

THE PEOPLES  
OF BOMBAY

# THE PEOPLES OF BOMBAY

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## P R E F A C E

BOMBAY with its cosmopolitan population which embraces not only types of men and women from all over India, but nearly all parts of the world, presents an ethnographical problem which the new-comer to its shores finds difficult of solution and his inability to recognise the various castes, creeds and communities with which he is daily brought into contact in the course of his work or during his leisure hours, acts as a set-back to his interest in the various peoples he sees in their national dress and costumes or if his interest is awakened draws from him a query to which a spontaneous reply is often difficult. As an aid to a better understanding of this problem, this unostentatious work, with its faithfully portrayed characters which form its chief attraction, is published in the hope that it will supply a long-felt want not only to the new-comer, but may it be said, to many who have stayed for some time in the country and find themselves still at a loss to arrive at a full understanding of its ethnography.

In the descriptive matter which deals with each illustrated character the authors have made an effort to trace the origin, history, religion, commercial and other activities of the various communities represented, but in a limited work of this nature they have not been able to touch more than superficially on their different phases of life and activities and if they have erred on any material points, they crave the indulgence of the tolerant reader in a work which has for its aim no greater ambition, than just an effort to create an interest and supply the knowledge which has initiated the necessity for such a publication.



The authors are greatly indebted to the artist Rao Bahadur M. V. Dhurandhar, late Vice-Principal of the School of Art, Bombay, for his whole-hearted collaboration in this work and for the magnificent coloured illustrations which he has put up and which in their detail and perfect characterisation of the different communities of Bombay have saved the author much trouble in handling it from a literary point.

*Note.*—The individual characters herein portrayed are purely imaginary and fictitious and are not caricatures of any person living or deceased and the work in general bears no political significance.

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THE PARSEES (old style)

*Their advancement in all spheres of life has been phenomenal*

## *THE PARSEES*

THE illustrations opposite are a truthful portrayal of a Parsee gentleman and lady of the early period and is reminiscent of the day when education and a desire for creating a sartorial effect as an embellishment did not find favour as a modernising medium with a race which to-day is hardly recognisable with these figures in their present mode of life, dress, education, and material and social advancement.

So many able writers have dealt with the life, work and progress of the Parsees of Western India, that for the purpose of this work, more than just a few details in explanation of the accompanying illustrations, would be considered a presumptuous undertaking. Yet when we consult literature on the subject, we find much to educate and interest us in a race of people, which to say the least of it, has within the last century or less exhibited a wonderful spirit of advancement and a still more wonderful genius for its adaptability to the most modern ideas, requirements and accomplishments whether as Educationists, Lawyers, Doctors, Commercial Magnates, Authors, Painters, Musicians and in fact in every walk of life which calls for exceptional intellectual qualities and business acumen. They are expert financiers and in this connection they have been facetiously referred to as the Jews of India but though the comparison may be without much truth, there exists a certain parallelism between the two races in the fact that force of circumstances in their early history, led them into channels which taught them finance, for like the Jews, they had to endure religious persecution and having no country of their own, in order to exist, they had to buy and sell what others made: they lent them money and financed their enterprises, and with years of experience and practice in the manipulation of this



commodity, they became the great financiers they are to-day. They have been pioneers of the Mill and other industries which flourish in Bombay to-day and in the inauguration and inception of which they have, by their long-sightedness, courage and perseverance given the lie to the old adage "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" which undoubtedly was a condition which faced them in the early stages of their financial adventures.

Their versatility found scope for genius also in the handicrafts, for in the latter part of the 8th century they established a reputation for themselves as shipbuilders for we have it on record that in 1814 a 74-ton ship built by one Jamsetjee Bomanjee described as a Parsee Master-builder and the head of the great ship-building firm of Lowjee Wadia and named the "Minden" was used as the Flagship of Admiral Sir Samuel Hood in which he cruised round to Sumatra and through the Straits of Malacca. Another ship, a sloop of 74 tons named the "Victor" also built on the slips of the Bombay Dockyard and described as one of the most beautiful ships of the period, was navigated by Captain Basil Hall to England, proving the wonderful sea-worthiness of these locally built craft.

Another parallelism and one to which we would not probably find a reference elsewhere may be drawn between the Parsees and that band of religious enthusiasts known as the Pilgrim Fathers who also to escape religious persecution, and for the sake of their Faith, left their own country and sought refuge in a foreign land, with this exception that the Parsees had through force of circumstances to merge themselves into the country of their forced adoption and though cherishing the Faith for which they underwent such hardships, had perforce to introduce some of the Hindu rituals into their original Zoroastrian form of worship obviously to placate the Hindu Rulers who had given them shelter and allowed them other privileges when they first landed on the shores of India in the 7th Century from their homeland Persia. These Hindu rituals are still evident in their Thread ceremonies and marriage customs, especially the placing of the *Kumkum* on the



foreheads of the bride and bridegroom and the chanting of some of their prayers in Sanskrit.

The Parsees, though just a handful numerically, in comparison with other nations of the world, their population to-day being about 95,000, have shown a wonderful power for consolidation of their forces and the prevention of disintegration in their ranks while their advancement in all spheres of life has been phenomenal. Nor have we to look far back to note this change. The wealthier among the Parsees have always been known for their lavish hospitality and from very early times have entertained on a sumptuous scale but if we are to rely on the authenticity of old records, which often err on the point of accuracy, we read that as near back as 1860, their fair sex took no part in social functions but kept themselves in retirement and seclusion which savoured much of the Purdah system, though they did not actually wear the garment with which this system is associated, and at such functions only the lady members among the guests had the privilege of associating with the lady members of the household in their private apartments. This however was a self-imposed condition with which, later, the Victorian Age bore some parallel and gave us the opportunity to view the progress since made by the fair sex among this progressive community. They appear to have progressed as rapidly as the men and to have kept fairly in stride with them in all matters of education, dress and social advancement in all spheres of life. They share equally with their men-folk all pleasures and amenities and actively engage in all social and other welfare organisations for the advancement, not only of themselves, but of other communities, thus making their activities of a wide and catholic nature.

The versatility of the Parsees has led them also into the field of Sport and they are excellent Cricketers and good exponents of Tennis but games like Soccer and Rugby do not appeal much to them. Their loyalty to the person of the King Emperor and the Throne has always been beyond reproach, and during the Great War and the present they have offered their services in the fighting ranks and have done much in



their munificent gifts in money and kind to relieve suffering. They have also merged themselves into the Volunteer movement and also taken a leading part in the St. Johns Ambulance Corps and have done much useful work during the Bombay riots and at other times.

It can confidently be said of the Parsees of the Present day, that with their inherited wealth, their natural genius for trade, their versatility and intelligence and last but by no means least, their munificent and catholic charities, they hold a leading place among all Communities in the Bombay Presidency.



A BRAHMIN PRIEST  
*There are a fairly good number of this type*



## *THE BRAHMINS*

OF the four great caste divisions into which the Hindus were originally divided, the Brahmins (Priests) Kshatriyas (Warriors) Vaisyas (Commercial class) and Sudras (Depressed class) the Brahmins have always, owing to their hereditary calling, held a position of precedence in all matters of social and religious observances and being learned in the Shastras, and cultered, they naturally exercised a great sway over the illiterate masses of India. The illustration accompanying this description depicts the Brahmin in his primordial attire and is no criterion of how he appears to-day to the outside world. The course of evolution and force of circumstances has compelled him to cast off the little he wore, for the more he wears to-day and the sartorial effect thus created, makes it difficult for the best informed of us to distinguish him in a cosmopolitan crowd as a Brahmin. Perhaps to the student of History and the keen observer there may be outstanding traits, such as the contour of his features, the birthmark of his Aryan descent which gives him his light wheaten complexion, especially if he is from the Deccan, and his bearing which is generally marked by a dignity of poise and manner, by which the Brahmin may still be recognised, but certainly not by his dress.

It is now no longer necessary to visit a Temple and peep into its sacred precincts to find a Brahmin carrying on his time-honoured rituals dressed in a saffron-coloured dhotie, his forehead ornamented with the sacred Kumkum in various shades of colour and design, his head shaved except for a long tuft of hair on the crown and often extending down to his shoulders, the upper part of his body bare except for the sacred thread running from shoulder to waist and forming its



only adornment, leading a life of segregation to avoid polluting his sacred person. There are of course a fairly good number of this type following their hereditary calling and because ethics demand that all sects should have their spiritual leaders, the Brahmins in their ancestral role are still a factor in the land, for the many rituals which the Hindus must observe, cannot be observed without the services of the Brahmins and those who have been fortunate in still following their hereditary calling, have enough to occupy them and keep them in comfort and affluence. Their services must be requisitioned before a marriage can be consummated, for a comparison of the horoscopes of the prospective bride and bridegroom must be made to see if they are suited to each other in temperament and other details and whether the union will be a happy one and if this is found to be so a propitious day has to be fixed for the marriage ceremony. On the birth of a child the Brahmin is called in to draw up its horoscope and so in all forms and ceremonies his erudition in all matters pertaining to the Occult Sciences makes him an indispensable factor in the lives of a people where superstition and tradition play so important a part.

The Brahmin whom one meets to-day in the busy thoroughfares of a cosmopolitan city, where he rubs shoulders with all castes and creeds, carries no distinguishing mark of his caste or priesthood. He may be dressed in a dhotie and a long coat reaching down to his knees and a turban to advertise the fact that he is from the Deccan, the Gujerath or Madras or he may be seen in the latest European outfit with the exception of the topee for which he substitutes a small cap of any shade. The relentless hand of evolution and the rapid march of progress have had their mark on the Brahmin as they have on all sections of the human race and this rapid change in things mundane has deprived him of the security of the cloister and its sequestered life which was his birthright and has forced him out into the outer world to face its stern realities and fight for an existence along with the rest of mankind and so to-day he may be found in all professions of life as Lawyers, Educationists, Architects, etc., while a great number of them, owing to a natural aptitude for figures and the desire for a quiet sedentary life, have found



a suitable opening as clerks and accountants in the subordinate services of Government and in the offices of the Railway companies from which they have raised themselves to positions of trust and responsibility. They have also been great leaders of political thought and enthusiastic reformers.

Of the Brahmin women it may be said without exaggeration that they are in a class by themselves. Many of them bear the mark of their Aryan descent in their features and fair skins, and the beautiful contour of their figures which is enhanced by the cunning folds of the saris in which they drape themselves, is perhaps the envy of many of their Western sisters. They are very refined and their inherent modesty and gentleness of speech and manner add to their gracefulness and charm. They are unimpeachably moral and are loyal wives and devoted mothers and to them the welfare of their home and their husbands and children make up the sum-total of their earthly existence. Frivolities of any kind make no appeal to their shy and retiring nature, and though they love home-comforts, they are sedulously clean in their habits of life and surroundings and on the whole are very happy and contented. Of late education has done much in the way of their enlightenment and the Brahmin woman of to-day while losing none of her inborn modesty, may be seen taking to higher education and to Painting, Literature and Music as an aid to her inherent accomplishments to more adequately fit her to take her place in life with her more advanced sisters.



## *THE PRABHUS*

THE illustrations opposite give us a vivid idea of the style of dress of the men and women who constitute the small community known as the Prabhus. They belong to the second great division of the Hindu castes—the Shatriyas or Warriors and though to-day being numerically just a handful compared with other communities, there being no more than about 4,500 all told, their history and mode of life make interesting reading. They claim Udaipur in Rajputana as the country of their origin, and if there is any happiness or contentment in the philosophy of dreaming on what we were, rather than what we are, then the Prabhus have a rich store on which to draw from this philosophy.

It seems hardly credible that the quiet, peace-loving and peaceful community which we see amongst us to-day, have behind them a glorious record of deeds of valour of which any nation or sect may well be proud, and though their quiet demeanour shorn of all ostentation and the peaceful avocations which they follow at the present time, such as Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Architects, Painters and Artists (among the latter some of no mean merit but in which they have cultivated this Art to a point of genius) they certainly do not advertise their former militant achievements or help to give one an insight into their past glory. Their nomenclature alone is perhaps to-day the only indication of their past, the word Prabhu meaning a Lord and their Surnames such as Jayakar, Kirtikar, Nayak, Dhurandhar, Rane, meaning respectively The Victorious, The Illustrious, The Leader, The Foremost and The King Lord.

It may not be widely known that when Mahomed of Ghazni swept





THE PRABHUS

*Their history and mode of life make interesting reading*



down on India with his Tartar hordes in 1024 A.D. and marched against the Temple of Somnath, which he eventually sacked, it was the Prabhus under their martial leader King Bhimdev, who offered a stout and spirited resistance in defence of their sacred Shrine. The vanquished Prabhus then retreated and settled in Patan (Gujerath) which has given its name to one of the two sects of this community—the Patane Prabhus, the other sect being known as the Pathare Prabhus who derive their appellation from the word Pathar or tableland—the Tableland of Rajputana of which they were the original inhabitants.

On their defeat at Somnath and after many vicissitudes, we next hear of them as Rulers of Bombay over which they held sway for over a century. On the advent of the Portuguese they left Bombay instead of submitting to religious persecution and a change of their religion with which they were evidently threatened, and took shelter under the Peshwas of Poona under whom they served under varying conditions eventually returning to Bombay on the establishment of British rule in this Presidency. This seems to have been an end to their vicissitudes and from this time onward they have settled down to their present avocations, having changed the sword for the pen with perhaps the consolation that whereas the former had been the means of their glorious past, the latter has brought its compensation in the way of continued peace and contentment and last but not least, their accredited wealth, for the Prabhus are a self-supporting community and have their own Institutions and Credit Societies which are run without any external aid.

The Prabhu women are the exact prototype of their Aryan sisters the Brahmins. They dress in the same simple style, have the same gentleness of speech and manners, are clean in their domestic habits, exemplary in their morals and of a modest and retiring disposition. The style of dress of the women of both these castes evidently attracted the attention of an early European visitor to Bombay in 1812 A.D. which he very graphically describes in the following words "The dress of these women consists chiefly of one strip of cloth many yards in length. This narrow web is wound round the body and limbs with so

much propriety that while the most scrupulous delicacy could find nothing to censure on the score of deficiency of covering, it is arranged with such innate and judicious taste that even the eye of a sculptor could hardly wish any of its folds removed." The Prabhu women of the present age have made full use of the Educational facilities offered them and have shown much aptitude in the Arts of Painting, Drawing and Music. The former appears however to be an inherent gift with them, for almost from infancy the Prabhu girl occupies her time in drawing colour designs on the floor and walls of her house in delible chalk in obedience to daily religious observances. It can be said to the credit of the Prabhu woman that she has followed the chequered career of her men-folk with commendable fortitude and loyalty and now shares with them in the proud retrospect of the past and the peaceful and happy conditions under which the one-time Rulers of Bombay live to-day.





THE KOLIS

*They are declared to have been the earliest colonists*

## *THE KOLIS*

THE figure here portrayed and one which may well tempt the Sculptor into the use of his chisel into modelling therefrom a bronze statue, is a familiar one to residents of Bombay and typifies the Koli or fisherman. His attire in which he freely moves about in tramcars, buses and other means of conveyance, though obviously inclining to no pretensions in creating a sartorial effect, has nevertheless (in a city which during the summer months compares favourably with a Turkish bath and during the Monsoon imposes a compulsory indulgence in a daily shower bath) an effect of creating a feeling of envy at his immunity from the discomforts which the vagaries of the Bombay weather impose on those who are slaves of convention in the matter of dress! And if the Koli thus argues, he has undoubtedly the right to do so, for long before our nameless Heptanesia, from which has been evolved the great and progressive city of Bombay, was known to Western Nations, the Koli lived and carried on his trade both as an agriculturist and a Toiler of the Deep and can boast of his connection with this city from about the year 150 A.D. or earlier. The Koli belongs to one of the few aboriginal tribes of Dravidian origin which at this period inhabited the "seven islands" and though nearly two thousand years have passed, he is still to-day practically the same he then was as he roamed about the marshy isles of our ancient Heptanesia, eking out an existence on what the virgin soil yielded in the way of grain and pulse and also what he was able to get from its surrounding waters by his experience and ingenuity in using the fishing net, untrammelled by the conventions and restrictions of a fast approaching civilisation, the dawn of which had already broken and was slowly but surely spreading over the islands in the way of new invaders and conquerors of portions of its lands. And



so in the course of evolution the Koli had not only to adapt himself to changed circumstances but to fight hard to keep himself from being engulfed by successive waves of invaders.

First came the Hindu conquerors followed by the Mohomedans, who in their turn were overthrown by the Portuguese under whose sway, owing to their lack of religious toleration and the zeal of the Jesuit Fathers and Franciscan Monks, the Kolis are said to have supplied the greatest number of converts to Roman Catholicism to which creed they still adhere but their conversion seems to have, in no way affected their mode of life and manners or advanced their social position or status for as they were hut-dwellers in the early period of their existence they still seem, with few exceptions, to favour this form of residence wherever their settlements are to be seen to-day, in Colaba, Worli, Mazagon or the near-by suburbs of Bombay. When the British in 1662 came to possess Bombay, those who had come under the tuition of the Jesuits, contributed largely to the rise and development of Bombay, as it was from this class that the early British Government drew their clerical supply and though a few of such hands may have been drawn from the Koli community there is no evidence of their, to-day, being engaged in such capacity any longer but seem to have returned to the call of the sea and the occupation of their primitive ancestors.

The Kolis of Bombay who are with us to-day are from a clan known as the Meta Kolis as differing from another sect, the Son Kolis who are residents of the Thana coast and whose occupation, originally, was agriculture. Of the Meta Kolis it is said that "they are declared to have been the earliest colonists of our islands and to have fished in these waters, tilled the soil and worshipped their primeval gods long before a higher Aryan civilisation left its mark upon the land."

Such is the history of the Kolis of Bombay, many of whom were, and are to-day in affluent circumstances from the wealth which the harvest of the deep have given them. Though they profess Christianity as their religion it seems to be a crude form and appears to be leavened

in certain ceremonies such as their marriage and funeral rites, with nature worship which has been inherent in them and has guided their destinies for centuries past. The Koli woman unlike her Indian sisters, appears to have set her face against all means of education and other facilities offered for her social advancement but has contented herself with her hut habitation and proved herself a worthy companion to her husband in his arduous profession as a Toiler of the Deep. However, in the management of domestic affairs the entertainment of guests, the control of the family purse and the part she takes in conviviality during festive occasions, during which she claims an equal share with her men folk in the potion that cheers, she very efficiently emulates the example of her Newhaven sister.



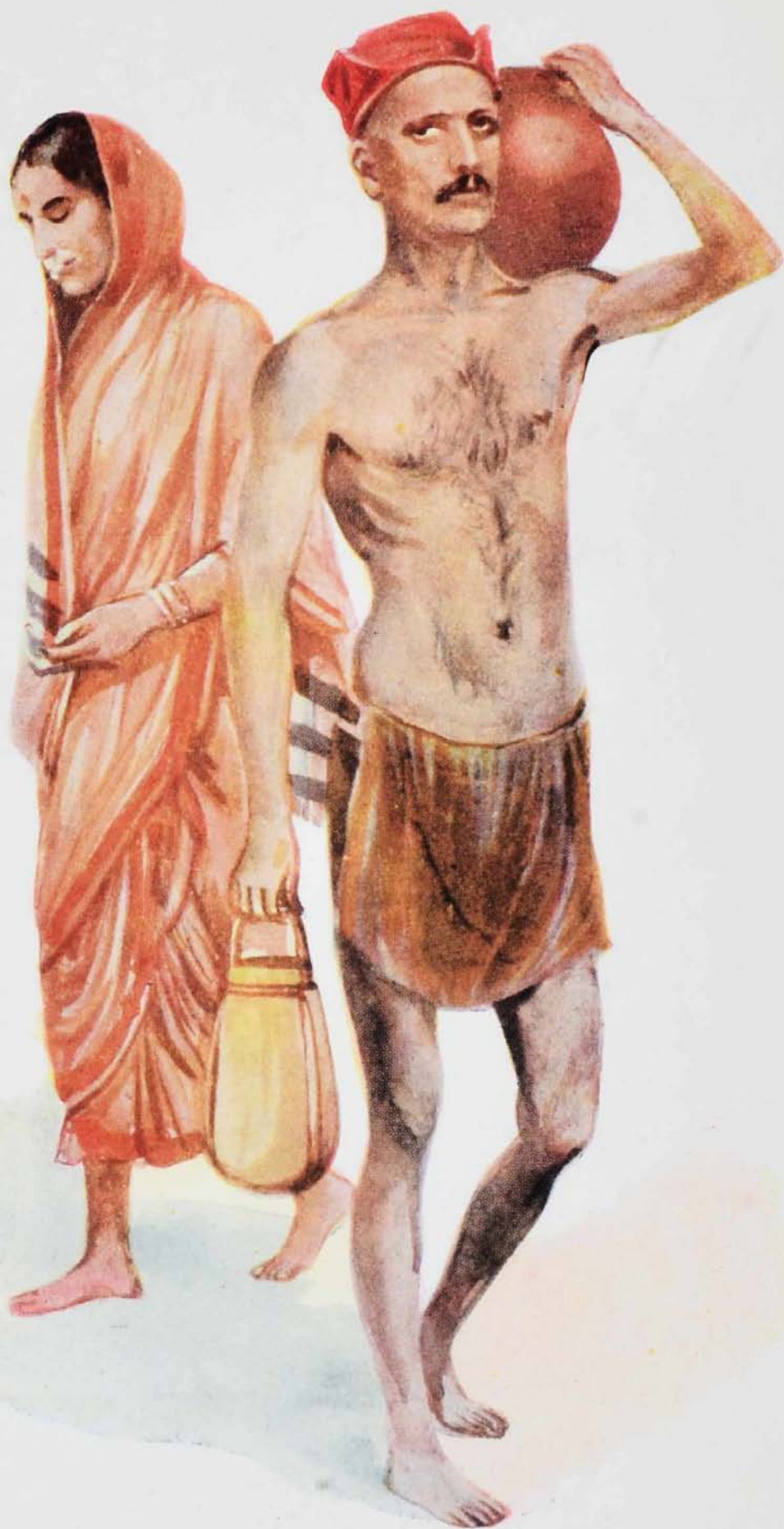
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## *THE BHANDARIS*

THE type here illustrated depicts one of a community whose origin as an inhabitant of Bombay is contemporary with the Koli. The profession of the Bhandaris from time immemorial, and traced back to a period when with the Agris and the Kolis, they roamed at large over our Heptanesia quite two thousand years ago has been chiefly that of palm tree tappers and distillers of liquor, a profession to which they have held with marvellous tenacity all through the different changes and vicissitudes to which they, with the Kolis, have passed through these many centuries. Unlike the Kolis however, the greater part of the community have, in the course of evolution, sought other avenues of livelihood and we read that as far back as 1780 A.D. many of the Bhandaris had forsaken their hereditary calling of palmtree tapping for other means of livelihood such as Military and Police duties. Since then however they seem to have penetrated into fresher fields and qualified for higher and more independent positions and so to-day we find them as Lawyers, Doctors, Educationists, Merchants and also as clerks and typists, though a fairly large number of them are still to be found in their hut settlements in the shelter of the palm-groves at Mahim and elsewhere, happily carrying on the calling to which they were born in the dim and misty past.

Those who, unlike the Kolis, have forsaken the beaten path of heredity and chosen the advantages which a spreading civilisation offered them, find themselves in an atmosphere wholly distinct from their humbler brethren and having adapted themselves to changing conditions in fostering education and other amenities among their ranks are hardly





THE BHANDARIS

*Palm tree tappers and distillers of liquor*

reconcilable with the hut dwellers and many of them hold position of trust and responsibility and are in affluent circumstances.

The early history of the Bhandaris makes interesting reading and gives us an insight into the various phases through which, as a community, they have passed. We find that during the early years of occupation of this city by the British, the Bhandaris had earned for themselves a martial reputation for they were then spoken of as "being bred to arms from their infancy and having courage and fidelity which may be depended upon and also for their notorious courage and zeal in the defence of the island when it was invaded by the Sidi." Many of them, as in the case of the Kolis, were converted by the Portuguese to Christianity and during the early British rule were formed into a Militia. The descendants of these early Bhandaris were the first to colonise the island of Mahim, then known as Madmala or the "Orchard of Cocoa Palms" and it is said of them, that during the occupation of the island by the Prabhu lords, they assisted these gentry in the management and rule of the island. The ancestors of the present hut-dwellers and Toddy-drawer of Mahim have been credited, by early writers, of being the first to initiate cultivation in the seven islands and to have introduced fruit and flower-bearing plants and trees which are to-day the pride of Bombay.

In conclusion it may be recorded that the Bhandari has the proud distinction of being descended from the great Mahratta Race mention of which first appears on a statue dated 100 B.C. and they have again been referred to in inscriptions in the Karla Caves which date back to 245 B.C. They are the third division of the Race and known as the occupational class, the first being the Mahratta proper or the Warrior class and secondly the Kunbi or the cultivator. They claim descent from the Shatriyas who came into the zenith of their prower in the time of their leader Shivaji Bhosle (1627-1680) who in 1688 A.D. in a successful rebellion against the Kingdom of Bijapur finally established the great Mahratta Empire which was destined to have its fall in 1817 A.D. Such



is the history of the Bhandaris of Bombay who like the Prabhus have an interesting past on which they look back with no little pride.

The women of the educated class have followed in the wake of their menfolk along the path of social advancement, while those of the humble hut dwellers were content, like the Koli women, to share the frugal fare provided by their husbands from their meagre earnings as toddy-drawers, a profession which can be truthfully classified under the head of "Dangerous living" and which to-day under the new order of things has, after these many years, at last, received its *coup de grace*.



THE BHATIAS

*The direct descendants of Sri Krishna*



## THE BHATIAS

*"Tempora Mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis"* appears to be applicable to all castes, creeds and professions of the East, for the different types of men and women whom we see around us to-day have changed so considerably in their mode and manner of life and even in their forms of religion, that they are hardly recognisable with their forebears of a century ago. The Bhatias as shown in the accompanying illustration, claim their descent from the Rajputs and as such belong to the second great caste division of the Hindus—the Shatriyas. They are the direct descendants of Shri Krishna the great Yadav King and are also known as Yaduvanshi.

After the fall of the Yadav Empire which had been established in Shaorashtra or what is now known as Kathiawar, a rapid disintegration of the dynasty appears to have set in. The Yadavs then migrated to the Punjab and established a kingdom at Jaisalmer and from which some of the Bhatias—those who eventually settled permanently in Bombay—came down about 400 years ago to Cutch and merged themselves into a new religion, the Vaishnav Guru Mahabrahbhu, thereby eschewing all meat diet and becoming strict vegetarians. Some of them went across to Sind and though calling themselves Vaishnavites continued to be omnivorous in their dietary habits. The vegetarian Bhatias from Cutch and Halar settled in Bombay about the year 1860 A.D. Here they appear to have applied themselves to the knowledge gained during their wanderings as traders and through display of their shrewd business capabilities became Brokers to some of the large English Commercial Firms in which capacity many of them still continue and flourish. They later on, contemporary with the Parsees, became pioneers



of the Mill industry. They also got a hold on the Cotton trade of Bombay and some of the more fortunate such as the firms of Thakersee Muljee, Muljee Jetha and others amassed large fortunes as the result of which we see to-day the palatial buildings such as the Muljee Jetha Market, the Goculdas Tejpal Hospital and other institutions which bear testimony to the opulent condition of the Bhatias of a decade ago. As a slight diversion here, it is interesting to note that the present Ruler of Jaisalmer still has in his possession a State Umbrella called the Meghadambar said to be about 5000 years old and reputed to belong to Shri Krishna the original founder of the dynasty. It has been handed down as a family heirloom from the days of Raval Jaisal the first Ruler of the State of Jaisalmer founded by him in 1156 A.D.

There seems to be a psychological trait in this community in common with some others closely allied to it. Whether through pride of race or a highly developed latent genius for commercial adaptability—more probably the latter—the Bhatias have not followed the line of least resistance in earning their livelihood by taking up subordinate positions as clerks or following avocations which have demanded service to others, but have chosen the more arduous task of paddling their own canoe by keeping themselves strictly to trade and commerce.

As a religious sect they are faithful to the teachings of their preceptor Vaishnav Maharaj and are devotees of the god Krishna to pay homage to whom, they make periodical pilgrimages to the sacred shrines at Muttra and Dwarka. They are polygamous and can marry as many as four wives but this seems to be more the exception than the rule at present.

The Bhatia women are mostly orthodox in their manner of life and confine themselves chiefly to their homes and their domestic duties which though commendable in itself, paradoxically creates an anomaly in this present age of general advancement. This orthodoxy acts as a brake to their advancement in education and other social amenities and unlike their other Eastern sisters they take no interest in the Fine Arts



nor are they interested in public affairs, but seem to live strictly domesticated lives and reap their happiness from the fruits of the labours of their wealthy lords and masters.

## *THE KHOJAS*

THE Khojas of the type here represented are a familiar figure of Bombay life and their history is interesting in comparison with the castes and creeds that form the population of the Bombay Presidency. Known in the early days of their existence as the "Secret Sect" and smacking then of a mysterious origin as Hindu converts to the Islamic Faith, the early history of the Khojas is reminiscent of the early days of Christianity and the shelter and security which the Catacombs afforded to the early Christians, appears to have been assimilated by this newly formed sect in holding their religious meetings in secret places to ensure the same immunity from religious persecution in cherishing the new Faith to which a goodly number of the Hindus of Gujerath had seceded from the faith of their Hindu forefathers due to the missionary zeal and activities of one Pir Satgur, the first Mohomedan Missionary who came to India from Persia and settled in Patan (Gujerath) in the year 1180 A.D. He was followed in 1430 A.D. by one Pir Sadruddin who converted the Hindu Lohanas of the Gujerath to the Islamic Faith and the Khojas of Bombay who to-day form not an insignificant factor among the Communities of this Presidency, are the direct descendents of these Lohana converts.

They consider themselves the real Khojas and are the followers of the Aga Khan whose fame and popularity are too well known the world over to admit of further reference here. In passing however it is of interest to know that the first Aga Khan, Hasanali Shah came to India in 1840 A.D. from Persia where he had been Governor of Kermain but had to leave the country owing to intrigues. He first settled in Karachi but since the year 1845 the headquarters of the Aga Khan have





THE KHOJAS  
*They are the followers of the Aga Khan*

been in Bombay. The followers of the Aga Khan belong to the Shiah denomination of the Islamic religion but some of them in 1866 seceded from this sect and adopted the tenets of the Sunni Faith. There was another schism in the year 1902 when a section of the Khojas left the original fold and called themselves Khoja Ashna-Asharies. This new sect differ from the original Khojas in the belief that there are only 12 Imam (Prophets) while the latter maintain that there are 48 Imams including the present Aga Khan.

Whatever their small differences on religious points may be the Khoja Community as a whole are a respectable, intelligent, hard-working class and confine themselves chiefly to trade and commerce which is their natural inheritance, and in which they hold their own against other communities. They also follow the avocations of Doctors, Lawyers, Educationists, Architects etc. in which many of them have excelled. Like the Bhatias they eschew all positions which place them in the category of employees and prefer to carry on their own business and depend on their inherent initiative and business acumen as merchants, traders and shopkeepers to support themselves and their families. They also interest themselves in public affairs and have adapted themselves to modern views and requirements in domestic and social matters in which they have advanced with the times and without prejudice to their religious tenets and observances to which they are devoted to a point of fanaticism and in this, as proselytes to an adopted Faith, they may be said to be an example to other sects and communities.

They have established Schools and Orphanages where their girls receive modern education and though the elder generation of their women-folk may be inclined to conservative and orthodox views, the rising generation are adapting themselves to the requirements of the times by taking an interest in higher studies and in Music, Painting and other Arts which carry them well beyond just their domestic obligations in social and other amenities. In general however they are reserved and modest in their manner and bearing and their home-life and devotion and loyalty to their husbands and children take precedence in their



everyday mode of life. In their social and religious activities the Khoja women enjoy greater freedom of action as they do not conform to the Purdah system like their other Islamic sisters.



THE BANYAS

*The lighter side of life and its frivolities have no appeal to them*



## *THE BANYAS*

THE illustration here portrays the Banya who belongs to the third of the four great castes of India known as the Vaisyas or the commercial class. The Banyas hail principally from the Gujerath and appear to have first established themselves in Bombay about the year 1677 when The Honourable Gerald Aungier, Governor of Bombay (1669-1677) anxious to advance the importance of this city after the seat of Government had been removed here from Surat, invited men of all trades and professions to take up their permanent residence in Bombay offering them every facility, security and encouragement in the lawful pursuit of their various callings and in this respect entered into a compact with the Banyas in particular, who then, it is said, virtually represented all castes and creeds in the island, granting them complete immunity from all interference in their religious rites and ceremonies and social customs. Since then the Banyas have lived here in peace and security, the majority following their ancestral calling as traders. As wholesale merchants and petty dealers in grains and cereals of all descriptions they have undoubtedly established a monopoly in the city as is evident from the grocers shops dotted through the length and breadth of the place. The Banyas, as a rule, are a quiet peace-loving community and carry on trade in friendly rivalry. They are seldom or never, except as servants to their own community, to be found working in any subordinate capacity and as such fittingly personify the Poet's ideal expressed in the line "Happy is he born and taught who serveth not another's will"! Though the majority seem to follow their ancestral calling, many of them are well educated and have branched off into other channels of livelihood becoming Share and Stock Brokers, Mill owners and Agents and not a few among them are financial magnates, in which they have found ample

scope for their inherent skill and business acumen. Their religion is Jainism and they are for the most part, strict vegetarians in regard to their diet.

Being orthodox in their life and manners, the lighter side of life and its frivolities have no appeal to them; they do not however eschew education and all the benefits that accrue therefrom. Their women at one time also strictly orthodox and extremely retiring in disposition and mode of life, have within recent years, left the shelter of the hearth and the privacy of home-life which was for all ages their birthright and have sailed out on to the rough sea of life and share with their enlightened husbands and brothers the vicissitudes of its depth and shallows.





A LOHANA  
*Once a martial race*

## *THE LOHANAS*

THE accompanying illustration is of the Lohana. The term Lohana comes from Lava who was the son of Rama, the hero of the Indian Epic describing the lives of Rama and Sita. The Lohanas claim descent from a branch of the Rajputs known as the Rathors. Their original home was in the Punjab. Being driven out from there by the Muslims they fled to Sind and in the 13th century many of them migrated to Cutch which has since been their adopted home. As their origin indicates, they were once a martial race like the Bhatias whom they resemble in many ways such as in their marriage customs and other ceremonies. Their history too runs on parallel lines with theirs in its vicissitudes and as their fortunes declined owing to stress of circumstances they relinquished the sword for more peaceful avocations. When in the height of their power as a militant race they are reputed to have led an arm against the powerful King of Kanauj whom they defeated and then established themselves in Multan—Punjab. When disintegration set in among their ranks, those that fled to Sind merged themselves among the Amils with whom they inter-married. Many of them embraced the Sikh religion. Those that migrated to Cutch and Gujrath became Hindus. Thus it is that the Sind Lohanas are flesh eaters but the Cutch Lohanas are strict vegetarians. The Gujerathi Lohanas indulge in Polygamy but polyandry is not permitted in any of their branches.

Like many of the other castes and creeds that have been attracted to this great cosmopolitan city owing to the facilities it offers for trade and commercial enterprise, the Lohanas, from early times, have filtered into Bombay and have taken up various callings such as traders, merchants, bankers, grain and cotton dealers and shopkeepers in which



they have successfully pitted their business acumen and abilities against their rivals. Though having resigned themselves to these humble and peaceful avocations they undoubtedly look back with pardonable pride on their glorious past from which they draw encouragement and inspiration for their present battle for life.

Many of those on whom Dame Fortune has shed her gracious smile have exhibited a commendable spirit of benevolence in establishing special schools for the children of their poorer brethren while others have built spacious Sanitoria on a charitable basis and have munificently endowed them for the benefit of the less fortunate of their community.

The Lohana women lead a quiet domesticated life and are seldom to be found taking part in social activities and pleasures but confine themselves mostly to the orbit of their domestic surroundings.

In 1480 A.D. many of the Hindu Lohanas of Gujrath were converted to the Islamic faith of one Pir Sadruddin, a Mohomedan Missionary from Persia and are to-day known as the Khojas whose history has been dealt with earlier.



A BOHRA

*They hold their own in shrewdness and enterprise against all traders in Western India*



## *THE BOHRAS*

THE accompanying illustration is that of the Bohra. Like the Khojas, the Bohras are the descendants of Hindu converts to Islam. They are comprised of two religious sects known as the Shias and the Sunnis. The Shias were converted by one Abdulla, a Muslim missionary who came to India from Yemen about the end of the 11th century. In 1588 A.D. there was a schism in the community resulting in the formation of a sub-sect known as the Dawoodi Bohras because they became followers of one Dawood Bin Kutubshah in preference to Suleman whom the minority followed. The origin of the term Bohra is uncertain but appears to have been derived from a Gujrathi word meaning Trader. The Dawoodi Bohras have been described as "the richest, best organised and most widely spread class of Gujrathi Musalmans." This description is undoubtedly borne out even to-day by the number of Dawoodi Bohras settled in Bombay where they carry on their hereditary occupation, many of them as hardware merchants, others as saddlery and harness dealers while others trade in glassware and crockery and some as furniture merchants, in all of which lines they hold their own in shrewdness and enterprise against all traders in Western India.

They are not all confined however to their hereditary calling for the more ambitious and better educated class have branched off into fields of fresh enterprise, becoming Lawyers, Doctors, Judges and others holding high and responsible positions under Government.

As a religious sect they owe absolute allegiance to their Spiritual Head or High Priest, The Mulla Saheb of Surat who lives in much state

and entertains with no frugal hospitality, and to whom they render implicit obedience in all religious and social matters. The Bohras, in their Halcyon days are reputed to have loved a luxurious life. They lived in large upper-storied bungalows comprised of five and six rooms, well ventilated and richly furnished, entertained widely and dispensed hospitality lavishly. This was evidently before their advent in Bombay. The Dawoodi Bohras in keeping with their religious tenets, adjure Music and Dancing nor are they permitted, as traders, to deal in any commodity of an intoxicating nature. Their women are said to be careful and thrifty as housewives but love good clothes especially silks and embroidered cloths of all colours and shades but these are evidently for home exhibition among their own sex, for unlike their sisters the Khoja women, they are restricted to the use of the Purdah and cannot appear in public except shrouded in the voluminous folds of the Burka.





THE PATHAN

*His philosophy of life extends no further than "self"*

## *THE PATHAN*

THE figure here portrayed with his loose baggy trousers, the upper part of his anatomy covered with a loose shirt and a vest of some coloured material, his head covered with a cone-shaped cap round which is tied a scanty puggree, is easily recognisable as a specimen of one of the turbulent tribes of the North West Frontier of India and known as the Pathan or more familiarly as Lala. By religion he is a Suni Muslim. Like the Dancing Girl he is foreign to the soil and has migrated to this great city lured probably by tales that have reached him in his mountain home, of easily acquired riches. Arriving here as an unsophisticated product of nature, born and bred in crass ignorance and illiteracy in some distant hamlet of the wild Frontier and devoid of the most elementary knowledge of civilised life and manners, he acquires in a most surprisingly short period of self training, a fairly accurate idea of the law of adjustment to circumstances and environment.

He may thereafter be found working as a dock labourer and eking out an existence by the sweat of his brow. If of a more ambitious turn of mind, he gets himself employed as a watchman in one of the local mills or in many of the private establishments or merchant firms that exist in the city. In this capacity he generally finds, in due course the acme of his ambitions in that the post secures for him that immunity from manual labour which probably his heart has desired and which while bringing him in a sufficient income for his necessities, opens out for him a life of ease and comfort. In this enviable condition he may be seen any day of the week lolling about on a charpoy placed on the footpath in the immediate vicinity of the building over which he has been employed to keep watch day and night either peacefully asleep or regaling a couple of his friends, who in passing may have stopped to



exchange friendly greetings with him, with a cup of tea and perhaps a song or a tune on a rudely constructed one-stringed banjo or guitar. And thus the Pathan watchman passes his days in serene contentment untrammelled by the cares and worries that beset others for his philosophy of life extends no further than "self."

The most interesting phase of life however in which the Pathan can be studied, is in his activities as a money lender. Here he is par excellence as a typical type of Shylock for his usurious methods are a revelation in the art of money-lending. His clients consist mostly of domestic servants and mill and dock labourers whose impecuious condition offers a good field to this wily Shylock and from whom he generally extracts interest on all loans at the rate of 75 to 200 per cent. In this profession the Pathan is a law unto himself and protection of the Civil Courts mean to him no security against defaulters among his debtors with whom he deals in his own sweet way. Moving about the haunts of his clients carrying a heavy-headed cane while the bulge in his vest pocket suggests the presence of a trusty clasp-knife, he creates a much desired effect among his unfortunate victims and woe betide the defaulter who fails to meet his demands when they fall due and which is generally on pay day, at which time the presence of his awe-inspiring person waiting at the gate to waylay his unsuspecting victim fills the latter with a wholesome dread and who is now compelled to liquidate his obligation through the medium of a murderous look and a threatening gesture which creates a much more salutary effect than all the Law courts in the land. And so this dreaded Shylock plies his nefarious trade untrammelled by the dictates of a conscience and adds yet another personality to the many types which go to make up the population of a large cosmopolitan city.

This however is not the last phase of his activities.

Those imbued with a martial spirit which is the natural inheritance of the Pathan, enlist in the fighting forces and soon prove themselves worthy of their calling by upholding the best traditions of the British Army thus adding their weight to the struggle for justice, liberty and freedom.



THE VAGHRIS  
*The Gipsies of India*



## *THE VAGHRIS*

THE Vaghris as here depicted are considered the Gipsies of India and are found in all parts of the Gujrath but chiefly in Ahmedabad, Kaira and Kathiawar. The name Vaghri means tiger-like. In their wandering habits and the means employed by them for a livelihood they are almost an exact prototype of their Western cousin the Romany. They are believed to be the descendants of the Sansyas a reputed race of plunderers in the Punjab. They however claim to be descended from the Chavan Rajputs but their present condition shows that they have degenerated to a very low social scale. They are divided into two divisions and while the one lives by agriculture the other assimilates to a striking degree the characteristics of the Western Gipsies. In view of the wild jungle life that is their heritage, they are endowed with a wonderful gift of mimicry and so truthfully imitate the call of wild animals and birds that they lure them by this means to carefully prepared ambushes and capture them alive. One amusing means adopted by them to earn a few coppers is to catch birds in the above manner and to make the orthodox Hindus pay to have them released! The voice of the jungle it may be, instills into them the belief in Spirits and lucky and unlucky days and omens. They are however, Hindus by religion but have their own preceptors and do not employ the services of Brahmins for their marriage and death ceremonies but still they are not free from the power of the Brahmins for when one visits their home they pay him a few coppers for making a "chandru" or red powder mark on their foreheads.

The lure of large cities seems to exercise a fascination for them, especially for their womenfolk, and so when they pitch their camp on

the outskirts of one they pay daily visits to the Indian quarters and pose as sellers of twigs used by the Indians for cleaning their teeth, small bundles of rope and string, beads and other trinkets but while posing as hawkers of these commodities they direct their activities towards the commission of petty thefts at which they are so expert that they are hardly ever detected. A very ingenious trick of theirs is the astonishing manipulation of change handed back to a customer who might have purchased some twigs or a trinket from them. In such cases the customer appears at first to be quite satisfied with the correctness of the change handed back to him but when he turns his back and re-counts it to make sure he finds to his surprise that he has been given a good few coppers short of the correct amount! Whether this is the result of clever sleight of hand or some hypnotic influence practised by these women it has never been discovered. They also practise the elusive craft of fortune-telling. And so while the women thus busy themselves with their questionable practices, the men generally work as day labourers till the wander-lust once again asserts itself when they strike their cloth tents overnight and trek to fresh pastures.





THE DANCING GIRL.  
*She leads a life of gay abandon*

## *THE DANCING GIRL*

THE illustration here depicts the Dancing Girl of Bombay. She is generally a product of the land of the five rivers—The Punjab—and with others of her calling has migrated to this city and found the change due to the cosmopolitan population a highly lucrative one. The institution of Dancing Girls appears to have spread its tentacles far and wide in the Indian quarter of the city. Patronised by a mixed clientele of various castes and creeds and men of all shades of social status she leads a life of gay abandon and conviviality by turning night into day. To allude to her purely as a dancing girl would be a misnomer for as an adept exponent of the Terpsichorian art she is also an accomplished singer and entertainer.

Arriving in the city accompanied by a couple of male attendants who besides forming her orchestra also act as her guardians or protectors, she generally rents a two-room tenement in a suitable quarter of the city using one room as a reception or entertaining hall and the other as her private apartment. Here she nightly holds her revels of dancing and singing to the pleasure and amusement of her male audience many of whom may form her permanent patrons but as casual visitors are not strictly debarred, we may also find a welcome to partake in the entertainment provided. Climbing a single flight of stairs with some diffidence we find ourselves in a fairly large well-lighted hall and once there any further feeling of diffidence is soon set at rest by the welcome accorded us. We find the floor of the brightly lighted room covered with either a large Indian carpet or small rugs strewn about while all along the four walls are large bolsters, leaning with their backs against which we see a fairly large and appreciative audience on whom our



arrival appears to have caused no effect. Seating ourselves down like them in oriental fashion we watch the dance which is now in full swing and as the dancer twirls one way and another in graceful movements her fully pleated skirt swings out revealing beneath it a tight fitting pair of trousers reaching down to her ankles in striking contrast to her European prototype. And as the dance proceeds she breaks out into a song descriptive of some stirring love romance which draws from her audience expressions of appreciation. The dance ended she seats herself down in the middle of the hall while the musicians, one of whom has been softly playing on two drums placed in front of him and the other on a sarangi, now rise and attend to her immediate demands. And while a babel of voices now breaks out we notice some coloured drinks or sherbet being served round which we in our turn reluctantly, but out of courtesy, accept. The interval is interspersed with jests and jokes in which the dancer at times joins with a well-timed quip or a clever retort to some remark of one of the audience. We now notice some of the audience rising with the intention of taking their departure but before doing so liquidate their obligation each in accordance with the size of his purse. We also accordingly rise and doing likewise make our departure feeling a certain satisfaction at being initiated into one of the attractions of the night life of Bombay.

Our departure however by no means rings down the curtain on the scene for "On with the dance let joy be unconfined" is the order of this non-stop performance till the break of dawn as long as there still remains an appreciative audience. But the scene which we have seen enacted may not be repeated nightly for the Dancing Girl has to meet heavy overhead charges in the way of rent, household and other, expenses. For this she has to plan other means. If she should be a well-known personality and favourite among some of her wealthy patrons she may reserve a couple of nights solely for their patronage to the strict exclusion of the common element which usually visit her dance room. Such a night generally brings the much desired grist to her mill, and leads eventually to her services being requisitioned by her wealthy patrons to attend their wedding ceremonies and entertain their guests with her

now reputed talent. She now enters a career which opens out to her ways and means of adding considerably to her finances for as so often happens her seductive ways may find a response in the heart of the scion of a wealthy father and who becomes so hopelessly enamoured with her that his visits to her dance room become of very frequent occurrence, leading eventually to the inevitable climax of the young man's financial disaster and Dancing Girl's affluence, who now continues her career without a thought for her future which has been fairly well assured till an urge to return to her own land now strongly possesses her soul and may be, as years later, she rests in a luxuriously furnished home reclining so one fine day she bids farewell to a city where she has acquired sufficient wealth to keep her in comfort, nay luxury, for the rest of her life and on a rich Persian carpet or a silk-covered Divan she falls into a reverie and lingers on the pleasant retrospect of her temporary Romance with a man who she knew all along could not have bought her love with all the gold in Golconda!



## ***THE MARWARIS***

THE Marwari, as his name implies, is a native of Marwar, an Indian State in Rajputana of which the capital is Jodhpur. As depicted here, he is a familiar figure in the life of Bombay. The Marwaris are said to have settled originally in Surat as traders and money-lenders about 200 years ago. At first they met with no little opposition from the Gujrathi Baniyas who considered their advent as an encroachment on their prerogative but it is said that their business acumen and industrious habits soon overcame all obstacles and in a short while they began to accumulate much riches and became very influential. It is said of the Marwari that his chief characteristic is love of gain and a contempt of local opinion. Perhaps it is this characteristic that has made the Marwari to-day such a powerful Community in Bombay. The probable date of their arrival in Bombay seems to be lost in the mists of years but it may reasonably be assumed that they filtered in with other communities which made this progressive city their asylum and found a rich soil for the planting of enterprises which while they yielded them a rich harvest brought in their wake wealth and prosperity to the city and turned it into the flourishing trade centre that it is to-day.

The Marwaris, like other communities hereinbefore dealt with, are divided into two classes, the commercial class and the petty traders and shopkeepers. The former are brokers and merchants operating on the Stock and Bullion Exchanges and the grain and seed markets and particularly the Cotton market where their ready wit and business acumen as speculators have made them a power to be reckoned with and raised them to the very affluent condition in which they are to be found to-day.





THE MARWARIS

*Even the richest among them do not deviate  
from their prescribed code*



The shopkeepers and traders whose activities are to be seen in the chain of shops established through the length and breadth of the city, carry on a lucrative business as Jewellers, Money-lenders and Pawn-brokers. They are a quiet, peace-loving and industrious class and lead a very conservative and parsimonious existence, their only relaxation from the scene of their daily labours being frequent visits to the Civil Courts where, armed with a couple of red-covered account books, they prosecute their unfortunate debtors which consist mostly of the impecunious class of mill hands, dock labourers, and their ilk charging them exorbitant rates of interest and demanding their pound of flesh and like their Western counterpart allow no feelings of sentiment to give a softening touch to their business transactions. In the other branches of their profession as jewellers and pawnbrokers, their methods are at times questionable and though in rare cases they may be led into an injudicious deal, due more to their inherent rapacity than from a guilty knowledge and find themselves involved as receivers of stolen property, they generally live beyond the pale of the Law and carry on their trade without let or hindrance, growing more affluent on their ripening experience of the law and its requirements till they feel they have amassed a sufficient capital to enable them to return to their homeland and set up in some little village as its leading Sethji.

They are very united as a community and are formed into a society known as the Mahajans which is empowered to settle social disputes, arrange for the support of their Temples and the general management of their Provident Fund to which they all subscribe. They are also known as Marwari Shravaks in contrast to the Gujrati Shravaks. Their language is Gujrathi but they speak a Marwari dialect and write a different character to Gujrathi. By religion they are Jains and as such are strictly vegetarians, even the richest among them not deviating from the prescribed code. Their chief shrine is at Mount Abu known as the Dilwara Temples which in point of architecture and magnificent carvings on marble are next in grandeur to the Taj Mahal at Agra. They see to it that their children are sufficiently educated to be able to read

and write as on this depends their future livelihood. Their women are modest and retiring and are seldom or never to be seen engaged in public activities, being mostly attached to their homes and children. They are fond of good clothes and Jewellery and on festive occasions bedeck themselves with an extravagant display of this form of adornment which to Western people may lend a touch of vulgarity but with them is strictly in conformity with convention and in keeping with their social and financial status.





THE MAHARS

*A new epoch is opening out to them*

## *THE SWEEPERS*

THE sweepers, the Dheds and the Mahars occupy the unenviable position of being the lowest in the social scale of the people of India which is that of the Sudras. Their employment in the lowest and meanest grades of occupation from times immemorial has led to their ostracism by all sects of Hindus and they came to be known and treated as the untouchables. Though Hindus by birth they were, in view of the nature of their work, segregated in all towns and villages and were debarred from joining in all religious rites and ceremonies nor were they permitted to have access to the village wells for their supply of water. In consequence of schools being closed against the admission of their children, these unfortunate people have lived in a condition of crass illiteracy for generations. Even when the question of their travelling from one village to another arose, they were unable to secure any means of transport and had to do the journey invariably on foot. Where railroad communication was available, they took advantage of this means of transport but when they took up their position in a railway carriage it was imperative for them to advertise the fact that they belonged to the sweeper caste and no one else would occupy the compartment with them. This however was a great advantage to them and proved a blessing in disguise as they were thus enabled to travel in greater comfort than their fellow passengers!

The work of the Dheds and Mahars has from earliest times been the skinning of dead animals and curing and tanning their hides. This occupation still holds good among them and the Tanneries of all the large cities afford them a very acceptable means of livelihood, whereas



the sweepers find their means of support under the various Municipalities as is well known.

This deplorable condition of their social and religious status has of late created much interest owing to the indefatigable efforts of social reformers who have done and are doing much for the uplift of these down-trodden people who now have much to look forward to and be thankful for in the new epoch which is opening out to them. If the efforts of all true reformers meet with the success which they richly deserve, the untouchables will, in a decade or so, be no longer thus branded and will enjoy the rights and privileges of ordinary citizens among all castes and creeds of India.

