

**OUR BHEEL
MISSION IN INDIA;
AN ACCOUNT**

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Our Bheel Mission in India; An Account by Olof Anton Dahlgren

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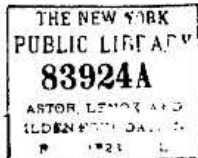
*An Account of the Country and the Character of the
Bheel People and of the Work of Evangelization
Carried on by Missionaries of the
Scandinavian Alliance Mission.*

BY
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Missionary at Navapur, India.

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W. W. W. W.
D. L. B. N.
Y. A. R. I.

FOREWORD

WHEN our Mission was started in India it was the intention to enter Thibet. This land being closed, however, the Missionaries had to settle down on the southern borders, having advanced as far as possible. Hoping soon to find the doors to the closed land open they toiled on while waiting; but the opening did not come and some began to look for other fields. One party went to Baltistan, another to Cooch Behar and still another to Naham, while some remained still preparing to enter Thibet, which, we trust, will soon unreservedly welcome the heralds of the cross.

Finally, the Bheels drew our attention, no effectual opening having been secured in the other places. Where this people live and how, the circumstances that led us to them and the part we have taken in the work of evangelization among them, these facts are related in this little book, which is sent forth with the hope that through it the Master's cause among the Bheels may be served.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNTRY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PEOPLE.

AREA AND POPULATION.—The Bheels did not originally occupy the country which they now occupy. The character of this country is such as to afford a convenient retreat from the oppressors—the later and stronger invaders. The portion of the Bheel country occupied by the S. A. M. is situated along the Tapti River up to a hundred miles from its mouth. It is part of the Tapti Valley, to the south extending up through Satpura Range, in the north towards the Nirbudda River. Roughly speaking the area of the portion chiefly occupied by our Bheels is 3,000 square miles; that of the other classes towards the east of the Tapti Valley portion 2,000 square miles. Since a definite number of the inhabitants of the above specified locality is not available one can safely state an average of 100 per square mile, which puts the population at half a million.

TIMBER AND GRASS.—The country is very hilly and undulated, in many parts covered with thick forest on the mountain sides. Teakwood, that splendid building material, which Alexander the Great is said to have bought from India for the building of his magnificent cities, is the main tree of the forest, of which it chiefly consists. The government of India has a special department to preserve the forests. When a field is acquired on which there are standing trees the Revenue Department deals with the field itself and the Forest Department with the timber, for which a certain fee is payable to that department. This is usually very low, enabling the purchaser to make considerable profit in selling the timber and firewood obtained in the clearing of the field.

Grass grows very luxuriously in the rainy season. On the beginning of the cold season, when the harvest is over, this is cut with sickles and tied up into sheaves or bundles, which are gathered up in stacks for supply during the hot season. Enterprising Hindus and Moham-medans take large contracts at convenient centers for exportation to Bombay and other large cities. The hay is



LOADING GRASS.

then pressed into bales, weighing about 180 pounds, and loaded on trucks at the station. The Bheels find good employment in the grass and timber business and hundreds of Bheel carts, loaded with heavy timber, are seen moving in to the weekly Nandurbar market during the cold season.

RIVERS.—Three large rivers flow through the country, viz., Tapti, Nirbudda and Mahi, each receiving a large

number of tributaries, many of which almost entirely dry up during the hot season. The villages are generally built on the banks of these brooks and rivers for water supply, since along their beds numerous springs gush forth out of the rock, the more prominent of which seldom dry up altogether. Should the rainy season be late the people may have to go for miles to water their cattle and fetch water, if, for want of a good well, they are dependent on the river supply. These tributaries quickly fill up at the heavy breaks of the Monsoon, sometimes working havoc. In some of these rivers marks are found of far better methods in agriculture than now contrived by the people, i. e., irrigation works at every prominent break in the bed-rock. The old Mahrattas and Moghuls, if to them we may ascribe these works, knew a good deal about engineering. The dams were made sufficiently high and strong to dam up a supply for the fields below, to which the water was led through small channels. Some of these, though very old, are still intact and used by the less industrious Bheel.

THE SOIL.—The lower parts of the country chiefly consist of black fertile soil (rajchikan), suitable for the cultivation of wheat, grain, cotton and the castor oil seed (*palma christi*), being the chief products of the cold season crop. The black soil has a remarkable power of retaining the moisture. The main products of the wet season are the Indian millet (*Jowari*), rice and a variety of oil seeds. They also sow a small quantity of corn for the household.

THE CLIMATE.—The climate in the hilly and wooded parts is rather unhealthy. At the end of the rainy season the fever malady usually breaks out, causing much suffering and even death. Quinine is the preventive as well as mosquito nets over the bed at night, neither of which is very agreeable. The bitter powder affects the hearing and the net the breathing. The net is to prevent the