Naika, is very poor and destitute in this part of the country, with a very low standard of life. Most animal flesh is acceptable to him, including beef. He is alleged to eat even the carcasses of these animals. Animals are killed for meat - But in the village, beef is mostly carcass beef. He is regarded as defiled, because of certain very dirty practices such as eating of carcass meat, drinking toddy in and out of season and a total disregard of personal hygiene, etc.

There are certain general rules governing inter-group relation in this area. For instance, cooked food may not be accepted from a person belonging to a group of a lower status. However, certain types of food in which no water has been used for cooking and water which has been brought specially for the guests in a new pot from the spring, are -

acceptable. Further no taboo attaches to the several raw ingredients of cooking and fruits. But under no circumstances is the food cooked on the family hearth may be acceptable to a person of higher group. Such food has to be prepared outside the house, on an improvised hearth of three stones (ningala). An exception to this rule is made on certain ritual occasions when a man has to accept a portion of the sacrificial meat offered to him by persons even of a lower status group. Further, a person may not enter the inner apartments of a house of a higher group man and vice versa. Neither may they use the cots in each other's houses.

Each group is strictly endogamous. Inter-group marriages sometimes occur. But such unions involving a woman of a higher group are resented and invariably the couple are forcibly separated. In a few cases that were reported to me, the man was severely beaten up. Unions involving a higher group man and lower group woman are tolerated, but result in the expulsion of the man. He is forced to restrict all his social relations with the kinsmen of his mate only. Even their children are looked upon as belonging to the group of the mother. For instance, in Pipero, a Patlia fell in love with a Dhanaka woman and much against the wishes of his kinsmen married her. As a result, he was forced to leave his house in the Patlia sector of the village, and build himself a hut near the homestead of his father-in-law. His Patlia wife and children were separated from him. After some years, when the ill-feelings roused by his action, had subsided and cordial relations were again established between

him and his kinsmen, he would often call on them. But always he had to sit just outside the hut and on the floor. He would not be asked to share a pipe of tobacco nor permitted to drink water from the same gourd they drank from. ~~them~~. Food would be dropped and water poured, from aloof into his cupped hands, so that the vessels might not be defiled by his contact. Even his wife and children would treat him as an untouchable.

However, this excommunication and loss of membership seems to be a consequence, not so much of his sexual relations with the lower caste woman, but of his acceptance of food cooked by her, and living with her in the same hut. It is the commensality and coresidence with a person of lower group that is objected to. Inter-group relations in this and the neighbouring regions have always been marked by a certain hypergamy (this question will be discussed in detail later in this chapter), without social sanctions being brought to bear upon the participants. Contact with a person of a lower status is itself not defiling. I have often noticed a Naika labourer working shoulder to shoulder with a Bhilala landholder in Kathiawara. In Pipergota, ^a Bhil is having a Dhanaki concubine for a number of years. But he does not live with her. He accepts no food from her. So his purity is unaffected and he remains a member of the Bhil society. Quite a few Bhilala land holders have Naika women as their concubines and in Earia, ^{such relations exist} between the Koli Thakurs and Ankadidars and Bhil women.

Only the Naika is kept at a distance. Even this distance seems to be more due to his dirty appearance and abhorred practices, such as the eating of dead animals. It is further alleged by certain Bhils that the Naika does not hesitate even to keep the uncleansed hide of an animal in the roof of his hut.

There are a few multi-group villages in the Limkheda taluka and in Kathiwara. Normally in such villages, each group tends to live away from the others as far as possible. The homesteads belonging to a group tend to be situated close together and far removed from those of the other groups. For instance, in the village Pipero, (see sketch map opposite) 20 homesteads of the Patlias form a large cluster in the northern sector, while the Koli homesteads are concentrated in the western sector. The other homesteads - numbering about 40 and belonging to the Bhils are scattered about in the eastern and southern sector of the village. The Dhanakas have only 3 homesteads on the eastern sector - somewhat removed from the Bhils. This pattern is followed in Kathiwara villages also, except for the Naika labourers, who live on the outskirts of the Bhilala landlord they are attached to.

One important consequence of such a pattern is that while the interaction within each group is considerably accentuated, inter-group relations generally tend to be infrequent and superficial. Except for certain specific purposes the several groups rarely come together, inspite of their living in the same village.

III

It is desirable to have more detailed information about the several groups themselves, before proceeding further with the analysis of inter-group relations in the area.

Patlia who come at the very top of the social hierarchy are a small group of people number 15,000 and found mostly in eastern Panchmahal talukas of Dohad and Limkheda and in the adjoining regions of Jhabua District. Most traditions relating to their antecedents give them a mixed Bhil-Rajput ancestry. One tradition speaks of them as descendants of those Rajputs who were driven to seek refuge in the Vinchyas from the armies of Alauddin (1303 A.D.). Due to an acute shortage of women and probably also attracted by the remarkably handsome Bhil women of this area, many Rajputs established sexual relations with these women. There were two groups of people - those who merely established sexual relations with Bhil women, and those who married them. The latter group of Rajputs were outcasted and were known as the vatlia - or impure. This derogatory term stuck as the name of all such people and their descendants, who in course of time, assumed an independent status of endogamous tribe with 12 main clans and many sub-clans. Their tribal affinities and associations seem to have been sufficiently dominant to induce them to a similar way of life in the jungles. Gradually the name vatlia seems to have been transformed into Patlia, their present name. These people - also known as Bhil-Patlia have a higher status to all the other tribal

elements in the region because of their Rajput affinities.

Another tradition mentioned by Sri U.S.Venkatacher, to be widely prevalent in the Central Provinces, associates these people with the Paramar clan Rajputs of Abu hills, who were forced to migrate to Pawagarh hills in Gujarat by acute famines. Here they stayed till about the end of 15th Century when the rash and improper advances made by their leader Prithvisingh (Pattai Rawal) to the goddess Kalika, brought on a curse from the offended goddess. They were again forced to leave Pawagarh due to famines and wars with the Muslims. One section of this clan migrated to Malwai in Dohad taluka. There, some of them seem^{to} have been forced by hunger, to kill and eat the flesh of roz (nilgai, bos elephas tragocamelus). They lost their caste in consequence and were driven out by their companions to the jungles, where they settled marrying¹⁰ from among the local Bhils.

It is perhaps significant that even today these people are referred to as Bhil-Patlia - meaning a people who broke away from their fold over to the Bhils.

Whatever their antecedents be, they are today a community of skilled cultivators. They have generally large holdings of land which they utilize to maximum advantage by having recourse to the most modern techniques of cultivation available to them. In the Limkheda taluka, they are found only in two villages and incidentally both these villages had two or three wells each in 1953, surprising in these parts, where

wells are regarded as unnecessary extravagance. Practically every homestead had its own bullock cart, used for a variety of purposes, ranging from bringing harvest from the fields, to hire out to the timber merchants during the logging season. Generally well to do, they have sizable herds of cattle and draught animals (20-40 heads), live in fairly well built huts of masonry and timber and dress more like the peasants of the Gujarat plains. They generally keep abreast of what is happening in the outer world. Patlia have also come under the influence of sacred hindu missions in the area to a far greater extent than the others. There are about 200 adults Patlias in all the Limkheda taluka. Yet, as many as about 150 of them are converts to either the Ramadasi, Kabirpanthi or Guru Govind sects. Its significance is well realized, when we note that all these three sects demand a total abstinence from liquor, and eschews non-vegetarian food. Incidentally a considerable number of Patlias in this region have been actively associated with the several reformist missions such as the Bhil Seva Mandali of Dohad. Two Patlia gentlemen represent Limkheda taluka in the District Development Board and on the Board of Directors of the Dhanpur Forest Labourers' Co-operative Society and other local organisations. A few are teachers in Local Board Schools and a few others are working as clerks in Baria and in Dohad.

Unlike the Patlia, the Koli are found in considerable numbers specially in the western part of Limkheda taluka. They represent a large congeries of tribes scattered along the western coast of India from Bombay to Broach. In Thana

and Surat Districts, they are a partly fishing and partly agricultural community, and have almost attained the status of a Hindu caste. But in Panchmahals they are a tribal people differing but little from the Bhils in dress, manners, and general way of life. The local traditions account for their presence in these regions, by explaining that they came in the wake of the ancestors of the present ruling houses of Bariya and other estates in the area. The latter claim to be Rajputs today. But the local traditions give them a Koli extraction.¹¹ This is supported by the fact that most of the Thakurdari and the Ankadi rights in these states are held by Bariya Kolis. Some of them even claim kinship with the Rulers of Baria and the Thakurs of Ratammal. It is said that these people were stationed in far off villages for better supervision over the tribal people. At one time the Koli ascendancy extended all over the Limkheda taluka - even to the Ratammal. The right of conducting the annual sacrifice to the Ratneshwar Mahadev on the Ratammal, rightly the prerogative of the tadavis of Bhuwara and Alindra had been usurped by the Koli chief of Pipergota. However, I am told the Bhils seized the opportunity offered by an implied insult to the Ruler of Ratanmahal proffered by the Koli chief of Pipergota and slew the latter, driving away at the same time all the Kolis from the Ratammal hill itself. Even the then Thakur of Ratanmahal was so alarmed at this ferocity of the Bhils, that he immediately shifted his permanent residence from Bhuwara on Ratammal to Kenjeta below the hill. Even to this day, however, the right to officiate as the priest at the mela of

Ratneshwar Mahadev on the Ratanmal, still rests with the descendants of the former Koli chief of Pipergota.¹²

Today, the Koli are emerging gradually in these parts as an enterprising community. Shrewd and industrious, they manage to get a good harvest from their lands inspite of their crude methods and inefficient tools of cultivation. With a keen appreciation of the modern money economy, they utilise most of the available resources to this end and invest their earnings either in land or cattle if available, or in ornaments of silver and gold. Most of them possess bullock carts and put them to a variety of use in their fields and elsewhere. Even on those years when they have bumper harvests, Kolis rarely sit back to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Every year during the logging season, they go with their carts as far out as Chota Udaipur, transporting logs, manufacturing charcoal, logging and engaging in a variety of other occupations. In recent times, a few of them have also started educating their sons and a few have sent their boys even to Boarding Schools at Baria and Godhra for vocational training. Some are working as clerks in the Baria and other Forest Labour Cooperative Societies and the several Sales and Purchase Unions at Baria and Godhra. A few have even started exploitation of the timber resources of the forests of Baria, Dhanpur and Sagtala, in partnership with the Vohra and Bania traders.

Both Bhilala and Rathia are found mostly to the east of Ratanmal. There is but one Bhilala family in the whole of Limkheda taluka and even that is of recent migration. Like

the Patlia, the Bhilala too have traditions of a mixed Rajput descent i.e. descended from the offspring of Rajputs and their Bhil concubines. In such other cases, where pregnancy resulted, the kinsmen of the women were given gifts of land and money towards the upbringing of the children. C.S.Venkatachar associates them with the Chauhan Rajputs of Delhi whose leader was the renowned Prithviraj, the last Hindu king of Delhi. When Rajputs were finally driven out by Iltutmish in 1192 A.D., they migrated to Chittoor, and on being again ousted from there in 1303 by Allauddin, fled to the Vindhya hills for refuge. Here, they seemed to have married the daughters of Bhil chieftains and were expelled from the Rajput fold. Hence they are known as Bhilara (lit., Bhils from a mistake (are)).¹³ They are today a community of powerful and style themselves variously as Thakur, Rao, Rawat, Bhumia, Mukhi, etc. A number of ruling houses in this area are Bhilala and the MahaRao of Mandhata, is the paramount chief of all the Bhilalas.

Generally well-to-do and skillful in cultivation, they differ but little from the Bhils in other respects. Their loin clothes and turbans are more colourful, their huts more neat and tastefully decorated. They are remarkably handsome and proud, but have a more volatile temperament, and given to excessive drinking. So long as the juice of the tad palm (sylvestris phoenix) is available, it is rarely that we come across a sober Bhilala. Further, Forsyth speaks of them as¹⁴ proverbially dishonest, while Malcolm writes that -

"the Bhilala and the Sondhia were the only thieves in Malwa whom no travellers could trust as no oath however sacred, restrains them"; and again as combining with the pride and pretensions of Rajputs the cunning and roguery of the Bhils.¹⁵ However, Bhilala are a hospitable people and for what they lose when they are drunk, they manage to make up during the other seasons, by hardwork and industry.

The Rathia are found exclusively in Barwani State, but appear to have migrated from Rath region in Alirajpur. According to some traditions, they seem to be a sub-section of the Mahadev Kolis of Satpura who migrated north during the late 17th century. Bhilala and Rathia rarely come into contact with the Kolis directly. Their equivalent status is fixed in relation to the Bhils and the Patlia, found on either side of the Ratammal.

Ravals are found sporadically in a few villages. They constitute barely a dozen homesteads with a total of about fifty or sixty adults. Though of a lower status to the Bhils, they have been influenced most by the Hindu reformist influences. Of the dozen families in Limkheda taluka, 8 or 9 are devotees of the Ramadasi panth and eschew meat and liquor, in toto. They are industrious and soft-spoken. They officiate as priests to the Bhils and Kolis on occasions of marriage and funeral, and also as professional barbers and musicians in the area.

The Dhaneka too are cultivators. Found only in one or two villages, they have a very low status both economically

and socially and are considered very inefficient. They engage in honey collection and in lac cultivation - tasks involving large-scale killing of bees and lac germs, and so regarded by Bhils and others as 'unclean'. The Naiks are found in a very few villages of Limkheda taluka and constitute a group of landless labourers. In Kathiwara, they are found in larger numbers, holding lands and in a few cases working as farm labourers with the Jagirdars and the bigger land holders among the Bhilala. They are reputed to be very good farm-labourers when under proper supervision. But they have a tendency to drink heavily. That is perhaps why they never take a good yield on their own lands. They are hardy and courageous and loyal, willing to take considerable risks for their employer. Very fond of honey, they often climb up to the most dangerous eyries to get the much-valued rock honey.

IV

Bhils occupy an intermediary status in the social hierarchy of this region. Bhils themselves concede the superiority of the Bhilala and the Rathia, but speak contemptuously of Patlia and Koli, as cowardly and untrustworthy, mean and avaricious. Many a Bhil have mockingly pointed out to me numerous instances on which an armed Patlia or Koli was set upon ~~the~~ in the jungles of Ulkadar (the long lines of ridges separating the Limkheda taluka from Dohad taluka and formerly marking the boundaries of the Bombay and Baria States) by decoits, and were beaten black and blue by the flat of their own bows. Once Royela Tadevi of Alindra told me

that even if ten armed Kolis should happen to meet a single Bhil suddenly in the jungle, one can be sure that they start trembling, each trying to get behind the other. If he should happen to shoot at them, then they drop the bows and prepare to run. "They never remember", said the tadavi "that the bow and arrow are not merely ornaments; but can be used to defend or to attack." This is probably an exaggeration but contains an element of truth. Once when I was staying at the Bhil Seva Mandali's Ashram at Pipero, a dozen or so Kolis well-armed with bows and arrows and sticks came there in a hurry to complain that in a neighbouring village, a Bhil had come and seized the Mango crop belonging to one of the Kolis. None of them had the courage to dispute or to drive him away and so were on their way to complain to the Police at Dhanpur. They were afraid of taking direct action lest the Bhil should set upon them in darkness sometime and burn down their village. The Bhil is regarded as a desperado and once his object is achieved, a year or two of jail means very little to him. But the Koli is a propertied man and cannot risk losing it. And he has to temporise.

Perhaps here lies the explanation of the mixed feelings of fear and contempt that the Patlia and Koli show towards the Bhil. The latter is regarded as a jungli (lit., one who dwells in the jungle), a wild being with no refinement about him. He is content to live the poorest life possible and under most wretched (relatively for the Koli and Patlia) conditions. He is lazy and shiftless even in his cultivation

and when he does have a good crop perhaps the first in several years, he prefers to 'waste' it all away in mela and jatra (festivals) rather than save it against future lean years as do the Koli and Patlia. Consequently a Bhil has little of value in his homestead, except his cattle and some silver ambitious to move up the social ladder, i.e. with the high castes, who find themselves amidst a wild (as it must appear to them) and instable people - poor and half starving. What perhaps other people may term as brave and adventurous qualities in the Bhils, make the relatively more stable Patlia and Koli, more uncertain and insecure.

Form the
Sentence
again!

Perhaps this insecurity gives us an explanation of the pattern of Koli and Patlia settlement in a multi-group village - close clusters of homesteads with the entrances of most homesteads opening inward into a narrow lane or courtyard with a narrow lane leading outside. This appears considerably significant, specially as the other people here do not live in such a congested fashion. Further, these people always avoid open conflicts with the Bhils, and prefer to conspire with the officials.

As stated earlier, the Patlia and Koli are regarded as mean and avaricious - specially so the latter. This has a reference to their tendency to engage in all sorts of hardy work for wages, even when they are economically well-to-do. The Koli and Patlia have taken to different types of occupation in recent times - from working as peons in government institutions, and as teachers in rural schools, to

operating timber coups in the forest. The Koli goes out with his cart for handling timber and charcoal as far as Chota-Udapur during hot summer (even in those years when he has a good harvest. He also engages in manual labour such as cutting and logging timber etc. This evokes much amusement from the Bhil who never works unless he is forced to. He would much rather enjoy his leisure even when half-starving. In Pipergote I used to notice, that despite many inducements offered by the Sāhukar, such as grain and money given in advance, quite a few of the younger Bhils would cut away from the coup area to "take rests". They would not go back till the exasperated agent of the Sāhukar (who has paid them in advance and so must recover it in labour) would come after them in person and drag them back.

Yet they fiercely resent the 'meanness' of the Koli who come from far off places to coups being operated near Bhil villages, and then filch away the best bits of work. When eventually the Bhils turn up they get only the unwanted bhata timber and the more difficult trees to cut and log. There a Koli pair (they work generally in pairs) get 4 or 5 large allotments of charcoal bhatas, a Bhil pair even though living in the vicinity get often but two small ones only. The same thing happens when the logging allotments are made. The Kolis get the more profitable assignments while the Bhils who come last get the unwanted ones only. Bhils generally explain away their lower incomes as due to the presence of Kolis in the coups.

As was mentioned earlier, the Bhils of Ratanmal and Kotumbi postpone picking the savra berries yielding the valuable charoli till after the timru leaf season is over. They prefer the latter as the easier, for the former involves shelling of the seed carefully in order to get at the charoli within. This operation involves patience and skill and often hurt fingers (in the process of breaking open the little shells). So while the Bhils sit about bundling leaves and earning on an average 4-5 annas, the plateau swarm^d with Kolis and Patlias from as ^{far} afield as Dohad and Baria, ⁿdep~~ending~~uding the forests of all the savra berries, taking them away in head-loads to be shelled at leisure and earning as much as 60-80 rupees per household of two (dry charoli is brought from them at 1-8-0 to 2 rupees a kaccha ser). When eventually the Bhils go into the jungle at the end of the timru season, they get only a few late berries that have been overlooked by the others. Curiously enough, the Bhils continue to lose every year and to abuse the plainsmen as robbers, etc. but it never strikes them to be first and store up the berries as much as they can - (that is plenty, since the jungles in which they live abound with savra trees) and then settle down to the business of timru leaves. They could later shell the berries. When once I suggested this to a group of Bhils, they explained that shelling is very tedious and often the fingers holding them get crushed. "Who can do such hard work" (evadi kef kon karhe) . This was at a period when they had

no crops for the last two years and so were practically starving! They console themselves by speaking ill of the Kolsa (a contemptuous way of referring to a Koli) who having plenty at home, still comes out so far to fetch away fruits and edible roots from 'our forests'. Often they have expressed the view that the government should prevent the Kolis from such trespasses.

This bitterness and contempt for the Koli and Patlia ^{other} rest on the grounds too. It was notoriously common for the talatis in these areas to ^ucarry favour with Sāhukars by helping them to dispossess the Bhil of his land holdings. Often a bill of sale would be fabricated, transferring the land to the Sāhukar for a particular sum, and entries are made in the village land records accordingly. It was easy enough to get a Bhil in those days to put his thumb mark on any official looking paper. ^{He} Sāhukar would keep the deed in the dark for a few years, during which period, whatever taxes are paid by the Bhil would be credited to the Sāhukar's account and receipts would be in the latter's name. Then it was comparatively easy for the Sāhukar to move in on the land which according to records was his for several years. Bhils had little chance of justice against the combined evidence of the bill of sale attested by his own thumb mark, tax receipts for a number of years and the testimony of the talati. Often these talatis were Kolis and Patlia. Bhils could never forgive ~~them~~ this type of treachery from a neighbour.

It is further pointed out that though there is a government order since 1940 or thereabout forbidding the transfer of tribal land to non-tribal hands, Kolis again aid the Sahukar to defeat the purpose of the order. A Sahukar would force a heavily indebted Bhil to sell his lands to a Koli or a Patlia - who would be just an agent of his. The Koli would get only a small share of the crops for his nominal ownership. But in actuality, the land will be controlled by the Sahukar only. In the winter of 1952, such an instance occurred at Madhi, where the local trader and the talati had conspired to dispossess an old Bhil of his lands. The latter who came down for advise to the Bhil Seva Mandali Ashram at Pipero, said that he had heard of the alleged sale of his land three years ago to a Koli of Malu for the first time, four days ago when the latter came out with the talati to take over the land, the Bhil was advised to fight the matter at the Baria court. Later I came to know that the concerned talati was arrested on some other charges, and had admitted to his collusion in the conspiracy to dispossess the Bhil of his land.

For some years past the Government of Bombay has a policy of giving priority to the tribesmen themselves and to Forest Labour Cooperative Societies, when coups are auctioned off. These coups are sold to these individuals and Societies at upset prices only. Certain Forah and Bania timber firms are taking an undue advantage of this concession by getting their Koli and Patlia agents to bid for these marked coups in their own accounts. The working capital is

provided by the traders who also direct the operations. Only a small portion of the profits go over to the dummy operator as his share. When I was on the Ratanmal in the winter of 1953, atleast three such coups were being operated in the neighbourhood by a Borah trader of Madhyabharat, through Koli agents acting as dummy contractors. All these circumstances tend to make the Bhil bitter towards the Kolis who in their turn know that they are disliked and are the more apprehensive of their wild and unruly neighbours.

V

In general, Bhils maintain cordial relations with the other tribal elements in the neighbourhood. The Raval for instance, has a very significant functional relation to the Bhil and Koli. He is their priest and barber and officiates on occasions of marriage and at the obsequies that follow on the 13th day of the death of a person (kaita). Normally he may not even enter the outer rooms of a Bhil homestead, as he is of an inferior group. But on these occasions, he may enter even the innermost section where the hearth and the granary are situated. When the marriage is over and the bride is about to leave for her conjugal home, he makes the bridal couple worship the hearth and seek the benediction of the tutelary spirits of the family. On several other occasions in the life of a Bhil or a Koli, a Raval assumes a very significant and directive role. Presents are given to him on these occasions. He often receives annual retainer contributions of

grain from many Bhil villages. A Raval does not officiate in the marriages of the Naika and Dhankas so far as I have been able to ascertain. Bhilalas employ his services wherever available. But he is not indispensable. His presence on these occasions is not such a ritual necessity to the Bhilala, as it is to the Bhils. Rathias do not seem to have any relation with the Raval at all. Perhaps they have never come into contact with each other.

The Bhilala, Rathia and the Bhil do not come into extensive or intimate relation with each other normally. But their relations are cordial and friendly. Culturally these three groups have much more in common with one another than with say, the Koli or Patlia. Living a more or less similar life under similar environmental conditions they also share common religious observances and ties. Generally the Bhils are a little wary of the Bhilala and Rathia whom he regards as short-tempered and 'quick to the offence', when in their cups. But no open conflicts seem to have occurred in this area so far as I can gather. There is reason to believe that the Bhilala had hypergamous relations with the Bhils and the Naikas. The offspring of such unions were brought up in the group of the mother. On the Satarmal and to the east, we often find Bhil homesteads adjoining Bhilala homesteads. In such instances, we find the Bhils showing considerable ethnic affinities to the very handsome Bhilalas and bearing the same clan names. Even to this day, hypergamous unions continue to take place between the Bhilalalandlords and the Naikas.

The Naika and Dhanka form what may be described as a depressed section of the community structure in the area. They are poor - specially in the north of Ratnamal and are often landless labourers working for a Bhilala on a daily or hali basis. Even those who have land in the Limkheda taluka, have not prospered. It is not so much a lack of skill or intelligence - I have often talked with them and found them as intelligent as the Bhils - but more a lack of diligent^{ce} in their work that vitiates their economic life. Drink and a general lack of initiative also seem to be the root cause of their adversity. Of the two, Naika is the more destitute and curiously enough also the more good-humoured. He is a willing worker and loyal to his master.

VI

So we may now pass on to a consideration of the internal structure of the Bhil social system itself. It is proposed to describe the several structures briefly here. A detailed discussion of each will be undertaken in subsequent chapters.

The Bhil social system may be described as poly-segmentary, with a number of successively narrow segments dividing the entire community into several kindred groups. The basic principle of alignment is patrilineal descent supported by genealogical evidence, or atleast a tradition of such descent as supported by exogamic injunctions.

As was already described in an earlier context, there

is no definite tribal awareness as such among the Bhils. They intermarry and interline normally only with Bhils. But beyond an orbit of 20-25 miles, membership of the same tribe as indicated by the term Bhil ceases to be of any special significance. Living as they do in an area where movement is not very easy, considerable differences in speech, dress and manners creep up even within such short distances. Further they have neither the necessity nor any social or ritual incentive to claim identity with the people living beyond the normal area of social relations.

Within the tribe, they have a large number of patri-lineal exogamous clans (atak), bearing names which seem in most cases to be eponymous. C.S.Venkatachar gives a list of 122 Bhil septs most of which seem¹⁶ observe certain totemic practices. However, in the Ratanmal and Kathiawar region atleast, such practices do not seem to be operative today. We have very little information as to their original places of development; but from the traditions prevalent among the several clans, most of them have affinities with Dhar (a State in the C.I.Agency), and it is not improbable that most of these Bhils migrated into these regions from Dhar, Mandu and Rajasthan.

However the clans are highly segmented and the several segments are scattered widely over a wide area, interspersed with the segments of many other clans. Clan-ship has virtually no regional or corporate significance. The several segments are independent of each other and owe

no allegiance to any other segment. So far as one can see there does not seem to be any hierarchy either among the clans themselves, or within the clan. In no sphere of activity, does the entire clan come together in common participation or collaboration. Thus except as a principle of descent and exogamy clanship seems to have little significance to the Bhil.

A process of fission seems to be continuously at work within the clan breaking up the segments into still smaller segments. Normally the several segments tend to retain their clan identity by the retention of atak name and exogamy. But under certain circumstances, (to be narrated later), a tendency may be noticed for some individual or a group of segments to take on a separate identity both in the clan itself - generally as a status group. For instance, in the Paramar, clan we have some segments which identify themselves as Pipreya, Dheravya, Katara, etc. Occasionally these terms are eponymous, but more often refer to a historical incident. These sub-clans (peta ataks) often break away from the parental clans altogether. The awareness of their relation with the latter is forgotten and even the exogamous injunction is overlooked, in due course.

Within a clan or a sub-clan, there are lineages - which are generally vicinage group. The depth of the lineage is limited by a genealogy, and encompasses at the most seven or eight generations. Most of the members of a lineage group are able to trace their relation to each

other with reference to descent from a common ancestor. When a lineage has an^{un-}usual depth or extension, and genealogical links are lost, there will at least be a definite tradition of kinship supported by extensive social and ritual collaborations. Even where some of the segments are dispersed, the members of a lineage share death and birth pollutions, come together to collaborate at least on certain important ritual occasions such as for instance, the annual sacrifice to the Babadeo (the principal tutelary deity of the village), when even persons who have migrated to a far off village, are expected to come back even when it involves a journey of two or three days on foot. "In fact a kindred might be living in a village for two or three generations and yet claim membership of a lineage elsewhere."¹⁷

Inside a lineage group, inter-personal relations are governed by reference to age, sex and generation principles. The members of a lineage group cooperate in economic and other activity. Lineage has a corporate character, the male elders having the power to act for it under certain circumstances and to direct, co-ordinate and control its activities, and to sit in judgement over and resolve disputes between members of the lineage group. The lineage has also residual rights over the property of the several members.

Within the lineage are to be found a number of what may be described as joint families. It is not a residential group, nor is it a commensal group. But operationally, it

is a well-integrated, corporate group and is really the unit of all social interaction. The elementary family though a residential unit and a commensal group, is subservient in most respects to the joint family. The Bhil joint family consists of a couple, their children and descendants in the male line. It has a normal depth of 3 generations, but sometimes extends to four. The senior male is the head of the joint family and his word is final in all matters relating to the welfare of the family. His decisions are binding even on such of those sons who have married and set up their own homesteads, and subsist on their several fields, for even after division, he continues to have rights over the land and other property of the family. These rights pass over to the next generation only after his death. With his death, the joint family normally splits up into two or more joint families, though the senior most member in the same generation continues to exert considerable influence over the others.

Family is a very intimate group with the relationships between the several persons within it being of a face-to-face character. Common residence or at least propinquity of residence and constant participation in a variety of activities fosters a sense of sympathy and affection and inculcates a sense of unity among the several members of a joint family. This unity of the joint family can be seen clearly in its relations with the other families in the

village. "Kinship and affinity stretch across clan, lineage and family and link up individuals and groups in different villages in an extensive net work of mutual rights and obligations."¹⁸

NOTES AND REFERENCES

(Chapter - III)

1. Rathvi, (lit. of Rath) are traditionally Bhils who formerly inhabited an area known as rastra or rath in the north of Alirajpur. They seem to have migrated from there only about 150 years ago from economic necessity, and are found mostly in Barwani State (15,000 strong in 1931).
cf. Venkatachar, "Ethnographic Notes", p.250 and also Russel R.V., Tribes and Castes of Central India, IV, p.201.
2. Oral communication from Jaminders of Barwani and Alirajpur States.
3. Venkatachar, p.249.
4. Russel, II, p.294.
5. Todd, Annals of Rajasthan, II, p.466.
6. Venkatachar, Loc.cit., account of Nadirsingh Bhilala. It is also interesting to note that many ruling houses of Rewakantha, trace their descent to Prithvisingh Paramar (Pattai Rawal) of Champaner who was ousted from Pava-garh by Sultan Mohammed Begada in 1485 A.D. In quite a few cases, genealogies are not complete - gaps being very vaguely explained, as in the case of the Baria and Ratanmahal dynasties. Tradition however ascribes a Koli extraction to these and many other houses.
7. For details of Todd, I, 184-6; II, 320-466.
8. In recent years, the Governments of Bombay and Madhyabharat, have passed some several legislative measures to safeguard the tribal people against the money-lenders. For a fuller discussion see intra, p.
9. In a Babadev festival in a Bhil dominated village, the sacrificial meat of the buffalo is tasted even by the Patlias who attend the site of the ritual.

10. Venkatachar, p.248.
11. Malcolm Memoirs of Central India, I, 228,463;
II, 125-30.
12. cf. Nath Y.V.S.; Notes on the Religion and Witchcraft
among the Bhils; J.M.S.U.,III,1
13. Venkatachar, 248-250.
14. Col.Forayth: Nimar Settlement Report, 1868(?),p,411
15. Malcolm: Memoirs, I,425; II,128.
16. Venkatachar, p.253.
- 17.) Y.V.S.Nath., "Lineage and Local Community among the
& } Bhils of Katanmal"; Economic Weekly,(Bombay) VI,
18.) 1355-60.
