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SOME ASPECTS OF THE CENSUS OPERATIONS

OF 1931

IN BIHAR AND ORISSA.

BY

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LECTURE I.

The Nature and Mechanism of the Census.

From time to time during the past year, as I have sat at my desk surrounded by figures, laboriously hammering out a report on the census of Bihar and Orissa in 1931, I have wondered whether anybody would ever read it. I was aware of course that for administrative purposes Government officials would occasionally find it necessary to consult the census tables, and that curiosity would probably lead some members of the general public to do the same. I even assumed that, when the information thus obtained was particularly surprising or unintelligible, the more enterprising and optimistic seeker after knowledge might be induced to refer to the relevant portion of the report itself, in the hope that some kind of explanation might thus be forthcoming. But was there anybody, I asked myself, who would sit down to read the report for no better reason than that he expected to find it interesting? Somewhat to my surprise, a friend to whom I confided these gloomy speculations assured me that in this province (containing, as I shall probably have cause to remind you more than once hereafter, some 42,329,583 souls) he believed there were two such persons; and by a singular coincidence one of them is the Vice-Chancellor of this University. Herein, I suspect, lies the explanation of the fact

that you are asked to listen to a course of lectures on some aspects of the recent census operations. However that may be, it is a source of consolation to me to feel that by the medium of these lectures (however much the audience may dwindle before their course is run) I am assured of a wider public than ever I might have hoped to reach through the printed page.

It is, I believe, customary for most lecturers, however distinguished and—if I may use the expression—hardened, to preface their discourses with some observations of becoming modesty. This practice makes it hard for those of us who really are diffident and totally lacking in experience to give adequate expression to our feelings. Consequently, in asking for your indulgence and patience, I shall only say that I believe I am more than ordinarily sincere. As a Census Superintendent my qualifications were few indeed, but as a lecturer I have none. My task is rendered more difficult because, in dealing with such a subject as this, it is not easy to refrain from quoting endless statistics. In writing the census report I was continually conscious of this handicap, but in print figures do not look quite so formidable, and in any case the reader can always skip them. Moreover, a scribe has the advantage, which is denied to the lecturer, of being able to maintain the continuity of his narrative by referring casually to “the statement reproduced in the margin” or “the table which will be found at the end of this chapter” and so forth. He can also vary the monotony by inserting descriptive maps and intriguing diagrams at points where he fears that the reader’s attention would otherwise be inclined to

wander. All these devices I must do without here. The best I can do is to undertake that, so far as in me lies, I shall eschew the quotation of statistics in ^{the} mass formation.

At the same time I should not be honest, were I to encourage in you the belief that figures will not intrude into these lectures at all. Many of the earlier census reports are enriched by a store of general information about the province and its peoples. When my own contribution to the series emerges from the press, I fear that it will be found to add but little to this treasure-house. The reason is two-fold. In the first place, when one has nothing original to say, the best course (as it seems to me) is to say nothing. Thereby one's report doubtless loses in interest much that it might have achieved if the gist of carefully selected passages on such subjects as ethnology, caste government, marriage customs, religious beliefs, etc. had been reproduced—with or without acknowledgment—from previous census reports or other treatises; but at least it can claim the merit of being a good deal shorter than it otherwise would have been. And this leads to the second reason for the avoidance of general descriptive matter. Considerations of economy, which in these days are all-powerful, forbade the production of a bulky report; and I make no apology for holding that the main business of a Census Superintendent is after all to present and (in so far as he can) to interpret the census statistics.

But, before entering upon this business, I propose in this first lecture to say something about

the nature of the census and the way in which it was carried out. In India, as in England, the census aims at recording the actual, or *de facto*, population of the country on the night when the enumeration was held. It does not concern itself, as is done in some countries, with the resident, or *de jure*, population. No person is asked to state his ordinary place of abode. Wherever he happened to be between the hours of 7 P.M. and midnight on the 26th February 1931, there he was brought to account and in the population of that place he is numbered. In India, however, where (in comparison at least with Western countries) the population is still extremely immobile, the difference between the actual and the resident population is never large. It happens that in Bihar and Orissa this difference, such as it is, reaches its maximum at about the time of year when the present census was taken. After the winter rice crop has been harvested, an appreciable percentage of the agricultural population is in the habit of migrating to Bengal or elsewhere in search of temporary employment. They return either when the spring crops are ready for cutting or with the breaking of the monsoon. Thus the province is usually at its emptiest in February. This is a constant feature of every census, but on the present occasion the date of the final enumeration was somewhat earlier than usual (in 1921 it had been the 18th March), and the census returns must therefore be regarded as exhibiting the population of the province at slightly below its normal census strength.

It has just been asserted that every person was enumerated in the place where he happened

to be between 7 P.M. and midnight on the night of the census. This statement must, however, be qualified, for there are a few localities in Bihar and Orissa where a synchronous count was not possible. Certain wild tracts of country, where human habitations are few and inaccessible, dense jungle infested by dangerous animals—these and similar phenomena, coupled usually with a dearth of persons in the immediate locality qualified to act as enumerators, provided insurmountable obstacles to the completion of the final count within the prescribed hours. The most important of these tracts was the Khondmals subdivision of Angul, 800 square miles in extent. In Mayurbhanj State the Simlipal hills and their immediate neighbourhood, covering an area almost as large, were similarly treated. The districts of Puri, Shahabad and the Santal Parganas contained much smaller blocks of such country. Altogether the “non-synchronous tracts” in the whole province covered some 2,100 square miles, or about 2 per cent of the total provincial area. The aggregate number of persons enumerated in these localities was only about 307,000, or less than 0.75 per cent of the population of the province; and it may be safely assumed that, if it had been possible to carry out the normal procedure for the enumeration of these special tracts, the difference in the figures would not have been appreciable.

The main organisation and machinery of the census was practically the same as on former occasions. Each district is divided into a number of charges, circles and blocks, the block being the smallest of these units and containing as a rule from 30 to 50 houses. An enumerator is placed

in charge of each block, and his immediate superior is the circle supervisor. A circle usually comprises some 10 to 15 blocks. The number of circles included in a charge varies a good deal but seldom exceeds 20, and the charge is ordinarily co-terminous with the jurisdiction of a police-station. In most cases the duties of charge superintendent were carried out by the local sub-inspector of police; the supervisors and enumerators were, almost without exception, non-officials. They are recruited from the most intelligent and literate portion of the population and are placed under a statutory obligation to perform their duties as census officers. At the present census there were 219,380 enumerators and 16,916 supervisors. Apart, therefore, from the charge superintendents (950 in number) and the various Government servants employed in the subdivisional, district and provincial offices, the enumeration staff in this province included not less than 2½ lakhs of *unpaid*, non-official workers, many of whom were actually put to some personal expense in carrying out the tasks assigned to them. When the time comes for a Census Superintendent to express his acknowledgments to the various persons from whom he has received assistance and co-operation, his task is a heavy one; but, so long as the census is run on its present lines, the first and greatest debt of thanks will always be due to this great multitude of enumerators and supervisors, of whose names there is no record and who at best can look only for a printed certificate as the reward of their labours.

After the formation of blocks, circles and charges has been completed, the work of number-

ing the houses is taken up. Every house likely to be occupied on the night of the census is marked with a number and entered up in a list. Special importance attaches to the preparation of these lists, as they form the basis on which the number of census forms required is estimated. Thereafter the staff are trained in the correct manner of filling up the census schedules, which contain as many as 18 columns. The difficulty of securing uniformity as well as accuracy in these manifold entries is far greater than might be supposed. Then, some weeks before the night of the actual census, the writing up of the preliminary record is taken in hand. First on plain paper, and subsequently—after the enumerator's entries have been checked by the circle supervisor—in the printed schedules, the requisite particulars are recorded for all persons found in residence at the time when this preliminary enumeration is carried out. During this period charge superintendents and superior officers are required to be moving about continually, testing as many entries as possible and satisfying themselves that the instructions have been properly understood and put into effect. Consequently, the final enumeration on the night of the 26th February amounted to little more than a revision of the record already prepared. Between the hours of 7 P.M. and midnight on that date each enumerator visited all the houses in his block; persons who had left the place after the preliminary count were struck off, and newcomers were added to the record. In view of the immobile nature of the population in India it is generally found that at least 90 per cent of the original entries hold good. Special arrangements had to

be made for the enumeration of persons traveling by road, rail, or water on the census night, and for persons watching in their fields or assembled in fairs, camps and so forth; and precautions had to be taken to ensure that such persons were not counted twice over. As ill luck would have it, torrential rain fell in several localities on the night of the census itself and persisted throughout the greater part of the period fixed for the final enumeration. But I can personally testify that in Hazaribagh at least this untoward circumstance failed to damp the ardour of the census staff.

At dawn on the 27th February the striking of provisional totals began. The enumerators added up the number of males and females in their blocks, and these figures were consolidated for the circles by the supervisors, who then despatched them post-haste to the charge superintendents. The charge totals were conveyed by train, motor car, bicycle, runner, telephone, or whatever other means might secure the greatest expedition, to the subdivisional headquarters, and thence a report was forwarded to the headquarters of the district. The district figures were reported by telegram to the Provincial Superintendent and the Census Commissioner for India. As usual, there was keen competition among districts and states to get their figures in first, and I received the provisional totals of 7 states and one district (Balasore) before retiring to bed on the 27th February. The achievement of Mayurbhanj state, whose figures were handed in at the incredibly early hour of 2-20 P.M. on that date, was particularly meritorious. The returns from the last district of all were received on the night of the 4th March, and the

consolidated figures for the whole province were telegraphed to the Census Commissioner next day. The provisional totals so telegraphed differed from the finally checked and published figures by 0.2 per cent.

The first stage in the abstraction and compilation of the statistics was carried out at the headquarters of each district. It consisted in copying out on to a separate slip of paper the entries relating to each one of the 42,329,583 persons in the province. Papers of different colours were used for the different religions, and sex was denoted by printed symbols. Thus, for a Hindu male the copyist would select an unbleached slip with a circle printed in the top right-hand corner; for a Muslim female he would take a green slip on which the symbol of sex was a square instead of a circle. In most of the districts, slip copying was finished in 6 or 7 weeks: when work was in full swing as many as 3,669 copyists were employed, and on the average they turned out about 420 slips each per diem. They were paid at piece rates and worked long hours, but it was only an exceptional copyist who could earn as much as Rs. 20 in a month—from which it may be inferred that the rates of pay were not excessively liberal. None the less, they were appreciably more generous than on the occasion of the previous census. When the slips had been copied and arranged by sex and religion for each circle, they were despatched to the central offices, five in number, where they were sorted by hand for the different tables and the results compiled by districts. Altogether, nearly 1,500 sorters were at work in these offices, their remuneration being slightly in excess of that pre-

scribed for the slip copyists. The final tabulation of the figures was carried out in the headquarters office.

I may perhaps add a few words regarding the cost of the census operations. At the moment the accounts have not been finally closed, but the outstanding items (of which the most important is the cost of printing the report) are few and can be estimated with reasonable accuracy. The gross expenditure incurred by Government will, when the last bill has been paid, amount to approximately Rs. 4,69,500. Certain recoveries, however, were made from the States and from municipalities in British territory; and these, together with receipts from the sale of furniture, waste paper and the like, reduced the net cost to about Rs. 4,23,800. In estimating the cost per mille of the population, it is fair to confine the calculation to British territory only, because, although the States were not invited to make any contribution towards superintendence charges or towards the preparation of the report itself, the recoveries made from them covered almost all the extra cost incurred over the actual enumeration of their inhabitants and the compilation of the figures. It may therefore be said that the cost to Government works out at Rs. 11-4-0 per mille of the population in British territory. This figure cannot be exactly compared with the corresponding figure for the census of 1921, as a different method of accounting was adopted at the present census. But, as nearly as I have been able to reckon, the real cost of these operations will be less by nearly -/8/- per mille of the population than it was 10 years ago—and this in spite of the fact that appreciably higher

rates of pay were allowed to the copyists, sorters, compilers and other temporary employees. One more point should be made clear in this connexion. The figures I have quoted cover the entire pay of all permanent Government servants who were deputed to census work as whole-time officers, and in consequence they convey a somewhat exaggerated idea of the net *additional* expenditure incurred by Government on account of the operations; for in the case of such officers the additional expenditure is limited to the cost of the arrangements made for carrying on their ordinary work during their absence on deputation. It is not possible to give exact figures of the reduction in total cost that may be ascribed to this circumstance; but judging from the figures worked out in 1921, it would be in the neighbourhood of Rs. 65,000.

Little remains nowadays of the misgivings and alarm which earlier censuses excited among considerable sections of the people. In 1881 we are told that the prospect of being numbered gave rise to such a panic in the Santal Parganas that an army of 4,500 men had to be drafted into the district to prevent the outbreak of an armed rebellion. In much more recent times the idea was still widely spread that a counting of the people will be followed by trouble of some kind—probably in the form of an outbreak of epidemic disease. Even in 1921 in this very district of Patna there were not wanting those who believed that the main object of Government in taking the census was to find out whether the population was increasing, and, if so, to resort to some sinister method of reducing it to its former level. Some parents, obsessed with this notion, refused point blank to give the names of

their only sons, and implored the enumerator to spare this their only issue. Few such instances came to light in the course of the present enumeration, and for the most part it may be said that hostile interest has yielded place to apathetic resignation. There were, however, one or two special circumstances which served to arouse a flutter of interest in the proceedings of the census staff. Among the more educated classes, particularly in urban areas, some appreciation was shown of the bearing of the census figures on the impending constitutional changes. The prospect of the creation of a separate Orissa province and the question whether such a province should include the whole or any part of Singhbhum district were responsible for a lively concern in the returns of caste, language, etc. in that locality. The anxiety of many of the lower castes all over the province to improve their social status by the adoption of more impressive caste names attracted considerable attention to the manner in which entries were recorded in this particular column of the schedule. And, lastly, for the second time in succession the census operations happened to coincide with a political campaign of non-co-operation. In this province no serious attempt was made to organise a boycott of the census, and comparatively little active opposition was encountered from individuals. But political principles were not infrequently advanced as a convenient excuse for declining to undertake the irksome duties of a supervisor or enumerator, and potential volunteers were discouraged from proffering their services on the ground that it was their duty not to assist the Government in any shape or form.

This made the difficult task of enrolling the requisite number of workers still more difficult; and the same spirit of sullen unhelpfulness was manifested by considerable sections of the population throughout the conduct of the operations. Sometimes false rumours were set about regarding the objects of Government in holding the census. Cases were reported in which the numbers painted on houses by the census staff were obliterated. But refusals to answer questions put by an enumerator were very rare, and the direct effect of this political agitation on the accuracy of the census returns cannot have been appreciable. Indirectly its effects were more serious in that sub-inspectors of police (who, as already explained, occupied an important position in the hierarchy of census officials) were so pre-occupied with the civil disobedience movement that they had little time to spare for other duties. And for the same reason District Officers were unable to take such an active interest in supervising the progress of the census work as they would normally have done.

I shall naturally be expected to give some indication of the extent to which the census figures can be regarded as accurate and reliable. It may at once be conceded that there are certain aspects of the returns for which no high degree of accuracy is claimed on this occasion—or, to the best of my knowledge, has ever been claimed on any previous occasion. Chief among these are the statistics relating to infirmities, occupation and age.

There are many reasons why reliable and complete information about infirmities can never

be looked for from an ordinary population census. **Intentional concealment by or on behalf of the persons afflicted is probably the most powerful of these, and here the degree of inaccuracy will vary roughly with the nature of the affliction.** Blindness, for example, provokes charitable sympathy rather than repulsion, and there is little deliberate suppression of the facts so far as this infirmity is concerned. But the head of a household will naturally be reluctant to admit that he himself is a leper or that his child is an idiot. Particularly will he be anxious to avoid any such compromising admission in respect of a child who is approaching the marriageable age. In rural areas the existence of certain infirmities in certain families may be more or less common knowledge, but an enumerator is supposed to record the answers actually given to his questions, and he will seldom take the responsibility of entering an infirmity in the face of a direct denial by the person questioned. Supervising officers are in a position to exercise very little check over the correctness of the entries in this column, which in 99 cases out of 100 is, and probably should be, left blank. Moreover, the correct diagnosis of these infirmities often presents difficulties to the expert; how then can the village enumerator be expected to grapple with the problem? The instructions given to the census staff were as follows:—

“ If any person be blind of both eyes, or insane, or suffering from corrosive leprosy, or deaf and dumb, enter the name of the infirmity in this column (18). Do not enter those who are blind

of one eye only or who are suffering from white leprosy only.”

But, apart from the fact that leprosy, even in a fairly advanced stage, may easily be confused with other ailments of the skin, there are many lepers who do not know themselves that they are suffering from the disease. There are different degrees of insanity, as well as different forms. Total blindness, one might think, should be recognized without any great difficulty, but in practice it is not easy to draw the line (especially among the aged) between defective sight and complete inability to see anything. Such entries as *kana* (one-eyed), which always appear with some frequency in the schedules, testify to the imperfect grasp of their instructions by the census staff. *Baudh* is a term sometimes used to describe a true deaf-mute, but does not always bear this signification. Even in more advanced countries the difficulties of obtaining reasonably accurate information about physical disabilities through the ordinary census agency have been found so grave that in England and Wales the attempt was abandoned altogether ten years ago. In the United States of America the same step had been virtually taken even earlier. The question of discontinuing such enquiries in the Indian census has been seriously considered, but there are few other ways in this country in which any statistics bearing on this subject can be obtained, and so for the present at least it was decided to continue the former practice.

Ignorance and superstition are largely responsible for the defects in the age returns. As pointed out by Mr. Marten in the all-India census report

of 1921, "there is a traditional reticence regarding the mention of a person's age which probably has its origin in the same class of ideas as that which causes a taboo on the mention of names. The age, like the name, is considered to be an intimate part of a man's personality which, if given away, might be used in some magical means to cause him injury". Apart from this, it is the exception rather than the rule for any person in India to know his own age or that of his wife or child. It is true that the practice of preparing a horoscope whenever a child (and particularly a male child) is born is supposed to be widespread among the Hindu population, but how far it is really observed, even among the better classes, is open to some doubt. In any case the horoscope is seldom consulted for the benefit of the enumerator, and the record of age is in consequence mainly the result of guess-work. It is usual, however, for the author of a census report to fortify himself—and, as far as may be, his public—with the theory that, while little reliance can be placed on the recorded age of any particular individual, it is nevertheless possible to extract from the mass a reasonably accurate estimate of the age constitution of the population as a whole; also that, the types of error being more or less constant, periodic changes in the age constitution from one census to another can be traced with some approach to confidence.

The returns of occupation were undoubtedly more complicated, and gave infinitely more trouble, than any other part of the operations, but it is not possible in this lecture to give more than a very brief indication of the special difficul-

ties which they involved. First came the problem of deciding whether any given person was an "earner" or a "dependant"; and, if the latter, whether he was a "working dependant" or a "non-working dependant". I say *he*, but the *shes* were often still more difficult to classify in this respect. Again, an earner might have more than one source of livelihood, in which case the enumerator was faced with the necessity of deciding which was the principal occupation and which the subsidiary. Then it was a matter of great importance that each occupation should be precisely described, and that such vague and indefinite terms as *naukari*, *majduri*, *kirani*, *dukandari* and the like should be avoided. In the case of service, for example, it was necessary not only to distinguish between Government service, service in a shop, etc., but also to particularize the Government department, the shop-keeper's business, and so on. Agriculturists had to be returned specifically as non-cultivating owners, cultivating owners, cultivating tenants or field labourers. It cannot be said that these and similar instructions were always carried out, but, so long as the task of filling in the schedules is entrusted to the present agency and their work is not supervised by a responsible paid staff in far greater detail than is possible under the present system, it is doubtful whether much improvement can be looked for in this matter. But it would be unfair to lay at the door of the humble enumerator all the defects and inaccuracies which characterize the occupation tables. After the columns in the schedule had been filled up, the difficulties were scarcely half over. The next stage, as we have seen, was the

copying out on to separate "slips" of the entries relating to each individual: and the copyist, whose pay depended on the number of slips he could turn out daily, was not likely to appreciate lengthy and involved entries relating to occupation. It required close supervision to ensure that these entries were not curtailed or mutilated in the course of transcription. Then came the sorting of the slips, a complicated and difficult process as far as the occupation tables were concerned, and one in which the system of piece-rate remuneration was once more conducive to impetuosity rather than discriminating care. Finally came the classification of the entries under their appropriate heads, and the task of posting and compiling the results in voluminous intermediate registers before they were ready to issue in their final form.

It is not a matter for great surprise, therefore, that the returns of infirmities, age and occupation are not wholly reliable. To a lesser extent there are undoubtedly errors in the statistics relating to such matters as literacy, civil condition and caste. Some account will be given in my other lectures of the difficulties in the way of securing accurate information on these points. As a general rule, however, I do not think that there is any good reason to regard the present census as being more defective in these particulars than its immediate predecessors, though this possibility will have to be considered when we come to discuss (for example) the surprising variations in the statistics of early marriage and the surprising absence of variation in the literacy statistics.

So far as the figures of actual population are concerned, the exceptionally heavy increase record-

ed in the last decade may well give rise (indeed, has already given rise in some quarters) to a feeling of scepticism. Stories have been put in circulation of successful attempts made by one community or another to exaggerate its strength by means of fictitious returns. I have little hesitation in venturing the categorical statement that, so far at least as this province is concerned, there is no substance in such allegations, and that no valid grounds exist for supposing that the recorded increase in population is not absolutely genuine.

In support of this contention I rely, first, on the independent record of vital occurrences. As most of you are probably aware, one of the miscellaneous duties imposed on the village *chaukidar* is to report all births and deaths occurring within his beat. Every week, or every fortnight, he hands in his *hath chitta* at the local police station, where the figures are compiled in the form of monthly returns and are forwarded to the Civil Surgeon of the district. In urban areas the reporting agency is the beat constable instead of the *chaukidar*, but in other respects the procedure is the same. Now, the vital statistics thus recorded are not always as accurate as they might be. The *chaukidar* is often illiterate and sometimes he is inclined to be lazy. But from our point of view the important point is this: it has been established as the result of various tests conducted from time to time in different parts of India that *the record of births is normally less complete than the record of deaths*. This proposition might not hold good during the prevalence of violent epidemics, such as the influenza outbreak of 1918-19, when the reporting agency was

thoroughly disorganised and thousands of deaths went unreported. But during this last decade there has been no such disastrous outbreak, and there is every reason to suppose that the vital statistics for this period reflect their normal tendency. And what do these figures actually say? They say that in the twenty-one British districts of this province—for the system of registration of births and deaths is not universally in force in the States, and our analysis must therefore be confined to British territory—the net excess of births over deaths between the 1st January 1921 and the 31st December 1930 was 3,254,095. According to the census the increase of population in these twenty-one districts between the 18th March 1921 and the 26th February 1931 was 3,682,158. In other words, the rate of increase according to the vital statistics is 9.6 per cent, and, although this is somewhat lower than the census rate of 10.8 per cent, it is still abnormally high. But this is not the whole story. The difference between the number of persons born and the number who die is not the sole factor which determines the growth of a *de facto* population. The balance of migrations must also be taken into account, that is to say, the difference between the number of persons who emigrate during the period in question and the number who immigrate. And it is safe to say that this factor alone was responsible for an addition of not less than 275,000 persons to the actual population recorded in 1921. I will not weary you here with the detailed calculations by which this figure has been arrived at; they will shortly be available to anybody who is sufficiently interested in the matter. But the result is that the discre-

pancy between the census figures and the vital statistics is reduced to a matter of 150,000.

As regards this discrepancy, the first observation to be made is that it is after all a very small one. Even if it could be supposed that the vital statistics are absolutely correct and that the population of the British districts of the province has been overstated by 150,000 as the outcome of the census operations, the actual rate of increase during the last decade would only have to be modified from 10.8 to 10.4 per cent. But we have already seen that no claim to meticulous accuracy can reasonably be advanced on behalf of the vital statistics; the method and agency employed for their compilation preclude it. The census record, on the other hand, was prepared by a staff which, whatever its imperfections may be, did at least receive a good deal of special instruction and training in the duties they had to carry out, and their work was supervised and checked much more closely. As between the two sets of figures, it will probably be conceded that a much stronger presumption of accuracy attaches to the census record. Moreover, it will be remembered that the *chaukidar* is more liable to let births go unreported than deaths. If we assume that during the last decade this functionary omitted to report 2 per cent of the births and one per cent of the deaths—a very modest assumption—the whole of the discrepancy between the census record and the record of vital occurrences disappears, and there is an almost exact correspondence between the two sets of figures.

I submit, therefore, that this independent record does furnish very strong evidence in

support of the contention that the growth of the population has not been exaggerated. Perhaps it is also relevant to point out that, although some part of the increase in this province is due to the reduced volume of emigration to other parts of India, the rate of growth in Bihar and Orissa is only slightly in excess of that recorded for India as a whole. Another point may be mentioned. If recourse had been had on an appreciable scale to deliberate falsification of the record by means of fictitious returns, it is almost certain that the increase in the female population would have been disproportionately high, for women are seldom produced before the enumerator and could therefore be "invented" with greater facility than men. But in actual fact one of the outstanding features of the present census is the relative decline in the number of females. Finally, I hope to show in the course of my lecture to-morrow evening that the economic conditions prevailing in this province during the intercensal period were in themselves quite sufficient to account for the rapid multiplication of its inhabitants.

LECTURE II.

Distribution and Growth of the Population.

I begin this evening with a bald announcement of fact. On the 26th February 1931 the province of Bihar and Orissa, with an area of 111,702 square miles, was found to contain a population of 42,329,583 persons. It is perhaps as well to make it clear that throughout these lectures, unless the contrary is indicated, whenever mention is made of "Bihar and Orissa", the term should be understood to include not only the British districts of the province but also the Orissa States. Since 1921, when the previous census was taken, there have been no important changes in the territorial constitution of the province. Over its whole extent the average density of population per square mile is 379.

It is of interest to compare the area, population and density of Bihar and Orissa with those of other provinces and countries. Perhaps it is not generally recognized that, although in point of size this province occupies a comparatively low place in the gradation list, there are only three provinces in India which contain a larger number of inhabitants, and only two in which the mean density per square mile is greater. Bengal, the United Provinces and Madras are the three provinces which can claim a superiority in numbers, and of these the two first-named are

also more thickly populated. But Bombay, the Punjab, the Central Provinces and Burma, although they all cover a wider area than Bihar and Orissa, have a much smaller population. Bombay, for example, has only 26 millions, as compared with our 42 millions. Burma, the largest province of all, contains less than 15 million inhabitants, and on six square miles of territory supports barely as many persons as this province supports on one. If we look to the average density of the population throughout India we find that Bihar and Orissa is twice as thickly peopled as the rest of the country. Turning to foreign countries, there is but little difference, as regards numbers, between Bihar and Orissa, England and Wales, and France; but, whereas this province is nearly twice as large as England and Wales, it is only about half the size of France. In point of density it approximates most nearly to Germany in the West and Japan in the East. The United States of America could accommodate this province within their boundaries 30 times over and still have room to spare, but the result would be that they would find themselves with a population ten times as numerous as they have at present.

The distribution of the population between the natural divisions of Bihar and Orissa is very irregular. But, before saying anything more on this subject, I may explain very briefly what is meant by "natural divisions". As most of you are no doubt aware, the 21 districts of the province are grouped together for administrative purposes into five commissioner's divisions. But *naturally* the province consists of three well-defined parts, each of which is more or less homogeneous in itself and differs very widely from the other two,

both in respect of physical features and in respect of the people who inhabit it. These three sub-provinces are Bihar proper in the north, the coastal districts of Orissa in the extreme south-east, and the plateau of Chota Nagpur, which covers the whole of the intervening country.

Now, in analysing and discussing the main results of the census, conclusions of greater value are likely to be arrived at by re-grouping the districts and states according to the *natural* divisions in which they lie, rather than by adhering to the *administrative* arrangement. It will be convenient, moreover, to subdivide Bihar proper into North Bihar and South Bihar, the Ganges being taken roughly as the dividing line between the two. We thus have altogether four natural divisions, the composition of which is as follows :—

North Bihar includes the four Tirhut districts *plus* Bhagalpur and Purnea.

South Bihar includes the three districts of the Patna division *plus* Monghyr.

The Chota Nagpur plateau includes not only the five districts contained in the administrative division of Chota Nagpur, but also the Santal Parganas, Sambalpur, Angul and all of the States, twenty-six in number.

Orissa therefore comprises nothing more than the three coastal districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore.

Lest there should chance to be an Oriya among those present, let me hasten to say that, in thus circumscribing the limits of the natural division of Orissa, I am very far from suggest-

ing that these will, or should, co-incide with the limits of the new Orissa province, which we are told will shortly come into existence.

Of these four natural divisions, by far the largest and at the same time the least thickly populated is the Chota Nagpur plateau. In extent it claims more than half of the entire province, but its inhabitants are actually fewer in number than those of North Bihar which is less than one-third of its size. This is in part due to the inclusion in the plateau of the sparsely-peopled States, where the average density per square mile is only 162. But, even if we take into account only the eight British districts contained within this natural division, the density figure is still as low as 258, or barely half that of Orissa which is the least thickly populated of the other divisions. As between North Bihar, South Bihar and Orissa, there is considerably disparity in size but not so much in density. The first-named is at once the largest and the most densely peopled of the three. Indeed, with the single exception of East Bengal, there is no natural division in the whole of India where the density per square mile is so great as in North Bihar. It exceeds even that of England and Wales, where 79 per cent of the population is urban, whereas the corresponding figure in North Bihar is only 3 per cent. The whole province of Burma, with an area more than ten times as large as North Bihar, does not support a population as numerous as that supported by this single division.

The average population of a British district in Bihar and Orissa is something over $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions, and the average area is nearly 4,000 square miles. In point of size Ranchi district heads the list with an area of 7,102 square miles, but in spite of its

vast extent the population of this district is well below the average number. Darbhanga on the other hand is smaller than the average district, having an area of 3,348 square miles only, but it can still (as always heretofore) boast a larger population than any other district in the province. At the present census for the first time it topped the 3,000,000 mark. No other district has yet accomplished this, but nine districts now contain a population of between 2 and 3 millions each. With the exception of Cuttack and the Santal Parganas, all these districts belong to North or South Bihar.

Turning now to the comparative density of the various districts in Bihar and Orissa, we find that Darbhanga, although pre-eminent in absolute numerical strength, must be content with second place when numbers are considered in relation to area. The most thickly populated district of the province is Muzaffarpur, which supports no less than 969 persons to each square mile—an astonishing figure, especially when the predominantly rural character of the population is borne in mind. Only 28 out of every 1,000 persons in Muzaffarpur district live in towns. Two other districts (both in North Bihar) have a mean density of more than 900 persons per square mile, and close behind them comes Patna with 893. At the other end of the scale there are six British districts with a population of less than 250 persons to the square mile. All of these, as might be expected, are to be found in the Chota Nagpur plateau, the most sparsely populated of them all being Angul. But among the States there are several with an even lower density. Rairakhol, for instance, has only 43, while there are five other states in which the figure varies between 50 and 100.

The year 1872 witnessed the first scientific attempt to take a census of the population of India, and the results of that enumeration are recorded in the first of the present series of census reports. Admittedly it was much less accurate than the subsequent censuses, and, partly for this reason and partly because it appears unnecessary to extend our survey of the progress of the population over a longer period than half a century, we may take the census of 1881 as our starting point. In the course of the fifty years that have elapsed since that date Bihar and Orissa has increased its population by 26.8 per cent. A small portion of this increase should, however, be discounted on the ground that the standard of accuracy in the census of 1881 was somewhat lower than in the succeeding operations and the actual population in that year was consequently greater than the recorded figures indicate. Excepting 1911-21, each decade has seen a greater or less increase in the population of the province. The disparity between the general rate of growth in the Chota Nagpur plateau and the rate elsewhere is particularly striking. Since 1881 the population of this division has increased by as much as 62 per cent. In comparison with this remarkable record, North Bihar, where the percentage of increase is 16 only, comes a very poor second.

The decade 1911-21 was completely overshadowed by the great influenza epidemic of 1918. When the census of 1921 was taken, the population of Bihar and Orissa was found to be 1.2 per cent less than it had been ten years earlier. Yet for the first seven years of the decennium the history of the province had followed a normal course, inclining indeed towards prosperity rather

than the reverse, and it was estimated in the last census report that, if a census had been taken in March 1918, it would have revealed an increase of about a million and a half over the population of 1911. But in the year 1918 alone over half a million deaths were directly attributed to influenza, which furthermore undermined the health and impaired the fecundity of many millions more. On top of this, there was a serious failure of the monsoon in the same year, and famine conditions prevailed in parts of the province. Distress was general and acute. The price of common rice more than doubled itself in twelve months. At the same time the general rise in the cost of living occasioned by the War had begun to make itself felt, and the unprecedented increase in the cost of cloth in particular inflicted untold hardship on the people. Some indication of the general condition to which they were reduced is afforded by the fact that the birth-rate fell from 40.4 in 1917 to 30.4 in 1919.

The present census records an increase of 11.5 per cent in the total population of the province since 1921. During the last fifty years, and probably for very much longer still, there has been nothing comparable to this rapid growth in numbers. There is not a single British district nor an individual state which did not contribute something towards the general increase. In Balasore district the percentage was smaller than anywhere else, being only 1.03. Singhbhum, with an increase of 22.4 per cent, heads the list of British districts, but is left far behind by the small state of Talcher, which emerged at the end of the decade with a population 36.6 per cent greater than what it had at the beginning.

Before proceeding further, it will be advantageous to consider the principal factors which influence the growth of population and to see how these factors operated during the last decade. And first we may consider briefly the effect of migration. It is clear that, if in any given period the number of persons emigrating from the province exceeds the number of immigrants into it, the population is really multiplying at a more rapid rate than the census figures indicate: or in other words the increase in the *natural* population is greater than the increase in the *actual* population. And the converse of course holds good too. Now Bihar and Orissa has always hitherto sent abroad to seek their fortunes many more persons than it has attracted from outside, and the number of emigrants (not far short of 2 millions) recorded in the census of 1921 was nearly five times larger than the number of immigrants. During the last decade this process was checked for the first time. While there has been a fall of about 185,000, or nearly 10 per cent, in the number of persons born in this province and enumerated elsewhere, the number of "outsiders" enumerated in Bihar and Orissa has increased by 87,600, or more than 20 per cent. The result is that, although the emigrants are still in a large majority, the disparity has been considerably reduced, and the growth in the natural population of the province is only 10.4 per cent as compared with a growth of 11.5 in the actual population.

It goes without saying that, in a province which depends directly on agriculture for the support of 80 per cent. of its inhabitants, the climatic conditions during the last ten years and the nature of the harvests are of overwhelming importance. Generally speaking, these were

favourable. In six years out of the ten the rice crop, with which the economic prosperity of the province is so largely bound up, was at least up to normal, and the year 1922 was memorable for a bumper harvest estimated at 20 per cent above par. From 1923 to 1927 (excepting 1924) the harvests were somewhat disappointing, but even in these years there was no serious failure of any important crop, and the condition of the agricultural population was never such as to give rise to serious anxiety. The reserve stocks of grain were usually adequate, and agricultural labourers found little difficulty in obtaining employment. In 1925 and 1926 Orissa suffered severely from floods. Other parts of the province were not altogether immune from visitations of this nature, and in particular considerable distress was caused thereby in Saran district in 1921, while the overflowing of the Son river in 1923 was responsible for a general destruction of crops over an area of 600 square miles.

At the beginning of the decade the post-war increase in the cost of living generally, combined with the acute distress occasioned by the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the failure of the monsoon in the same year, had raised the price of food-grains to an unprecedented height. For the first three years of the intercensal period they declined steadily in price. Then came a reaction, and from the beginning of 1924 to the end of 1927 prices were once more on the up grade. But the last three years of the decade witnessed another fall, more sharp than before, and by the end of 1930 the extremely low level to which the price of food-grains had dropped was beginning to cause embarrassment to agriculturists. Apart from food-grains, the price of the indispensable commodities

of ordinary existence, such as other articles of food, fuel and lighting, clothing, etc., declined consistently throughout the decade, and more steeply during the last year or two.

A rural wage census of Bihar and Orissa, carried out in 1924, affords an interesting insight into the extent to which wages had adjusted themselves to the changes in the cost of living. The last census of this nature had been held in 1916; and, although the Great War had been in progress for two years by that time, it had not yet had any appreciable effect on the general level of prices out here, so that the index figures of 1916 may be taken to represent the "pre-war" cost of living. The corresponding index figures for 1924 revealed an all-round increase of about 60 per cent in rural areas, and this tallied almost exactly with the increase in the wages paid to unskilled labour. The skilled workman, on the other hand, was able to command in 1924 an average wage about 100 per cent higher than he received in 1916, and he may therefore be regarded as having improved his position considerably. It must be remembered, too, that there is always a pronounced lag in the process of adjusting wages to a new level of prices. Consequently, during the years succeeding 1924, when the cost of living was falling ever more rapidly, the unskilled workman as well as the skilled scored heavily.

The public health during the decade was on the whole extraordinarily good. Cholera has always exacted a heavy toll in Bihar and Orissa, but the total number of deaths for which this disease was responsible during the last decade was 30 per cent less than in 1911—20, and would have been much smaller still but for the severe epidemics experienced during each of the last three

years. The annual mortality from plague decreased from 42,000 to about 11,000, and the progressive improvement in the figures since the beginning of the century gives reason to hope that this dreadful scourge is dying out altogether. Small-pox is the only important disease which proved more destructive of human life during 1921-30 than in the previous decade. This was due to two serious outbreaks in 1926 and 1927. In the former year Orissa was the chief sufferer, but the second epidemic was felt with some severity throughout the province. "When in doubt, call it fever" is the motto of the village *chaukidar*, whose business it is to report the fact and cause of every death occurring within his beat. So the deaths brought to account under this head are commonly due not only to genuine fevers of every description but also to such diseases as dysentery, pneumonia, phthisis and many others. Out of some 9 million deaths from all causes reported during the last decade, more than 6 millions were ascribed to fever. In the preceding decade, however, the number had been very nearly 8 millions. Of course the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 had contributed largely to that appalling total, and a more just impression of the improvement in the *normal* state of the public health during the last twenty years will perhaps be obtained by comparing the "fever" deaths for the first seven years of each decade. From 1911 to 1917 these numbered 4,800,000 and odd, while the corresponding figure for 1921-27 was about 4,300,000, representing a decrease of something over ten per cent.

We may now attempt a brief re-capitulation of the principal factors which appear to have been responsible for the unparalleled increase in the population since 1921. In the first place, there is

the natural rebound from the heavy losses sustained at the close of the previous decade. This recovery was materially assisted by a succession of good, or reasonably good, harvests and by the complete absence of anything in the nature of the serious failure of any important crop. At the same time the general state of public health reached, and successfully maintained, a higher level than it has ever known before, and grave epidemics of disease were exceptionally rare. Wages and economic conditions generally had adjusted themselves fairly early in the decade to the high post-war level of prices, and the wage-earner profited greatly by the subsequent decline in the cost of living. The agriculturist was in a hardly less advantageous position, because the price of food-grains remained at a comparatively high level for some years after all other commodities had come down in value. Towards the end of the decade, however, it was already becoming apparent that the days of plenty were numbered, and the agriculturist began to feel the pinch sooner and more severely than anybody else. In the meantime, the general economic prosperity enjoyed by the province had operated to discourage emigration and to attract back to their own homes not a few of those who had been driven abroad to seek a living in less halcyon days. In this way, the actual population was swelled even beyond its natural growth.

The census schedules do not concern themselves with questions relative to the standard of living of the population of the province, and exact statistical information on this subject is not therefore available. A brief questionnaire was however issued to representative persons in each district, and their replies, based on personal

knowledge and observation, contain much that is of interest. By common consent there has been a marked rise in the general standard of living during the last ten years. This is evidenced in various ways. It is perhaps most apparent in the increasing use of articles which a short time back were regarded as being in the nature of luxuries. Dietz lanterns, for example, are nowadays looked on as absolutely indispensable by vast numbers of people who were formerly able to make shift with the earthen *diya*; and kerosine oil in the same way is taking the place of indigenous seed-oils of domestic extraction. In slightly higher grades of society the electric torch-light has achieved a tremendous popularity. Umbrellas, too, are used habitually to-day by many persons, and classes of persons, who would not have aspired to them ten years ago. The old types of umbrella, made of bamboo or palm-leaves, which in certain parts were very common, are being replaced more and more by the cloth article. Bicycles are to be found now in the most remote villages, and their owners are not confined to the zamindar and trader classes; a cultivator who has made a good profit on the sale of his lac crop may go off now-a-days and invest the proceeds in a bicycle. Except in the most backward parts of the province, it is becoming difficult to find a village *darzi* without his sewing machine. This is attributed largely to the enterprise of the Singers' firm in popularising the hire-purchase system in the mufassil, but it is none the less indicative of a great advance in the outlook of the *darzi* himself.

The clothes worn by all sections of the population are more varied, and usually of better quality, than they used to be. For some time the tendency towards a higher standard of wearing

apparel expressed itself in a preference for more finely-woven mill cloths or cloths of foreign manufacture; but political considerations were responsible later on for a re-action in favour of the coarse hand-woven *khaddar*. This, however, did not necessarily imply that a man's outlay on his wardrobe was reduced. In the matter of jewellery, the tendency among women of every class is towards a greater refinement. Ornaments are fewer in number but more valuable. The wearing of ornaments by men is falling out of favour, but wrist-watches, fountain-pens and so forth are affected instead.

As regards houses, the general opinion seems to be that there has not been much change in their size or in the general arrangement of the rooms. But it does really appear to be a fact that the importance of light and air is beginning to be realized in the more modern houses. *Pucca* buildings are undoubtedly more common than they were, but more noticeable still is the substitution of tiles for thatch, while in some parts of the province roofs of corrugated iron are beginning to find favour even in the villages.

With regard to developments in the kind and quantity of food ordinarily consumed by different classes of the community, it has proved more difficult to obtain general agreement. The view of the majority is that the last decade has seen little change in this respect, apart from a slight improvement in the quality of the food-grains consumed and a tendency to eat more vegetables. It does not appear that wheat or fish or meat is now taken by any considerable section of the people who did not formerly take them. Indeed, "social uplift" movements have in some cases resulted in the partial abandonment of meat as an

article of diet among the lower castes and aboriginal tribes. Some correspondents, however, have detected more substantial changes in the gastro-nomic habits of the community in general, and I am indebted to a Muslim resident of Puri district for the following picturesque account of such developments in his part of the world. "The red portions of the ordinary rice are usually discarded. Except the sweepers, Haris, Sahars, etc., almost all classes have recourse to polished rice, which has resulted in serious loss of vitamin, as a result of which berri-berri is noticed in places. The *roti* and *paratta* is held in greater demand. Loafs and biscuits have permeated the very nooks and corners of the locality, of course as far as the biscuit hawkers can travel. Hotels in towns teach even mufassil people new methods of preparation of food. The itinerant confectioner hawks cakes and other varieties of sweets prepared from *badam* oil or vegetable ghee in the mufassils, often in exchange for paddy, and has created a different atmosphere in the life of the children in the mufassils. The potato is universally demanded by almost all classes of people. Mangoes, generally dumped from the Madras Presidency, are sometimes resorted to by the average household. The bill of the fruit-seller is increasing, as ill-health prevails in the country. Barley and arrow-root form light beverage during fever. Wheat-flour is used by fashionable people for tiffin purposes. Fish obtained locally by themselves are used by the lowest classes. Meat, except that of swine, hare, etc. which they generally used, is nowadays used in ceremonial occasions even by the lowest classes. To quote the words of Goldsmith—'To boast of one splendid banquet once a year'. The Brahmans, Karans and other

classes of orthodox Hindus, who generally did not use flesh, now-a-days relish the same". There is unanimity of opinion regarding the rapid development of the tea-drinking habit in every grade of society, and this is possibly the outstanding feature of the period, so far as questions of food and drink are concerned.

Another sign of the times, which testifies eloquently to enlargement of ideas and higher standards of comfort, is the extent to which the passenger lorries and motor services of every kind are now patronized by the rank and file of the population. Ordinary cultivators and members of the labouring classes, faced with a journey of five, ten or fifteen miles, think little or nothing of jumping on to a lorry and paying their fare—for no stronger reason than to be quit of the trouble of walking.

The position then is that in the course of the last ten years the population has been increasing at a rate almost—if not quite—unprecedented, and at the same time there has been a definite improvement in the standard of living. The question is : how has this come about? So far at least as the two natural divisions of Bihar proper are concerned, it was the generally accepted view that the pressure on the soil had some time ago reached a point where any further increase was bound to lead to a deterioration in the conditions of existence unless it was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the productive capacity of the soil—or of course by the development of alternative means of supporting life. It is no part of my present purpose to enter into a complicated discussion of what is implied by the term "overpopulation". Our consideration of the subject

may be confined within the narrow limits of the following proposition, which states the problem in its simplest form: "We may consider the relation between the number of the people of a certain defined tract at their present intellectual, moral and material standard of living on the one hand, and the average productivity of the area according to existing methods of exploitation on the other hand, and say that if this population continues to increase numerically at its present rate it cannot maintain its material standard of living under conditions as they exist at present". Has the productivity of the soil in Bihar and Orissa increased appreciably since 1921? The answer to this question must be in the negative. There may have been a few acres of waste land or jungle reclaimed here and there and brought under cultivation, but this has not been done on such a scale as to add materially to the natural resources of the province. Indeed, according to the official returns of the agricultural department, the proportion of the total area under cultivation in 1931 was slightly smaller than in 1921. Nor can it be asserted that the yield per acre of the soil has been increased to any great extent by new and improved methods of exploitation. Is there any indication, then, of the development of fresh resources, apart altogether from agricultural produce, which would help to support the surplus population? Practically none. It is true that there has been a slight rise in the proportion of those who seek their livelihood in towns rather than in rural areas, but very slight; and the expansion of commerce and industry in Bihar and Orissa still proceeds at a painfully slow rate, despite the richness of her mineral resources. There has in fact been no appreciable change since

1921 in the percentage of the total population which relies directly on agriculture for the means of subsistence. Yet in the face of all this the people of the province have multiplied *and prospered*, showing to all appearances a cheerful disregard of Malthus and his laws.

But in truth the solution is not far to seek. The main clue to the prosperity of this period has already been indicated. From about 1917 the price of all commodities began to rise rapidly and continued to do so until about the time when the last decade opened. Then they started to fall again. The fall was more or less steady and continuous throughout the whole of the intercensal period, and generally speaking it affected all commodities *except food-grains*. Obviously the lot of the agriculturist in these circumstances was an enviable one. That portion of the produce of his fields which he must set apart to pay his rent was smaller than before, and after feeding himself and his family he was in a position to realize good money from what still remained over and to purchase more with the proceeds—more cloth, more kerosine oil, more country liquor, better ornaments for his womenfolk, more frequent joyrides in the motor lorry which had just started to ply up and down the main road near his village. Meanwhile, the monsoon never failed once! It is not that the harvests during this period, taken as a whole, were abundant. There were one or two exceptionally good years, but on the average the outturn of the principal crops was below normal rather than above it. The invaluable thing about them was that they were consistent, and never once was there anything in the nature of a serious failure. So greatly do the agriculturists in this province outnumber every

other section of the community that their felicity alone would be sufficient to account for the phenomenon of a population growing in numbers and prosperity at one and the same time. But it so happens that the wage-earner was equally well off. It might almost be said that wages had no sooner adjusted themselves to the high cost of living than the cost of living began to fall. But, as invariably occurs, wages continued for some time longer at their new level. It is true that the price of rice in a tiresome way persisted in remaining much higher than it should have done, but everything else was coming down with a rush. The day-labourer, the domestic servant, the Government official, the factory employee, the shop-keeper's clerk—they could all afford to contemplate their growing families with equanimity.

So it came about that money, besides being worth more, was more plentiful. There are many indications of this, apart from the common indulgence (already noticed) in unwonted luxuries. Take for example the remarkable expansion of the revenue derived by the Government from excise. In the first six years of the decade receipts under this head rose from about $1\frac{1}{2}$ crores of rupees to about 2 crores. This was caused not by an increase in the amount of drink consumed but by a progressive enhancement of the price. If money had not been plentiful, it would never have been possible for Government to pursue with such marked success its policy of "maximum revenue combined with minimum consumption". The slump in excise receipts which set in at the very end of the decade was in the first place due in no small part to political propaganda, but the propagandists were greatly assisted by the sudden and complete change in the economic situation. Take

again the record of transactions in post-office five-year cash certificates. These certificates were first offered to the public in 1917-18, and for the first year or two the purchases were moderately heavy. But from 1919-20 the withdrawals were for four successive years greatly in excess of the new issues, and by the end of 1922-23 there cannot have been much left in the post-office vaults. Then came five years on end of solid buying. Even supposing that every rupee withdrawn during this period was immediately applied to the purchase of fresh certificates, the new money invested between 1923-24 and 1927-28 amounted to no less than a crore of rupees. Much the same story is unfolded by the accounts of the post-office savings bank. Each year since 1920 has witnessed a steady increase in the sum total of the money invested, and at the time when the present census was taken the balance in the bank (something over 2½ crores of rupees) was much more than double of what it had been ten years earlier. Lastly, the sums remitted by money-order to post-offices in Bihar and Orissa are not devoid of significance. These sums represent to a large extent the contribution towards the wealth of the province made by those of its people who have journeyed abroad in search of employment. Separate figures are not available in respect of money-orders despatched from places outside the province, nor of course would it be correct to assume that only the savings of emigrants are remitted by postal money-order. But it is noteworthy that with very few exceptions remittances are heaviest to just those districts from which emigration is known to be most common. The aggregate value of the remittances made during the last six years of the decade 1921-31 was 50

per cent greater than in the corresponding period of the previous decade; and this in spite of the fact that the emigrants were far less numerous. The reason is that, like the wage-earners at home, they were receiving higher pay and were required to spend less of it on the bare necessities of life.

So much, then, in explanation of the past. But what of the future? From their very nature it is clear that the factors making for unusual prosperity during the last ten years were bound to be temporary. Economic conditions were unbalanced, price levels largely artificial. Food-grains could not continue indefinitely to command a price relatively higher than that of other commodities. Wage-earners could not continue indefinitely to enjoy a remuneration out of all proportion to the lowered cost of living. Ominous signs of the inevitable break became evident during the closing year of the decade. Industrial depression had indeed set in at an earlier date, but Bihar and Orissa was little affected by this. Here the first serious blow took the shape of a catastrophic fall in the price of agricultural produce. At the time of the census the precarious Utopia of the wage-earner had not yet been shattered, but it grew clear that for him also the day of reckoning could not be long delayed. In the new order of things how would this province stand? It is obvious that it has added heavily to its commitments in the shape of over four million extra mouths to feed, and, so far as we have been able to see, its *permanent* resources have not been correspondingly augmented. Prophecy is dangerous and thankless, and the events of the immediate past have falsified many anticipations, but it is hard to see how there can be any further improvement in the standard of living during the

coming years or indeed how the existing standard is to be maintained. The Indian peasant is commonly said to be adaptable and to find less difficulty than some in cutting his coat according to his cloth; and it certainly looks as though he will have to do without some of the "luxuries" to which he has grown accustomed of late. But it is not easy to put back the clock even ten years, and a definite decline in the standard of living cannot be contemplated without misgivings. Moreover, the population as it now stands would appear to be exceptionally vulnerable, and if, while it is attempting to adjust itself to the new conditions, it should be subjected to some sudden attack of famine or disease, things would surely go hard with it. One thing at least seems tolerably certain. The outward flow of migration from the province, which since 1921 has dried up so noticeably, will receive a fresh impetus. But here again much depends on developments in the industrial world outside the province. Of recent years many would-be emigrants who made their way to Calcutta and other industrial centres in search of work were forced to return home because there was no work to be had.

Finally, the future course of the birth-rate in the province is a matter of paramount interest. For the province as a whole the annual rate throughout the last decade averaged out at 36.5 per mille, which is quite exceptionally low. In the preceding decade it had been 39 per mille, while for 1901-10 it had been as high as 41. These figures demonstrate forcibly the truth that a high birth rate is not necessarily conducive to a rapid increase in the population. The important thing is the rate of survival, and this of course is governed by the number of deaths no less than by

the number of births. The first decade of the present century, despite its prolific outturn of human lives, could only show an annual survival rate of 6 per mille. In the next decade this dropped ostensibly to 4, but actually it should have been *nil*, for the havoc wrought by the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 caused a complete breakdown of the machinery for reporting vital occurrences, and there were wholesale omissions in the record of deaths during that period. The decade 1921-30, with its comparatively low birth rate, can yet point to an annual survival rate of 10 per mille. It is not easy to account altogether for the falling-off in the number of births. At the beginning of the decade the explanation is undoubtedly to be found in the debilitating effects of the influenza scourge and the general scarcity and distress which followed on its heels. Recovery from such a serious set-back to the well-being of the people as this constituted is always a slow business. And there is reason to believe that the influenza epidemic proved particularly fatal to females between the ages of 20 and 30. The result of this would be that for several years to come the number of women at the child-bearing age would be disproportionately low, and this circumstance may account in large measure for the failure of the birth-rate of rise to its normal level even after conditions of apparent prosperity had been re-established. But the aftermath of the influenza epidemic should by now have worked itself out, and in fact the proportion of females between the ages of 15 and 40 is at the present time abnormally high. The question is whether the birth-rate will now begin to rise again to its former level. Modern methods of limiting the number of births—*viz.* postponement of marriage

and voluntary birth control—have not yet been adopted to any appreciable extent in India, and the old-fashioned methods of infanticide, abortion and abstention from intercourse have been largely given up. If therefore the birth-rate continues to decline or does not regain its old level, there may be some reason to agree with those who hold that the march of civilization, with its more lavish expenditure of nervous energy, is gradually beginning to have its sterilizing effect on the masses of India's population. But *prima facie* it seems premature to come to such a conclusion as this.

LECTURE III.

Marriage.

It is not my intention in this lecture to give any account of the customs and rites connected with marriage among the various communities found in Bihar and Orissa. Dissertations of great interest on this subject will be found in some of the earlier census reports, but I have already explained that my own energies have been concentrated on the more humdrum task of presenting and analysing the results of the present census, and of offering some comment on the recent social and economic developments which the figures themselves appear to indicate. By way of preface, therefore, I shall merely touch very briefly on one or two general matters, with the object of removing any ambiguity which might otherwise attach to these figures.

The enumerators were instructed to return each person in column 6 of the schedule as *unmarried, married or widowed*; divorced persons who had not re-married were to be described as widowed. The question may be asked how far the recorded number of widowed persons is affected by this circumstance. Hindu law does not recognize divorce at all, but it is sanctioned by custom in certain localities and among certain castes—usually in the lower strata of Hindu society. Divorce is permitted by Muslim law, but in practice it is believed to be rare. Among the

aboriginal tribes it is generally recognized. But in all such cases divorce is nearly always followed by re-marriage, and its influence on the statistics of widowhood may be taken as negligible.

It was explained to the enumerators that persons who were recognized by custom as married were to be entered accordingly, even though they had not gone through the full ceremony. This had particular reference to the re-marriage of widows and divorced wives by the rite known as *sagai*. But even this form of marriage is usually marked by some kind of religious ceremony, the most important part of which consists in the placing of the *sindur* mark on the bride's forehead in the presence of assembled friends and relatives. Generally speaking, marriage is now everywhere regarded by Hindus as a sacrament which must be attended by certain religious observances. Among Muslims it is primarily a civil contract, requiring only a proposal and acceptance before witnesses to establish the marital agreement, but the civil ceremony is almost invariably accompanied by religious and customary rites. Similarly with Christians a religious ceremony, though legally not essential, is in practice more or less universal. The primitive tribes also have their special rites and ordinances for validating matrimonial relations. There is therefore little scope for uncertainty whether a particular person is married or not, and from this point of view the census returns may be accepted with some confidence. Deliberate misstatements were doubtless made occasionally. For example, although it was impressed on the enumerators that prostitutes and persons living in unregulated relations with men should be shown as unmarried, such persons probably suc-

ceeded now and then in getting themselves returned otherwise. A few widows may have concealed their unpopular status by describing themselves as married, and some Hindu fathers would endeavour to secure a similar entry in respect of unmarried daughters who have already attained puberty. But the effect of such incorrect returns on the statistics as a whole can hardly be appreciable, and in the case of males it can safely be ignored altogether. There is, however, one important aspect of these statistics which might convey an entirely false impression to persons unfamiliar with Indian conditions. After the first wedding ceremony has been performed, a Hindu girl-wife does not as a rule live in the same house as her husband; she returns to her parents and lives with them until she reaches the age of puberty, when a second ceremony takes place and she goes to her husband and enters on the real duties of wifedom. Although returned as "married" after the first ceremony, these very young wives therefore are not wives at all for practical purposes, except in so far as their future is irrevocably committed; and from the eugenic point of view what is objectionable is not so much infant marriage itself as the very early age at which effective union takes place, girls becoming mothers before they are fit to do so.

The sensational increase revealed by the present census in the number of married persons, especially at the very early ages, may well rise to doubts regarding the reliability of the figures. Some indication has just been given of the extent to which errors, intentional or unintentional, are likely to have crept into the census schedules. It has been seen that their effect must have been very small indeed; nor is there any obvious reason why

they should have operated on this occasion more than at previous censuses to exaggerate the real number of married persons. Rather, the contrary result might have been anticipated. It would not have been surprising if parents, whose infant children had been married just before or after the Sarda Act was passed, had sought to conceal the fact from some idea that they might render themselves liable to prosecution; but there can have been no inducement for a father to state that his infant daughter was married when actually she was not. If the census tables are seriously inaccurate, the fault must lie not with the enumerator but with the copyist or the sorter. And it is just possible that the method (adopted for the first time at the present census) of recording civil condition during the slip-copying process may have been responsible for material inaccuracies. In my first lecture I explained how a printed symbol was used on each slip to denote a person's sex. Formerly it had been the practice to have six different symbols—three for males, according as they were married, unmarried or widowed, and three others for females. This time a circle was used to signify males of every kind, and a square to signify females; if a person was married, the symbol was not touched by the copyist, but for an unmarried person a dot or a tick was inserted in the centre of the circle (or square, as the case might be), and for a widowed person a cross was super-imposed over the symbol. A careless copyist might sometimes omit to make the appropriate modification, and in such cases the person would be treated automatically as married; or he might insert such a faint dot that it would escape the notice of the sorter at a later stage, with the same result. As most adults in this country are marri-

ed, the effect of such irregularities would be most noticeable in the early age categories. But, though honesty compels the advertisement of this possible cause of error, there are circumstances which suggest that it was not in fact primarily responsible for the striking variations recorded at the present census. For example, in almost every district the number of married males bears very much the same relation to the number of married females as was formerly the case, and sins of omission on the part of the copyist are hardly likely to have been characterized by such consistent impartiality. Again, in localities where infant marriage was formerly rare, it is still comparatively rare; the greatest increases have occurred in areas where it has always been common. But, if the copyist had been the culprit, the natural result would have to reduce, not to enhance, the disparity between different localities.

The census tells us that, out of every hundred males of all ages in this province, 42 are unmarried, 53 are married and 5 are widowed. For females the corresponding figures are 31 unmarried, 53 married and 16 widowed. It will be seen that just over half the total population, males and females alike, are married. The distribution of the remainder between unmarried and widowed is, however, markedly different for the two sexes. The number of *widows* is half as great as the number of unmarried females, but for every *widower* there are fully 8 unmarried males.

Here we may perhaps pause for a moment to congratulate ourselves that we in Bihar and Orissa are not confronted with the particular conundrum which certain other provinces are being called upon to solve. You may have noticed recently some pointed comments in the press on the circumst-

ance that, for India as a whole, the number of men returned as married at the present census is appreciably greater than the number of women. Is it then a fact, the leader-writer asks, that in this country the practice of polyandry is more common than has hitherto been supposed? And, if not, where do these surplus husbands come from? We may leave the Census Commissioner for India to grapple with this problem as best he may, assisted (as no doubt he will be) by the ingenuity of those Provincial Superintendents whose returns have contributed towards this unexpected state of affairs. In this province married women are more numerous by 41,605 than married men, the ratio being 1,004 females to every 1,000 males. Migration is largely responsible for this excess of married women, for they not infrequently stay behind at home while their husbands go abroad in search of temporary employment. It has also been explained that the company of women returned as married includes a few prostitutes and other single women who for one reason or another were wrongly described in the census schedules. These two circumstances would account for nearly, if not quite, the whole of the surplus, and it is therefore unnecessary to attribute any appreciable part of it to the custom whereby a Hindu or a Muslim is at liberty to have more than one wife at the same time if he so desires. Owing to the fact that men marry later than women and are usually a good deal older than their wives, the proportion of married females is much higher in the early age periods than the proportion of married males. By the time the age of 30 is reached, however, the tables have already been turned, and at all subsequent periods of life the male proportion is higher.

When we compare the statistics of civil (or marital) condition in Bihar and Orissa with those of any Western country, we are at once struck with three distinguishing features in the conditions out here, namely, (a) the universality of marriage, (b) the early age of marriage, and (c) the large proportion of widows. Consideration of the last-named feature may be deferred for the present, but we will here glance briefly at the other two outstanding characteristics.

Take first the universality of marriage. In this province among women aged 50 and over only 5 in every thousand are unmarried; in England and Wales there are 149. (I should explain that the figures quoted here for England and Wales are taken from the census of 1921, as the full details of the more recent census are not yet available.) For males the figures are not quite so striking, but the contrast is still very great. Out of every thousand males aged 50 and over, 19 in Bihar and Orissa and 102 in England and Wales are unmarried. We may consider next the age of marriage. In England and Wales no person of either sex ever marries below the age of 15, by which time more than half the female population of this province have not only gone through the original marriage ceremony but have already started living with their husbands. At the age of 20 not one woman in ten is unmarried in Bihar and Orissa, whereas in England and Wales the proportion is almost nine out of ten.

So far at least as the universality of marriage is concerned, it is the Western and not the Eastern figures that are abnormal. Marriage is a natural condition for both men and women; celibacy and postponement of marriage are the result of artificial circumstances and are rare in Asiatic

countries. In India the natural instinct to marry and beget children has been encouraged by the teachings of religion. To the Hindu, marriage is a sacrament and a religious duty incumbent on all, and a man must marry and bring children into the world for the salvation of his own soul and his ancestors'. The Muslim also is taught to believe that "when a man marries verily he perfects half his religion". Christianity, on the other hand, has always tended rather to lay stress on the virtues of sexual abstinence; and the Council of Trent anathematized any person who declared that the married was better than the unmarried state. Religious teaching apart, the advance of civilization always produces conditions which are more artificial and less in accordance with nature; instinct gives way to prudential considerations, and not least is this true in regard to the procreation of children.

Throughout India the census of 1921 registered an increase in the number of the unmarried and a tendency to postpone the age of marriage. Commenting on these figures in the all-India report, Mr. Marten wrote: "The circumstances of the latter part of the decade have been exceptional, and until we have the evidence which the figures of another census will supply it would be rash to attribute to any radical change of custom a variation which is possibly the outcome of special economic conditions." These words have received striking, if melancholy, justification. There was indeed some ground for hope, ten years ago, that the spread of education and increasing contact with Western ideals were gradually leading towards an abandonment of the custom of child marriage. Among the higher classes there is little doubt that the evils attendant on this

custom were gaining wider recognition. With regard to the lower Hindu castes the position was more obscure, for their anxiety to improve their social status sometimes took the form of resolving to postpone the age of marriage and sometimes showed itself in an exaggerated orthodoxy which had precisely the opposite effect. But it was realised that, whatever the direction and the force of the influence exerted by social developments, the economic factor had undoubtedly played its part—and possibly a preponderant part—in reducing the number of marriages and discouraging marriage among the very young. The return of prosperity in the new decade naturally tended to reverse this state of affairs. But, so far as child marriage is concerned, an even more potent influence was the passing of the Sarda Act in the year 1929.

What the effect of this Act will be in the long run it is impossible to say, but during the few months before it was passed into law the apprehensions to which it gave rise led to an unprecedented rush of early marriages. A subdivisional magistrate doubtless indulges in some exaggeration when he states that during this period “all girls from a few days old upwards were given in marriage to avoid the restriction imposed by the new legislation”, but there is enough of truth in this statement to make it absolutely impossible to distinguish in the present statistics the operation of any other factor that may have been at work during the last decade to postpone or accelerate the normal age of marriage. It may be of interest to quote here further views expressed by various correspondents on the reception given to this Act and the manner in which it has hitherto operated. In doing so, I should like to make it quite clear

that I do not associate myself with these expressions of opinion. I have simply endeavoured to select representative extracts from the letters which have reached me—letters written for the most part by non-officials. The magistrate referred to above is of the opinion that in his part of the province (Singhbhum) the Act is unpopular, “not because the people consider it is an offence to their religion, but chiefly on account of the extra expenses involved over marriage of grown-up daughters and sons”. On the other hand, a lawyer residing in Puri states that in his district “there was extensive movement and agitation against the Sarda Act, and the Brahmans especially opposed it as a thoroughly anti-religious and heterodox measure”. He goes on to say, however, that since the measure became law the failure to enforce its provisions strictly and the absence of prosecutions under the Act have “led or misled people into the belief that the Act will practically remain a dead letter”. In the opinion of this correspondent there is “a gradual tendency to postpone the age of marriage, especially among the higher castes. But this tendency is more the result of economic, educational and sociological conditions than of any fear or awakening consequent upon the passing of the Sarda Act”. One Deputy Magistrate takes the pessimistic view that the measure has not only proved ineffective, but has indirectly done more harm than good. He attributes such progress as has been made in this sphere of reform to “the reluctance of educated young men to marry before settling down in life,” but holds that “in the *mufassil*, where education has not spread at all, early marriage is still the order of the day, and the majority of *mufassil* people are quite in the dark about the provisions

of the Sarda Act. Even in towns, where people are aware of the Act, child marriage takes place without the least fear of prosecution under the very nose of the police and the executive. As the prosecution under the Act depends on a complaint before the magistrate and a security deposit for the purpose, such prosecution is not feared except in cases of enmity, rivalry and the like. Where antagonism and feud exist, this Act gives an additional weapon to the litigants, and thus it has been a menace to the peace and security of the people instead of remedying the evil of child marriage to any considerable extent". A Christian missionary in Manbhum district writes of a village, regularly visited by him, in which it is openly stated that marriage arrangements are still made even before birth. He cites also the case of a nine-months-old girl who was married in 1931 within 200 yards of the District Magistrate's house. Another girl of tender years was married about the same time, and "her father who is a respectable merchant said he understood the Sarda Act was not yet put into force by Government". From another magistrate comes the story of a dispute which arose between the bridegroom's party and the bride's in the course of a wedding procession and led to an exchange of blows. The aggrieved bridegroom, six years of age, brought his tale of woe to court. When it was pointed out to him that, in view of the Sarda Act, his position was a somewhat equivocal one, he effected a graceful withdrawal. The attitude of the orthodox Muslim towards this piece of legislation is summed up by a correspondent from Puri, whose views on a number of social and economic questions are pungently expressed. After affirming that "in this area child marriage is no custom

among the Muhammadans, and marriage until the age of maturity is seldom held", he states that "maturity occurs even previously to the age-limit of the Sarda Act. In such cases the parents of the couple think twice before embarking upon marriage, due to the faint fear instilled into their minds by provisions of the Sarda Act. Several cases of prosecution in Bengal have caused some consternation among the educated public". But comfort is derived from the reflection that "the provisions of the Sarda Act are rendered ineffectual when one thinks of an united village performing the marriage ceremony of under-aged couple harmoniously without any impediment or hitch. Even if there be opponents in a village, their idea of the security deposit of Rs. 100 is another troublesome factor".

I have suggested that, even if there had been no Sarda Act, the swing of the economic pendulum since 1921 would almost certainly have produced some re-action from the tendency to postpone the age of marriage, but it would have been interesting to see how far the effect of this would have been countered by the growth of more enlightened ideas. When, however, the general apprehension excited by the introduction of the Act joined forces with the economic factor, enlightenment suffered a total eclipse, and the pendulum's swing was exaggerated to a length that could hardly have been foreseen. In the result, the actual number of girls married before they are even twelve months old has increased *tenfold* since the last census—from 507 to 4,959; and the latter number includes 150 unfortunate infant widows! The proportion of girls below the age of five who are either married or already widowed has risen during the same period from 19 to 52 per mille;

in the 5—9 age-category it has risen from 154 to 281 per mille. Among boys, while the proportions themselves are not so high, the relative increase in those proportions is equally striking.

It is fair to point out that the new method of age-grouping adopted at the present census is probably responsible for some distortion of the facts. To explain this a short digression is necessary. Lack of knowledge of a person's age commonly leads to the use of round numbers in making an approximate estimate, and for this reason ages ending in 0 and 5 are much in evidence in the census returns. In 1921 the ages of 400,000 persons in this province were specially tabulated by annual age-periods, and it was found that about 25 per cent of these persons had returned an age ending in 0 and about 18 per cent an age ending in 5. For the rest, even numbers were very much more popular than odd numbers. Now, in the past the practice had been simply to assemble together the age statistics, as actually recorded, in quinary groups without any adjustment, and to say that there were so many persons aged 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, 20-24 and so on. By this means, the distortion caused by the habit of plumping on multiples of 5 and other favourite digits was to some extent reduced; but the result was not satisfactory. Persons whose age was recorded as ending in 0 or 5 figured at the bottom of each group, and many of them should in reality have been included in the next younger group. It was accordingly decided that in the first place the statistics should be assembled in groups of which 0 and 5 should be the *central* digits, so that persons whose real age was slightly above or below that actually recorded should as far as possible be accommodated in the appropriate group. More-

over, instead of having uniform groups comprising five years apiece, those containing the digit 5 should consist of three years only, and those containing the digit 0 of seven years—thus: 4-6, 7-13, 14-16, 17-23, and so on. Having assembled the population by ages in this manner, the next step was to convert the ternary and septenary groups back to the quinary groups formerly used. This was done in the following manner. The 5-9 group was made up of half the persons aged 4-6 and half the persons aged 7-13; the 10-14 group was made up of the remaining half of the persons aged 7-13 and half the persons aged 14-16; and so on. Now, whatever may be the merits of this procedure for the purpose of arriving at a more accurate estimate of the age distribution of the population as a whole, it is scarcely appropriate when applied to the age distribution of the married and unmarried. For example, something over 1½ million girls, whose ages were stated to be between 7 and 13 were returned as married, and the probability is that the great majority of these were 10 years old or more; but half of them have been taken to the age group 5-9. There is little doubt, therefore, that the present returns do exaggerate the number of married girls below the age of 10.

Darbhanga district is, as it always has been, the home of infant marriages, with whose unenviable record no other district in the whole of India can compete. In Darbhanga there were at the last census 15,965 married girls below 5 years of age, but now there are 34,779; the number of brides less than a year old has risen from 25 to 340. The other districts in which the proportion of very young married girls is exceptionally high are the following:—In North Bihar, Bhagalpur

and Purnea; in South Bihar, Monghyr; on the Chota Nagpur plateau, Hazaribagh and the Santal Parganas. It will be remarked that all these districts, including Darbhanga, form a solid block of territory, occupying the north-eastern portion of the province. In no other subject of which the census takes cognizance are the local variations so pronounced as in this matter of early marriage. I have already said that, taking the province as a whole, the proportion of girls below 5 years of age who are married is 52 per mille, but this proportion varies from 157 in Darbhanga to only 1 in Cuttack and Puri districts. Throughout the whole of Orissa (including Sambalpur and Angul) and the States infant marriage is very rare.

The influence of religion on the customary age of marriage appears to be subordinate to the influence of locality. One might expect that in Orissa, where the population is almost exclusively Hindu, and where moreover Hinduism is more orthodox than in any other part of the province, early marriage would be particularly prevalent. The facts, as we have just seen, are exactly the reverse. Even after the age of puberty—between, let us say, the ages of 15 and 40—the proportion of unmarried women in Orissa (317 per mille) is more than twice as high as it is in the rest of the province. But in the advanced age-periods, among persons aged 60 and over, a spinster in Orissa is just as difficult to find as she is in Bihar, while elderly bachelors are much more uncommon there than anywhere else.

Again, if one were guided by the criterion of religion, one would certainly expect to find that the proportion of girl-wives and boy-husbands was far lower among the Muslim population of the province as a whole than among the Hindu popu-

lation; but even this expectation is falsified. Among Hindus, 51 girls in every thousand below the age of 5 are either married or widowed: among Muslims the corresponding number is 80. Between the ages of 5 and 10 the proportion of Hindu wives or widows is 290 per mille, while the Muslim proportion is 342 per mille. At first sight, therefore, you are apparently asked to believe that infant marriage is practised more commonly by Muslims than by Hindus, but in actual fact it is not necessary to impose so great a strain on your credulity. This case, indeed, affords a striking instance of the importance of carefully examining statistical data before proceeding to build up theories upon them. The reason why there are relatively more married infants in the Muslim population of the province than in the Hindu population is that the great majority of Muslims are to be found in localities where the custom of early marriage is more or less universal. If the province were divided into two approximately equal parts by a line traversing the southern boundary of Palamau, Hazaribagh and Manbhum, no less than 94.5 per cent of the Muslims in the province would be found on the northern side of the line and only 5.5 per cent to the south of it. When we look into the statistics of early marriage for Hindus and for Muslims in each natural division *separately*, a very different state of affairs is revealed. In both the divisions of Bihar proper the proportion of married persons below 5 (or below 10) years of age is considerably higher among Hindus than among Muslims. In Orissa, too, where child marriage is very rare, the same proposition holds good. On the Chota Nagpur plateau it does not; but here again the explanation is that the Muslims of the

Chota Nagpur plateau are for the most part concentrated in Hazaribagh and the Santal Parganas, where infant marriage is very prevalent. In Ranchi and Singhbhum—still more in the Orissa States, Sambalpur and Angul—a Muslim is a *rara avis*, and it is these localities which are responsible for the comparatively low proportion of young married children on the plateau. Moreover, in this natural division a great many Hindus are aboriginals, who ordinarily marry much later than the Aryan races, and this circumstance tends to accentuate the disparity between the Hindu and Muslim figures on the Chota Nagpur plateau.

Nevertheless, as compared with previous censuses, the present statistics of early marriage in the Muslim community must be characterized as extraordinary. Taking the province as a whole, whereas the proportion of *Hindu* girl-wives (including widows) below the age of 10 has increased since 1921 from 105 to 160 per mille, the *Muslim* proportion has increased from 76 to 202 per mille. The local distribution of the two communities is not sufficient to account altogether for this phenomenon. It is perhaps relevant to recall that the introduction of the Sarda Act evoked more uncompromising opposition from the followers of Islam than from any other quarter, and it may be that this attitude caused them to forestall its provisions on a correspondingly larger scale. But it is also probable that through close association with their Hindu neighbours they are gradually assimilating more and more the social customs of the major community.

It is commonly said that marriage before puberty is rare among the primitive tribes, and the statistics of previous censuses went far to confirm this theory. But here again the present returns

are surprising. They do indeed show that at the early age-periods marriage is still less common among the adherents of tribal religions than among Hindus or Muslims, but the contrast is not nearly so great as it was ten years previously. In 1921 only 9 boys out of every thousand below 10 years of age were married or widowed; now there are 37. Among girls the proportion has jumped up from 13 to 57. These increases are even more striking than in the case of the Muslims. At the present census over 500 tribal infants of either sex, less than twelve months old, were returned as married, whereas in 1921 there were only 2 males and 4 females of that age. Increasing contact with Hinduism is doubtless having its influence on the primitive tribes, and the effect of the Sarda Act must once more be taken into account; but, if these figures are accurate, they are very depressing. A conspicuous characteristic of the aboriginal races is the comparatively high proportion of unmarried persons of both sexes in the advanced age-periods. In this respect the latest returns conform to previous experience.

In the whole province 51 males in every thousand are widowers and 161 females in every thousand are widows. The corresponding proportions in England and Wales in 1921 were 36 males and 82 females. The disparity is most marked in the female sex, and would be still more so, had not the Great War led to an abnormal increase in the number of English widows twelve years ago. The early age of marriage in this country and the circumstance that husbands are usually much older than their wives are responsible to some extent for the great excess of widows, but the prejudice against their re-marriage is a much more potent factor. This prejudice is of course a

great deal more acute among Hindus than among Muslims, so that in the province as a whole and in each natural division the proportion of Hindu widows is higher than the proportion of Muslim widows. But in this matter also local influence usually out-strips the influence of religion, so that the proportion of Muslim widows in Orissa is higher than the proportion of Hindu widows in any other part of the province.

The census of 1921 registered an increase in the proportion of the widowed in each sex, and this was ascribed principally to the adverse economic conditions of the preceding decade and the selective incidence of the influenza mortality. Now the pendulum's swing has travelled back to a point far beyond the 1911 position, and again the change in the economic sphere must be held partly responsible. There is however some reason to hope that the latest returns do indicate a weakening of the prejudice against widow re-marriage and a wider recognition of the injustices and social disadvantages thereby involved. At the risk of exhausting your patience, I will quote a few figures showing the variations during the past twenty years in the number of Hindu widows below 25 years of age. They are the last figures I shall inflict on you to-night. Out of every thousand Hindu females between the ages of 10 and 15 there were in 1911 as many as 27 widows; in 1921 there were 26; but in 1931 the number had fallen to 15. Between the ages of 15 and 20 the proportions were as follows: 45 in 1911, 49 in 1921 and 36 at the present census. Between the ages of 20 and 25 there were 66 in 1911, 74 in 1921, and now there are only 54. The substantial decline in widowhood revealed by these figures is at least encouraging.

LECTURE IV.

Literacy.

The census test of literacy is the ability to "write a letter to a friend and read the answer to it". This criterion was adopted in 1911, and it is therefore only in respect of the last three censuses that the returns of literacy are strictly comparable. In 1881 and 1891 the population was divided into three classes—*literate*, *illiterate* and *learning*. Persons who were under instruction either at home or at school or college were recorded as *learning*; those who, not being under instruction, were able both to read and to write any language were shown as *literate*; and the remainder were *illiterate*. This classification, however, was found to be unsatisfactory in practice. The census returns of *learning* bore no resemblance to the departmental statistics of persons under instruction, because children who had only recently started going to school were wrongly classed as *illiterate*, and the more advanced pupils were shown as *literate* while still pursuing their studies. In 1901, therefore, the *learning* category was dropped, and the population was divided simply into the *literate* and the *illiterate*. But at that census no special instructions were given as to the degree of proficiency in reading and writing required to satisfy the test of literacy, and considerable local variations resulted. In **general**, it is believed that many persons who could read sufficiently to decipher the sacred texts.

but could not write at all (except perhaps to sign their own names), and others who could read and write a very little but were not capable of conducting a private correspondence, were treated as literate in 1901, with the result that the exclusion of such persons from the returns of the following census obscured to some extent the true growth of literacy in the decade 1901-11.

At the present census, while there has been no change in the general criterion of literacy laid down in 1911, the returns were complicated by two new factors. In the first place it was desired to obtain a record of persons whose education had progressed beyond the primary stage and who had completed successfully the "middle" course. The main object in view in making this enquiry was to obtain information which might be of value in determining the educational qualification required for the exercise of the franchise. The question of adopting some lower standard for the purpose of this enquiry—such as the completion of the upper primary course—was considered by the local Government, but it was felt that the margin of difference between the achievement of such a standard and the acquisition of simple literacy which would not relapse into illiteracy before years of discretion were reached was so small that it would not be worth while to collect separate figures. The instructions issued to the census staff in this connexion were that in the literacy column of the general schedule an entry of *middle* should be made for all persons who had successfully completed the middle school course of education (including middle vernacular schools) or had progressed beyond that stage; the entries of *literate* should be confined to persons who could read and write a letter but had not succeeded in

passing the middle standard; and, as usual, a cross should be used to signify persons who did not fall within either of the above categories.

The other circumstance which complicated the returns on the present occasion was that it had originally been intended to obtain a record of the vernacular language or script in which each person was literate, and in the printed forms of the general schedule the heading of the literacy column and the instructions for filling it in were drafted with this object in mind. The proposal was subsequently abandoned and revised instructions were duly circulated, but there is no doubt that this modification in the original plan, together with the supplementary directions about the record of "middle" qualifications (which were also issued at a somewhat late stage of the proceedings), tended to give rise to some confusion and may have affected adversely the accuracy of the figures.

From the nature of things a child under the age of five years cannot be expected to have acquired literacy, and infant prodigies of this kind, where they figured in the returns, were left out of account. Moreover, in considering the proportion of literate persons to the total population, it is probably better to confine the calculation entirely to persons aged five and over, for it not infrequently happens that the percentage of the population in the first five years of life varies markedly from census to census (as indeed it has done on the last two occasions) and it is undesirable that such fluctuations should have the effect of exaggerating or obscuring the progress of literacy in the population as a whole. It should be understood, therefore, that the proportional figures which I may have occasion to quote in this

lecture are all based on the complete exclusion of persons below five years of age unless the contrary is expressly stated.

The total number of persons returned as literate in Bihar and Orissa at the present census was 1,853,094, or 52 per mille of the total population aged five and over. We may put it another way by saying that, leaving very young children out of account, nineteen out of every twenty persons in the province are still illiterate. The vast majority of the literate population are of course males, who out-number the literate females by about 12 to 1. For the sexes separately the proportions are 95 literate males per mille and 8 literate females. In comparison with the other provinces of India Bihar and Orissa is very backward. Burma is in a class by itself, for there no less than 368 persons in every thousand are literate. The corresponding proportions for the other provinces are as follows:—

Bengal	..	..	..	110
Madras	..	..	..	108
Bombay	..	..	..	102
Assam	..	..	..	91
Central Provinces	..	..	..	60
Punjab	..	..	..	59
United Provinces	..	..	..	55
Bihar and Orissa	..	..	..	52

At this point it may be stated that in 1921 Bihar and Orissa had a distinctly higher proportion of literate persons than any one of the three provinces which are now immediately above it in the gradation list. But in this province the proportion is still almost exactly the same as it was at the previous census, whereas the other three units (namely, the Central Provinces, Punjab and the

United Provinces) have each shown a remarkable increase, varying from 30 to 40 per cent, over their previous figure. Later on we shall examine more closely the apparent failure of Bihar and Orissa to register any appreciable advance in this sphere. But for the present we may glance at the local distribution of the literate population in this province.

Taking both sexes together, Orissa—where 85 persons in every thousand are literate—is easily the most advanced division. (I am speaking here of the *natural* division of Orissa, which, as those of you who were present for the second lecture of this series will remember, comprises only the three coastal districts of Cuttack, Balasore and Puri). In point of female literacy Orissa is on exactly the same footing as South Bihar, but among males the proportion is about 40 per cent higher. North Bihar and Chota Nagpur come a long way behind the other divisions in every respect; but of the two, although the plateau can claim a superiority in the standard of female literacy, it is more than counter-balanced by the larger proportion of literate males in North Bihar. The pre-eminence of Orissa in the sphere of education is of long standing; and in the days when the test of literacy was less strict than it is supposed to be now the disparity was even greater. Two reasons for this were suggested by Mr. Tallents in 1921. The Orissa districts occupy the coastal strip of land which connects Bengal with Madras—and these are, with the exception of Burma, the most highly educated provinces in India. Moreover, priests are many in Orissa and its traditions are clerkly rather than martial. In South Bihar the relatively high standard of literacy is probably due in the main to the much larger proportion of town-

dwellers in this division; for urban conditions are far more conducive to the acquisition and spread of literacy than life in the villages. Chota Nagpur, “the Boeotia of the province”, is the home of numerous primitive tribes who are educationally backward. It has its bright spots nevertheless, for in three of its districts the proportion of literacy is above the provincial average and distinctly higher than that found in any district of North Bihar, while the standard of female education is conspicuously advanced in certain parts of the plateau—for reasons which will presently appear.

Among individual districts, Patna alone can boast that one out of every ten of its inhabitants is literate. Here the proportion for both sexes combined is 113 per mille, which is more than twice as high as the average for the province. Patna is, and has always been, much more urban than any other district. Next in order come the three sea-board districts of Orissa, where the number of literate per mille ranges from 94 (Balasore) to 75 (Puri). There are five other districts which are better than the average. They are, in order of merit, Shahabad, Gaya, Manbhum, Singhbhum and Sambalpur. The first two, it will be noted, fall within the fairly advanced tract of South Bihar, and the other three in the backward division of Chota Nagpur. In Manbhum and Singhbhum the growth of modern industrial conditions is responsible for the purplish patch, while in Sambalpur the influence of the Orissa tradition is clearly traceable. In the states as a whole, as well as in Angul district, the Oriya's love of learning is overshadowed by the aboriginal's neglect of it; but there are certain individual states—notably Dhenkanal, Khandpara, Talcher, Narsinghpur, Daspalla and Athgarh—where the

proportion of literate persons of both sexes is exceptionally high. All these outstanding states are grouped together in the south-eastern corner, quite close to Cuttack and Puri. In the five most backward districts of the province the proportion varies from 30 to 35 per mille. In order of demerit these five districts are Palamau, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Champaran and the Santal Parganas. All of them except one are situated on the plateau.

If we were to prepare a gradation list of districts on the basis of literacy among males only, it would differ hardly at all from the list for both sexes combined, since the number of literate females is seldom sufficient to exercise a determining influence. But there would be some notable re-shuffling in a list which confined itself to literacy among females. Patna indeed would still be an easy first, but immediately after it would come Ranchi, which is very nearly at the bottom of the combined list. This is largely due to the educational work carried on by the Christian missions among the female converts of that locality. Fully half the literate girls and women in Ranchi are Indian Christians, although not more than one-sixth of the female population of the district belong to the Christian community. Nor is the activity of the missions confined to their own people. Under the head "tribal religions" there are only 1,307 literate females in the whole province, and 748 of these—or well over half—are found in Ranchi district. Bracketted second with Ranchi in the sphere of female education is Singhbhum, which has to be content with ninth place so far as males are concerned. Here the explanation is to be found in the high proportion of literate women in Jamshedpur city, where their number is about twice as great as in the whole of

the rest of the district. More will be said on this point in a moment. The three Orissa districts follow next, and then Manbhum. The seven districts so far mentioned are the only ones in which one woman out of every hundred is literate, and after them there is a big gap. North Bihar shows up very badly in the matter of female education, particularly the districts of Purnea, Muzaffarpur and Saran, where the disparity between the number of literate persons of either sex is greater than in any other part of the province. Another district which is above the average in respect of male literacy and below it in respect of female literacy is Sambalpur. Palamau and Hazaribagh rank at the bottom of the list for males, and occupy the same unenviable position in the female list also.

A short while ago I alluded to the greater rapidity with which education will naturally spread in urban areas. Separate statistics of literacy are not available for all towns in the province, but they have been extracted for what are known as the four "cities" of Patna, Gaya, Bhagalpur and Jamshedpur. In these four places, taken together, 301 males in every thousand are literate, as compared with the provincial average of only 95. For females the contrast is even more striking, the corresponding figure being 82 instead of 8. Indeed, in Patna and Jamshedpur the proportion of literate women is actually higher than the proportion of literate men in the province as a whole. To a limited extent this is doubtless due to the presence in the bigger towns of a relatively large number of Europeans, Anglo-Indians, etc., but, except possibly in Jamshedpur, this factor is not really of outstanding importance. For the four cities combined not more than about 7 per

cent of the literate females are foreigners; for Jamshedpur alone the proportion would be about 10 per cent. So far as Jamshedpur is concerned, a factor of greater relevance is that the female population of the place is relatively small, owing to the fact that many of the male immigrants into the city leave their womenfolk at home. This would apply more especially to the unskilled, casual employees, and the men with higher qualifications who come to Jamshedpur on a contract for several years would be more likely to bring their females with them. Hence it is that the proportion of educated females in Jamshedpur is so large. Patna City has the advantage not only of a long urban tradition behind it but also of a number of educational institutions to which persons of both sexes, who have commenced their studies elsewhere, come to pursue them further.

Among Christians the percentage of literate persons is more than twice as high as among the members of any other important religious community. It is naturally a great deal higher among non-Indian Christians than among Indian Christians, for in the nature of the case most of the foreigners in this country would not be here unless they were educated; but even among Indian Christians literacy is much more prevalent, especially in the case of females, than it is among their compatriots. This again is due primarily to the educational fervour of the Christian missionaries in Chota Nagpur. For both sexes together, the proportion of literate persons in the major religious groups is as follows:—

Indian Christians	96 per mille
Muslims	55 per mille
Hindus	53 per mille
Tribal religions	6 per mille

The very low standard of literacy among the adherents of tribal religions is only to be expected. Not only is the aboriginal generally backward, but the more advanced aboriginal is usually to be found under some other religious designation. Either his thoughts turn to Hinduism after he has acquired education, or his thoughts turn to education after he has embraced Christianity. As between Hindus and Muslims, Muslims have a slight advantage. Among males there is practically nothing to choose, the proportion of literate per mille being a shade under 100 Hindus and a shade over 100 Muslims; but in the same number of females there are 11 literate Muslims to only 7 Hindus. It would seem that the Muslims owe their superiority in this matter largely to the fact that they are more addicted to town life than the Hindus. This of course does not necessarily mean that the urban Muslim is more literate than the urban Hindu. In the four cities of the province the proportion of literate Hindus of either sex is higher than the proportion of literate Muslims; and the same probably applies to most other towns also. Broadly speaking, it will probably be true to say that in urban areas *taken by themselves* the Hindus are the more literate, and in rural areas *taken by themselves* they are again the more literate; but the general standard of literacy is so much higher in the towns than in the country, and the proportion of town-dwellers is so much greater among the Muslims than among the Hindus, that when urban and rural areas are taken together Muslims can show the better results. In this connexion it may be noticed that in North Bihar, where the relatively large Muslim population is not concentrated in towns to anything like the same degree as else-

where, the standard of literacy among the male members of the community is exceptionally low; and this has a depressing effect on their provincial average. The Muslim women of South Bihar are particularly advanced. Separate figures have been exhibited in the census tables for those Hindus who returned themselves as Brahmos or Aryas. I need not quote them here, but naturally the proportion of literate persons in these communities is high. The appeal of the Brahmo Samaj is confined to the enlightened of both sexes; and, although many of the Aryas are recruited from the lower Hindu castes, education is frequently the cause—or the result—of their zeal for reform. It is noticeable, however, that, whereas with the Brahmos the ranks of the literate contain practically as many women as men, with the Aryas there are nearly five literate men to every literate woman.

It is customary to tabulate statistics showing the prevalence of literacy in particular castes and tribes, and this practice was observed on the present occasion also. By way of innovation an attempt was made this time to extract complete statistics of this kind for what are known as the "depressed classes". For the rest, a few castes and tribes representative of the different strata of society have been selected for this special treatment. The more advanced castes, six in number, fall into three pairs. Of these, as is only meet and proper, the *Kayasths* and *Karans*—the writer castes of Bihar and Orissa respectively—easily take the highest place. There are 372 literate Kayasths and 318 literate Karans in every thousand; and in both these castes the standard of education among women is relatively high, there being one literate female to

about six literate males. In the matter of *English* education the Kayasths greatly excel. The next pair are the *Brahmans* and *Babhans* (or *Bhumihar Brahmans*), amongst whom the number of literate persons per mille is 195 and 136 respectively. It will be seen that they come a long way behind the writer castes, and the disparity is twice as great in the female sex as it is in the male sex. Among 14 literate Brahmans we may only expect to find one woman. Then come the *Rajputs* of Bihar with 120 literate persons in every thousand, and the *Khandaits* of Orissa with 97.

After these three pairs there is a very noticeable gap, and of the other castes for which statistics have been tabulated the only one which can show a slightly higher proportion of literacy than the provincial average of 52 per mille is the *Teli* caste. Their dealings in trade have led a fair number of their menfolk (about one in ten) to acquire some familiarity with the three R's, but their females are still very backward. After the Telis come the great agricultural classes of the province: the *Kurmis* and *Goalas* of Bihar and their opposite numbers in Orissa—the *Chasas* and *Gauras*. In all these communities, except the *Goalas*, the number of literate persons per mille is between 40 and 50; but among the *Goalas* the proportion drops right down to 20.

Of the "depressed classes" the least illiterate are the *Dhobis* and *Pasis*. There is no other important caste in this category which can produce one literate person in a hundred, while among females the average is less than one in a thousand. Male literacy is at its lowest among the *Doms* (7 per mille), and female literacy among the *Pans* (3 per 10,000).

The primitive tribes of the province, other than those which have been almost completely absorbed in Hinduism and have lost their distinctive characteristics, are not included among the "depressed classes". Separate statistics of literacy have been made available for the different religious categories under which the members of these tribes were returned. Among Christian aboriginals the proportion of literate persons is generally high—higher indeed than in any of the Hindu castes except the really "advanced" group; among Hinduized aboriginals the proportion is as a rule slightly above that found in the depressed classes; but among the adherents of the old tribal religions it is very low indeed. The *Santal* tribe is as a whole more impervious to the onslaughts of education than any of the other great aboriginal tribes of the province.

The only Muslim "caste", if such it may be called, for which statistics of literacy have been extracted is the *Jolahas*. In respect of the male sex, this community ranks midway between the *Kurmis* and the *Goalas*, but among its women literacy is more prevalent than in any of the "intermediate" Hindu castes.

Just one person out of every 200 in the province was returned as being literate in English. The actual number of such persons is 178, 701, in which are included 13,059 females. If we leave out of account Europeans, Anglo-Indians and the like, the tally is reduced to about 160,350 males and 9,230 females. To this number the community of Indian Christians, although it represents scarcely 1 per cent. of the whole population, contributes 6,240 males and 2,306 females. In other words, out of every four women in this province (excluding foreigners) who are literate in English, one is

a Christian. Among Muslims 13 males per mille are literate in English, and among Hindus the corresponding figure is 9. In both these communities the proportion for females is only 4 in 10,000.

I have explained that a special enquiry was made at the present census regarding the number of persons who had completed the middle school course of education. In the result it would appear that, out of every twelve males who claim to have acquired literacy, only one has pursued his studies with success up this stage. Generally speaking, there is a fairly close correspondence between the numbers of those who are literate in English and of those who have passed the middle standard, the latter being as a rule slightly fewer than the former.

But it is high time that we came to grips with what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the literacy returns—namely, the variations which have occurred since the previous census was taken. Briefly, the facts are as follows. Since 1921 there has been an increase of 151,605 in the total number of persons returned as literate. Literate males are more numerous by 122,257, and literate females by 29,348. But the growth in literacy has barely kept pace with the growth in population; in fact, in respect of the male sex it has failed to do so, with the result that the proportion of literate males is now actually lower (albeit very slightly) than it was ten years ago. In view of the common belief that education in this country is making rapid strides forward—a belief which certainly appears to be borne out by the departmental statistics of schools and pupils—this result must be accounted surprising, and the more so because it is at variance with the general experience elsewhere in India. How far it may be ascribed to inaccurate returns,

either on this occasion or on the last, is a question difficult to answer; though some incidental light may be shed on this point in the course of our analysis of the variations by age and by locality. At the beginning of this lecture mention was made of two special circumstances which complicated the returns of literacy at the present census, and it is possible that in some cases the enumerator, having failed to grasp what he was really required to enter in column 16 of the schedule, solved the problem by the simple expedient of entering nothing at all. In other cases the entry may have been so recondite that the ingenuity of the slip-copyist or the sorter failed to interpret it, and it was accordingly consigned by one or other of those functionaries to the limbo of illiteracy. Apart from these possibilities it should be borne in mind that the census definition of literacy—the ability to write a letter to a friend and read the answer to it—may be much more strictly applied by one enumerator than by another. By some the enquiry would not be pursued beyond a simple *likh parh sakte hain?* and there are undoubtedly many persons returned as literate at every census who can do little more than sign their own names and decipher a few words in print. I know of no particular reason why it should be supposed that the test was on the whole more rigidly interpreted on the present occasion than formerly, except perhaps that, as the enumerators themselves become more literate, they may be expected to be more exacting in admitting the claims to literacy advanced by others.

In the census tables the literate population is classified by age in four separate groups—persons aged 5 to 9, 10 to 14, 15 to 19, and 20 or over. Now of course it always happens that the

proportion of literate persons in the second group is a much higher than in the first, or youngest, group. Similarly, in the third group the proportion is a good deal higher than in the second. But, when we come to the fourth group (20 or over), we always find that, so far at least as females are concerned, there is a substantial drop. It is indeed inevitable that the standard of literacy among adult women should be lower than among girls from 15 to 19 years of age. The spread of female education is a phenomenon of fairly recent growth, and some time must elapse before it penetrates into the advanced age-periods. It is also possible that, as the necessity for practising the arts of reading and writing is less in a woman's life than in a man's, she may more frequently forget the knowledge acquired in her youth. In the case of males these considerations have not equal force; but at the same time, so long as education is steadily advancing and the number of pupils attending schools and colleges is rising year by year, one would normally expect to find a distinctly higher proportion of literate males at the period 15—19 than among older persons, many of whom passed the school-going age at a time when the opportunities for learning were far less than they are now. At the present census this expectation is fulfilled, and there is a slight decline (from 118 to 116 per mille) in the proportion of literate males in the fourth age-group. But in 1921 this was not the case; the proportion on that occasion rose from 111 per mille to 126. *Herein lies the whole explanation of the apparent failure on the part of the male population of the province to register any advance in literacy during the last decade.* If the comparison with 1921 is confined to persons below

the age of 20, it will be found that there has in fact been a substantial advance, the proportion of literate males having increased from 57 to 66 in every thousand, while the gain recorded by the female sex is also a good deal more pronounced than it is otherwise made to appear. In this connexion it is interesting to recall that in the year 1911 almost all parts of India returned a higher proportion of literates among the adult population than at any other age-period. Three possible explanations were put forward at that time to account for this somewhat curious circumstance, but none of them is altogether convincing. First, it was suggested that even at the age of 15 a boy's education is sometimes not sufficiently complete to enable him to conduct a correspondence with a friend. Secondly, in the case of youths the enumerators might investigate more strictly than they would with older persons the validity of claims to literacy. Lastly, it is possible that among the trading classes the knowledge how to read and write is sometimes picked up in the course of business at a fairly advanced age. However this may be, at the census of 1921 a different state of affairs developed. Some provinces (including Bihar and Orissa) continued to show a progressive increase in literacy right up to the fourth age-period, but others did not; and for India as a whole there was a slight decline after the third period was passed. This province has now come into line with the majority, and, whether the present returns are complete or incomplete, they appear in this respect at least to be more in accordance with the inherent probabilities than the previous returns.

It is usually held that the truest index of the progress of education is furnished by the growth

of literacy in the age-group 15—19, for the statistics relating to this group give some indication of the number of children who have been under *effective* instruction during the preceding quinquennium. It is therefore consoling to find that both sexes can show some improvement in this particular age-period over the proportions returned in 1921. And, since the total number of persons between 15 and 20 years of age is much larger now than it was then, the absolute increase in literacy at this time of life is of course greater than the proportional increase.

North Bihar is the only natural division in which, taking both sexes together, the proportion of literate persons of all ages is less than it was in 1921. In this division the increase in female literacy is almost imperceptible, while the male ratio has fallen from 86 per mille to 82.5. South Bihar has recorded a distinct advance in female literacy and a slight decline on the male side; on the balance there is one more literate person in every thousand than there was at the last census. In the other two natural divisions the proportion for both sexes has increased. Among individual districts there 10 in which the standard of literacy among males has risen; two in which it has remained stationary; and 9 in which it has deteriorated. The most violent fluctuations are those which have occurred in Purnea, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. In Purnea the proportion of literate males has shot up from 66 to 94 per mille; it is now the most advanced district in North Bihar, whereas in 1921 it shared with Champaran the lowest place in that division. There can be little doubt that literacy in Purnea has not really made such rapid strides during the last ten years as the figures suggest. On the other hand, the

1921 returns for this district, when compared with those of the previous census, show a heavy fall which in its turn can hardly have been genuine. In Monghyr and Bhagalpur events have taken an exactly opposite course. Both these districts had recorded an advance at the previous census which was more than double the rate for the province as a whole, but now they have relapsed to a position far worse than they occupied in 1911. Even if we discount some part of the progress recorded ten years ago, it is almost certain that the present returns for these two districts are defective. It is worth pointing out that, despite their disastrous showing in the sphere of male literacy, both Monghyr and Bhagalpur record an increase in the proportion of literate females since 1921.

Indeed, there are only three districts, namely, Saran, Gaya and the Santal Parganas, where the standard of female literacy has not risen. It is curious to find that in the Santal Parganas, where the relapse is most pronounced, it is combined with a substantial increase in male literacy. Particularly striking progress has been made by the women of Patna, Singhbhum and Ranchi. The rapid spread of women's education in Bihar and Orissa is evident from the fact that at the beginning of the century, out of 10,000 females aged 10 and over, there were only 34 who could read and write a simple letter; now there are 81. The increase is one of nearly 140 per cent in thirty years, whereas among males during the same period the proportion has risen by barely 3 per cent. Nevertheless, rapidly as the women of this province are now imbibing education, in comparison with the other provinces of India they still have even more lee-way to make up than the men have

It is never an easy matter to correlate the census returns of literacy with the number of pupils attending educational institutions according to the departmental returns. But some idea of the wastage involved in the present system of education may be gathered from the fact that in the year 1925-26 approximately 800,000 boys between the ages of 5 and 10 were under instruction in recognized institutions in this province—apart from pupils in unrecognized institutions and those receiving tuition at home. When the present census was taken all these boys (all, that is to say, who were still alive) would be between 10 and 15 years old, but the total number of literate boys of that age in British territory was little over 150,000; and this number undoubtedly includes a fair proportion who began their studies after the year 1925-26. On the whole, it is not perhaps so very surprising that, when the losses due to wastage attain such dimensions as these, the growth of literacy during the past decade has been less rapid than might at first have been supposed.

LECTURE V.

Caste.

For reasons of economy the tabulation of the statistics of caste at the present census was to some extent curtailed. In general, no attempt was made to extract figures relating to any community which numbered less than 1 per cent. of the population of the province in 1921. Again, if in certain localities a particular caste was believed to be more or less unknown, no statistics were compiled for it in those localities, even though it satisfied the numerical test just mentioned. Consequently, the totals shown against some of the castes in the census tables cannot be regarded as absolutely complete. On the other hand, certain exceptions were made to the general rule. There are a number of castes which, although they do not comprise 1 per cent. of the total population, are yet of considerable importance in limited areas of the province; and in those areas statistics were compiled for them. With regard to the "depressed classes" a special effort was made to obtain figures for the whole province which should be as complete as possible. Special attention, too, was paid to the primitive and semi-primitive tribes; and, while it is not claimed that the statistics relating to them are absolutely exhaustive, it is hoped that the omissions are inconsiderable.

Apart from European and allied races (in which term Americans and Armenians are comprehended) no information has been tabulated in

regard to the nationality of foreigners. Their number in this province is very small, and some indication of their origin and distribution may be gathered from the language table.

Christian converts from Hinduism and Islam do not ordinarily make any return of caste other than a simple return of "Indian Christian". A Christianized Brahman, it may with reason be contended, is no longer a *Brahman*. But the same does not apply equally to converts from the primitive tribes. A *Munda* continues to be a *Munda*, whether he worships the tribal deities of his ancestors or has embraced Hinduism or Christianity. Consequently, the statistics of the primitive tribes in the present tables include Christians as well as followers of other religions; and in this respect they differ from the statistics give in previous reports.

The only purely Muslim community for which statistics have been compiled on the present occasion is that of the *Jolahas*. But in the case of *Doms*, *Halalkhors* and *Lalbegis*, some of whom were returned as Hindus and some as Muslims, separate totals have been given for each religion. For *Sikhs*, *Jains* and *Buddhists* no caste figures have been tabulated. Persons belonging to the *Brahmo*, *Arya* and *Dev Samajist* sects of Hinduism sometimes returned their caste and sometimes did not; where they did so, they were included under the appropriate heads. Leaving these sects on one side, there were 6,743 *Hindus* against whose names the caste column was found to be blank. The number of these persons is placed on record in view of the statements that have from time to time been made to the effect that there is an increasing tendency among the Hindu population to resent questions concerning their caste and to

show reluctance in answering such questions. Accordingly the enumerators were instructed that, if any person expressed a definite desire that his caste should *not* be recorded, no entry at all should be made in this column. The result suggests that one person in something over 5,000 gave expression to such a desire, but actually it is probable that the figure has little significance. It always happens that a column here or a column there is left blank through the negligence of an enumerator or through his inability to decide what the correct entry should be; and most of the blanks in the caste column are quite likely to be due to this cause. On the other hand, it is not improbable that in the original schedules there were more blank entries in this particular column, and that these were filled in during the process of slip-copying with reference to the clues afforded by the other entries to the caste of the person concerned. In any case, it may be quite definitely asserted that the number of persons who showed any diffidence about disclosing their caste was extremely small, and the general experience was exactly the reverse.

Altogether the returns which have been exhibited in the main caste table account for more than 80 per cent. of the total population of the province and for more than 85 per cent. of the *Hindu* population.

The practice of classifying the people of the province by caste and tribe has been assailed on two main grounds. The first is that the caste system is in process of disintegration; barriers between caste and caste are breaking down, and it is wrong in principle that this process would be impeded by the action of Government, which

by insisting on (or inviting) a declaration of caste at every census may be said to recognize and encourage these invidious distinctions. The second criticism is that the caste returns are in any case inaccurate and more or less worthless, since members of the lower castes take the opportunity of returning themselves as belonging to communities of higher status. The latter of these two objections may be examined first.

It may be freely conceded that the anxiety of various castes to improve their status in the social hierarchy by assuming names other than those by which they are commonly known is not conducive to accuracy in the caste tables. Brief mention may be made here of some of the claims which were pertinaciously advanced at the present census. The claim of the *Babhans* to the alternative designation of *Bhumihar Brahman* has long been recognized, and at each successive census determined (and increasingly successful) attempts have been made by them to shed the qualifying epithet. On the present occasion their perseverance in these attempts was not abated. A more recent claim is that put forward by the *Barhis*, *Lohars* and *Sonars* to the title of *Vishvakarma Brahman*. The *Bhats* would have preferred to be recorded as *Brahmans* pure and simple, or failing that, as *Brahma Bhats*. The *Khatris* and *Sutars* made common cause in claiming the designation of *Jangida Brahman*. Another community which was anxious to assert its Brahmanical origin was the *Hajjams*, some of whom aspired to be entered in the schedules as *Kulin Brahmans*, while others, more modest, were content with the designation of *Nai Brahman*. The *Goalas* wished to be shown either as *Yadavas* or as *Jadubansi Kshatriyas*, and the latter title was also claimed by

some of the more sophisticated members of various castes in Chota Nagpur and Orissa, such as the *Binjhias*, *Rautias* and *Khandaits*. *Dangi* and *Kushwaha Kshatriya* were alternative titles favoured by the *Koiri* community, while the *Kurmis* were anxious that they should appear as *Kurmi Kshatriyas*. The designation of *Shaundik Kshatriya* was claimed by the *Sunris*, and that of *Haihaya Kshatriya* by the *Kalwars*. The *Rawani* sub-caste of *Kahars* had fought hard in 1921 to establish their right to the title of *Chandrabansi Kshatriya*, and they returned to the attack on this occasion. *Gahlot Rajput* was the appellation chosen by, or on behalf of, the *Dusadh* community.

The foregoing list is by no means exhaustive. It makes no mention, for instance, of the *Pasis*, whose unrivalled proficiency in tree climbing is said to have encouraged them to claim a title meaning "the *Brahmans* who go up in the air". It will be noticed that the general desire is to be recognized as *Brahmans* or *Rajput* in some form or other. Now the validity of these claims is not a matter upon which the census authorities, or indeed the Government, can properly adjudicate. Nevertheless, they were perforce faced with the problem of deciding in the first place what entry should be made in the caste column of the schedule against, e.g., a person who declared that he was a "*Vishvakarma Brahman*" by caste; and in the second place how such a person should be classified in the final census tables. On the first point it was decided that as much latitude as possible should be given to each individual in describing the community to which he belonged, and that he should not be required to return himself by a caste-name which he regarded as derogatory. But

the stipulation was made that he must not employ a term which would be either ambiguous or definitely misleading. Thus the term *Vishvakarma Brahman* is ambiguous, for it is claimed both by *Barhis* and by *Kamars* as well as by certain other artisan castes; and it is necessary for the purposes of Government that a separate record should be available of the number of persons commonly known as *Barhis* and *Kamars* respectively. Instructions were therefore issued that an entry of *Vishvakarma Brahman* by itself should not be permitted, but that there was no objection to one of *Vishvakarma Brahman—Barhi* or the like. Again, exception had to be taken to the return of a *Hajjam* under the designation of *Kulin Brahman*, because this term had hitherto been used to denote a particular community to which the *Hajjams* quite definitely do not belong, and the use of it by them would therefore have been misleading; but the same objection did not apply to their use of the term *Nai Brahman*. Subject to such reservations as these, the enumerators were told that they should ordinarily accept the answers actually given, and that in cases of doubt they should take the precaution of entering *both* the terms, viz., that by which the caste of the person concerned is ordinarily described and that by which he wished it to be described. It cannot be claimed that these instructions were always scrupulously observed. Complaints were not infrequent that enumerators resolutely declined to record well-known castes under titles which they regarded as new-fangled and preposterous. Nothing, it seems, would induce some of these autocrats to believe that a *Dusadh* was not a *Dusadh* but a *Gahlot Rajput*. The blame for this, however, cannot with justice be laid at the door of

Government. And in any case it did not make any difference in the end, except that the caste tables are possibly a little more accurate than they would otherwise have been. For, although one man may call himself a *Koiri*, and another a *Dangi*, and a third a *Kushwaha Kshatriya*, they all three belong to the same community, and the census tables show only the total number of persons in that community. It might indeed have been of some interest to ascertain how many members of it described themselves in one way and how many in another, but considerations of economy made it impossible to extract and compile separate figures for every alternative designation and variant used to denote each individual caste. The sorting staff were therefore provided with a list of these variants, which was made as exhaustive as possible, and all those relating to a single caste were consigned to a single pigeon-hole. Those which were unrecognizable were relegated to the limbo of unsorted entries which do not appear in the caste tables at all. And there is little doubt that, by the time a puzzled but conscientious enumerator had reduced to writing his impression of *Kushwaha Kshatriya*, and thereafter a well-meaning slip-copyist had dealt faithfully with the same, an appreciable number of slips containing this entry were diverted from their rightful destination, and the real strength of the great *Koiri* community is to that extent understated in the tables.

The question then arose under what names these various castes should be shown in the census tables. As already observed, Government is not the final authority to pronounce on the validity of claims to Brahmanic or Kshatriya origin and so forth. That is the function of Hindu society.

If and when the *Dusadhs* are accepted as *Gahlot Rajput* in Hindu society and commonly alluded to as such, they will doubtless be referred to under that designation in Government reports and publications. But one may at least suspect that certain castes desired to make use of the census report as a means of establishing claims which society in general has not hitherto been prepared to endorse. And it is relevant to bear in mind that, among the members of these communities themselves, opinion on this matter is not unanimous. So far as this province is concerned, although for the reasons stated precise figures are not generally available, it may confidently be asserted that the number of persons who took advantage of the permission to describe themselves by the new names was relatively small. There were some, on the other hand, who were definitely opposed to this procedure. More than one protest was lodged by associations claiming to represent the lower castes against the manner in which their fellows were being "misled into returning themselves in the census papers under strange, imaginary names instead of their old, real and familiar names." This they attributed to "the big propaganda that is on foot from the side of the high caste *Hindus*.....to add to their numerical strength by spreading such strange ideas among the lower castes as to get themselves returned under new names of "higher meanings" instead of the old most familiar names of castes that are generally looked down". Not only is the whole question raised by these claims one which admits of a good deal of controversy and debate, but from the point of view of practical convenience it would be extremely confusing if new names were adopted for the different castes at every census, and

the difficulty of finding one's way about the table (in which the castes are arranged in alphabetical order) would be much increased. The local Government accordingly decided that on the present occasion each caste should be described in the tables first by its old name and that the new name should thereafter be added in brackets.

In view of the fact that statistics are not separately tabulated for sub-castes, the above procedure could not be followed in the case of the *Rawani Kahars*, a sub-caste of the *Kahar* community, whose claim to be of *Kshatriya* origin was stoutly championed by the "All-India *Chandrabansiya Kshatriya Mahasabha*", an association which claims to have five lakhs of members in this province alone. But, as a special case, a record was kept of all persons who returned their caste either as *Rawani Kahar* or as *Chandrabansiya Kshatriya*, and their total number was found to be 20,923. Incidentally, the misapprehensions under which certain members of this and other communities laboured with regard to the questions really at issue and the effect of the entries made in the census schedules are well illustrated in some of the petitions submitted to me in the course of the census operations. The following is typical of many:—"The undersigned and his family were formerly *Rawani Kahar* by caste and lately they have been converted to *Chandrabansiya Kshatriya* under the *Chandrabansiya Kshatriya Sabha*, and the name of the undersigned has been changed by solemn affidavit from.....*Ram* to.....*Singh* according to the custom of the aforesaid *Sabha*". Another petitioner, complaining that the local enumerator had refused to take cognizance of a change similarly effected, represented

that "by this anomaly of names and caste there will be serious inconvenience in law courts and in the present documents." Few people, it seems, were able to realize that the information recorded in the schedules about individuals was kept strictly confidential, and that a man's personal status was not in the least affected by success or failure in his attempt to get himself recorded as a *Brahman*, a *Rajput*, or anything else. If this fact had been appreciated, I am convinced that more than half the anxiety and agitation to which this matter gave rise would have been allayed at once.

It is not possible to estimate the extent to which the accuracy of the caste tables has suffered as a result of these complications. Certain specific instances may be detected in which there has clearly been a transference from one head to another; but on the whole there is surprisingly little change in the proportional strength of the main castes, and the relative constancy of these figures from census to census appears to give meagre support to the criticism that the caste returns are so inaccurate as to be practically worthless. At the same time the system of allowing so great a latitude to individuals in describing their caste may well lead at no distant date, as increasing advantage is taken of it, to something approaching chaos in the census figures. Already the communities which have begun to aspire to names of "higher meanings" comprise well over ten millions of the Hindu population of the province, and it is to be expected that other communities will follow their example ere long. The task of sorting and classifying the entries at future censuses promises to be an unenviable one.

There is the further criticism against the tabulation of caste at the census, that it serves to bolster up a system which is in process of disintegration and to perpetuate barriers between caste and caste which of themselves show signs of breaking down. On this point, the following observations were made in the all-India report for 1921 :—“ Whatever view may be taken of the advantages or disadvantages of caste as a social institution, it is impossible to conceive of any useful discussion of the population questions in India in which caste would not be an important element. Caste is still ‘ the foundation of the Indian social fabric ’, and the record of caste is still ‘ the best guide to the changes in the various social strata of the Indian society ’. Every *Hindu* (using the term in its most elastic sense) is born into a caste, and his caste determines his religious, social, economic and domestic life from the cradle to the grave ”. In the main this view of the matter is still essentially true. Developments there have undoubtedly been in the last decade, which has indeed been a period of flux and has seen the emergence of tendencies which frequently appear to be contradictory. In some respects there would seem to have been a genuine relaxation of caste distinctions, while in others there are indications of a caste consciousness more acute and aggressive than ever before, But these manifestations are really nothing more than ripples on the surface. They may portend greater and more far-reaching changes to come, but hitherto they have but touched the fringe of the problem. And so long as caste counts for as much as it does at the present time, so long as it continues to exert a vital influence on the growth and the distribution of the population, on the occupation of the indivi-

dual, the age at which he marries, the position of his womenfolk, his educational prospects and so on, it would be wrong as well as futile for the census to ignore its existence.

The march of progress has inevitably led to some modification of caste rules which at one time were more strictly enforced. Rules about personal contact were bound to be relaxed as soon as railway travel became an every-day affair, and the more recent development of motor-lorry passenger services has carried this process a step further. The purification ceremony which a journey overseas formerly entailed is now seldom more than a formality—if indeed it is not dispensed with altogether. Conditions of life in modern industrial centres are incompatible with a strict observance of caste distinctions, and in this connexion the subdivisional officer of Dhalbhum, writing of the present state of affairs in Jamshedpur and its neighbourhood, states: “Inter-marriage between castes has not yet been increased, but there has been a distinct weakening of caste government and a development in toleration. Many of the castes have abandoned traditional occupations and all classes are found working together in an industrial process, and I am informed that in many cases castes who in their own village would avoid each other drink out of the same receptacle and eat in the other’s presence”. It may, however, be argued that these are not signs and portents heralding the ultimate collapse of the caste system, but merely indications of the way in which it is adjusting itself to modern conditions.

In the last census report relating to this province it was observed that, while marriages

between persons belonging to different castes were still unheard of, there were signs of greater laxity in this matter as between sub-castes of the same caste. Instances were cited from the Ahir community of Bihar, the Kayasths (particularly the domiciled Bengali Kayasths), and the Brahmans of Orissa. On this subject an Oriya correspondent writes: "Money works in these cases as a mighty leveller of sub-castes. If a member of a lower sub-caste acquires money, power or authority, he marries into the immediately higher sub-caste and gradually becomes amalgamated into it. Thus most of the sub-castes of the Brahman caste are gradually being amalgamated into the common genus. The Chasas of the Puri district are thus trying to inter-marry into, and pass themselves off as members of, the Khandait caste, while the Khandaits in their turn are trying to inter-marry into, and pass themselves off as members of, the Karan caste. This is not due to any relaxing of the rules of inter-marriage or commensality. These rules are as hard and inexorable as ever; but, as social rules have lost their sanction and their binding force, people never fear or scruple to violate them whenever it suits them to do so. The man of power and pelf can shut the mouth of the caste people with gold and break the social rules with impunity". Further testimony to the power of the purse in these matters is furnished by a Deputy Collector serving in the same part of the province:— "*Sagarpesa* or the class of men and women born from parents not bound by wedlock are trying to be absorbed into the caste of their father, and their success or failure depends on their individual prosperity. While in settlement I tried to record their caste correctly, but this led to such

a social antagonism and created such a row that I had to leave the question altogether to the sweet will of the parties concerned". The adoption by two or more castes of a common designation—e.g., *Vishvakarma Brahman* by the Barhis, Lohars, etc.—would seem to point out towards an obliteration of caste barriers, but no case of inter-marriage between the communities concerned in such cases has yet come to notice. On the other hand, the movement for "social uplift" is not infrequently accompanied by a hardening of the caste rules or by the introduction of new restrictions. In their desire to assert the dignity of their origin and to demonstrate their kinship with orthodox Brahmans and Rajputs, some of the lower castes have resolved to enforce more strictly the ban against re-marriage of widows—and this at a time when the general tendency among the higher castes themselves is to show greater liberality in this matter. Again, there are localities in which a Dosadh who has vowed to abstain from taking meat or intoxicating liquor can marry none but a Dosadh of the same sub-caste who is bound by the same vows. Among the Tana Bhagats of the Oraon tribe a similar rule is frequently enforced.

The extent to which castes are gradually abandoning their old, traditional occupations is a matter on which a few words may be said here. A correspondent from Orissa, who holds emphatic—but always interesting—views on a variety of subjects, writes as follows in regard to this particular question.

"With the advancement of education and growth of cosmopolitan views the tendency to stick to traditional occupations has totally disappeared in towns,

where at present the profession of a man is purely one of his choice or of his guardian's. But in distant *mufasils* adherence to such traditional occupations has been determined more by the economic necessity of the villages and their inhabitants than by any sanctity of custom or restriction of caste government or opposition from other castes and communities. Thus, though a son or two of a washerman or a barber or a carpenter may stick to the traditional occupations of their forefathers, the other sons generally go away to Calcutta or some such distant parts for their livelihood and take to any profession that they can conveniently lay their hands on. Annual exodus to distant parts of country is an outstanding feature in Orissa villages, and, as their supply of work is regulated by the demand for the same, following the traditional occupation is almost obsolete except on very broad lines. As for example, a Brahmin or a Karan may choose to work as cooli or millhand at Calcutta, but will not condescend to take up work as a domestic servant washing utensils, etc."

In one of the census tables statistics are given of the various occupations returned at the present census by certain castes which are commonly regarded as having fairly distinctive pursuits of their own; as, for example, the Barhis, Chamars, Dhobis, Hajjams, Kamars, Kumhars and Tantis. The first comment suggested by these figures is that there is no longer a single one of these func-

tional castes in which (taking the province as a whole) 50 per cent of the members rely for a living on the special occupation with which their name is associated. The Dhobis indeed approach most nearly to this proportion, and after them come the Kumhars. It should, however, be remembered that in a fairly large number of cases the traditional occupation is returned as a subsidiary means of livelihood by persons belonging to these castes, and, if this be taken into consideration, the proportion of Dhobis in the province who are still engaged in the business of laundering will be as high as 69 per cent, while 57 per cent of the Kumhars are still whole-time or part-time potters. Another noticeable fact emerging from this particular set of figures is that conditions in this matter vary greatly in different parts of the province. In Orissa, for example, the proportion of Tantis who have remained faithful to the business of weaving is nearly ten times as great as in Bihar; in Hazaribagh carpentry retains its hold over the Barhis to a very much smaller extent than elsewhere. In view of the extract just quoted, it is of interest to find that on the whole traditional occupations are still followed in Orissa more generally than in other parts of the province; on the other hand, it is in Orissa that the widest divergence occurs between the figures of 1931 and those of 1921. And this leads to the third noticeable feature of the statistics, which is that the tendency to break away from traditional occupations has developed very considerably during the last decade. The Hajjams of Bihar proper are the only community in which at first sight this tendency has not manifested itself, but the reason here is that in 1921 the number of Hajjams who returned hair-

dressing, etc., as their *subsidiary* occupation was much larger than on the present occasion.

Among Brahmans, about one worker in ten follows some priestly vocation as his main business in life; with an almost equal number religious duties are subordinated to some other occupation. Agriculture in some shape or form is the principal means of support of three Brahmans out of four. There has been but little change since 1921 in the statistics relating to this caste. The proportion of Kayasths in Bihar and Karans in Orissa returned as "writers" by profession is substantially less than it was ten years ago, but clerical duties can be carried out in almost every walk of life and cannot always be identified as such in the census returns. The statistics afford some indication, but not very much, of the extent to which Brahmans and Kayasths are now beginning to take to occupations involving manual labour. An interesting report comes from Palamau district to the effect that a small community of Muslim *mehtars* in police-station Hussainabad, known either as Halalkhors or as Lalbegis, have given up almost entirely the occupation of scavenging and "have now largely taken to the *darzi's* occupation and are doing successfully with hired Singer sewing machines. They are well off and appear neat and clean, but Muslims in general do not still eat and drink with them although some *pirjis* have done so".

The formation of caste *sabhas* to advance the social status of the lower castes is not a new phenomenon, but it has become very much more common during the last decade. In most cases the procedure is more or less uniform. A new name is selected for the caste, its members are adjured

to adopt the sacred thread, and various resolutions are passed dealing with such questions as food and drink, the abandonment of "degrading" occupations, postponement of the age of marriage, etc., etc. The attitude of the higher castes towards these movements was at first definitely hostile. The wearing of the sacred thread, for example, aroused no little resentment. But later on this attitude appears to have been considerably modified. By some accounts the former hostility has given place to indifference. Others hold that these activities are still viewed with a "lachrymose" eye, even though they no longer provoke active opposition. One correspondent roundly declares that "the Brahmans who get fees are rather encouraging them, though they refuse to consider their social status improved in any way". The principal item in the programme which is still liable to give rise to trouble is that which relates to the abandonment of *begari* and other menial work. The following account refers particularly to the Gauras of Cuttack and Balasore, who are striving to get themselves recognized as Yadubansi Kshatriyas, but *mutatis mutandis* it describes what has been going on in several other districts of the province:—"They have not only assumed the sacred threads but also refused to work as palanquin-bearers. Their attempt to discard this traditional occupation, resulting in much inconvenience to other communities in the *mufassils* of Orissa where communication by road is very rare, has been resisted by these other communities. The Khandaits and Karans, who are generally the most influential and well-to-do amongst the local inhabitants and whose idea of false prestige combined with an exaggerated notion of *pardah* system has made them the worst

sufferers in this respect, have led the opposition and the rivalry has ripened into actual riotry at several places in this (Cuttack) district”.

There are in Bihar and Orissa ten castes (or, more correctly, nine castes and one tribe) which number over a million persons each. They are the following: Goala, Brahman, Santal, Kurmi, Rajput, Koiri, Chamar, Dosadh, Teli, Khandait. Between them these ten communities account for some $16\frac{1}{2}$ million persons, or about 38.5 per cent of the provincial population. In point of numbers the Goalas, of whom there are very nearly $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions, are in a class by themselves. They are most numerous in Bihar proper, and attain their maximum strength in the district of Darbhanga. In Chota Nagpur they are relatively few; while in the five districts of the Orissa (administrative) division and in the Orissa States their place is taken by the Gauras—the Oriya equivalent of the Goala caste—who are over 890,000 in number. Some idea of the numerical preponderance of these two great castes may be gathered from the fact that, in the province as a whole, one person out of every ten is either a Goala or a Gaura. The Jolahas, who are the only Muslim community for which statistics have been tabulated at the present census, fall just short of the million mark; but nearly one-quarter of the whole Muslim population of Bihar and Orissa is included in this group.

It would be interesting to analyse the variations that have occurred since 1921 in the strength of individual castes, but for this there is no time. Mention may, however, be made of the Babhans, who are the only important caste in the province to record an actual decrease (amounting to as much as 8.5 per cent) in their numbers. This loss is quite unreal. I have already alluded to the

increasing measure of success which has attended the persistent efforts of this community to identify themselves with the community of Brahmans. The localities in which they are chiefly found are five out of the six districts of North Bihar (Purnea being excepted) and the four South Bihar districts. A generation ago the Babhans in these nine districts taken together outnumbered the Brahmans by some 85,500; to-day the Brahmans have a numerical superiority of 425,000. Assuming an equal rate of natural growth by both these communities, there has been a transfer of more than 225,000 persons from Babhan to Brahman in the course of the last thirty years, and one person out of every four who was returned as a Babhan in 1901 is now shown as Brahman. The process has been carried to an extreme length in the district of Darbhanga, where over a lakh of Babhans (or two out of every three in the district) have achieved this transformation. Bhagalpur, Monghyr and Shahabad come next in order, but to a greater or less degree the same process has been going on in every district. During this last decade there has been no slackening in the tide of transfer. In Bhagalpur, for instance, there has been a decrease of *nearly 40 per cent* in the Babhan community since 1921. The loss in Darbhanga is one of over 22,000, or 30 per cent; in Monghyr 37,000 or over 20 per cent. There has, however, been a substantial increase in the number of Babhans in localities where they are less plentiful, such as Hazaribagh, the Santal Parganas, Purnea, Manbhum and Palamau.

Indeed, the most common explanation of the different rates of progress recorded by the various castes is to be found in divergences of classification from census to census. A secondary cause

can often be distinguished, namely, that certain castes reside for the most part in areas where the general conditions are particularly favourable (or unfavourable, as the case may be) to a rapid growth of population. Other factors are undoubtedly at work, such as the social customs prevailing in the different communities with regard to such matters as child marriage, the re-marriage of widows, and so forth. But the complications introduced by transfers from one caste to another are so great that it is exceedingly difficult to arrive at any reliable conclusions about the effect of these other factors. In one respect, however, there appears to be scope for legitimate inference. Considering the large number of castes that have been striving for some time past, and not altogether without success, to identify themselves with either the Brahmans or the Rajputs, one would expect to find that these two communities are increasing in number much more rapidly than the average rate. But this is not the case. During the last decade the percentage of increase among the Brahmans was 11.8, and among the Rajputs 12.3—neither of which is materially in excess of the provincial average of 11.5 per cent. To go further back, at the beginning of the century 48 persons in every thousand were Brahmans, and to-day the number has risen to 50 only. In the case of the Rajputs the proportion during the same period has actually fallen from 35 to 33. Now it has already been seen that in the course of these 30 years no less than 225,000 Babhans—not to mention any other caste—have turned themselves into Brahmans. If we exclude these, the number of Brahmans is greater by some 124,000 than it was a generation ago, and this represents an increase of only 7.1

per cent, whereas the population of the province as a whole has increased by 17 per cent. The inference seems to be justified that the natural rate of growth amongst Brahmans is exceptionally low. The same applies to the Rajputs. Even with the extraneous assistance of the *parvenus* they have lost ground in the last thirty years. It is doubtless true that the *whole* of the loss suffered by the lower castes is not appropriated by the higher ones, because (as mentioned earlier in this lecture) the rendering of the newly-adopted name in the census schedules is sometimes quite unintelligible to the slip-copyist or the sorter, with the result that it remains entirely unclassified. But there can be no doubt that the number of Rajputs has actually been swelled by this means to a considerable extent. There is no other reasonable explanation for some of the variations recorded at the present census. In the Orissa States, for example, they were only 12,500 Rajputs in 1921; now there are nearly 40,000. In Singhbhum the number has risen from 5,000 to 13,000. Abnormally large increases have also occurred in Purnea, the Santal Parganas, Monghyr and Patna. This phenomenon, however, is not present in localities where orthodox Rajputs are strongly entrenched and look with disfavour on the aspirations of the other castes. In Shahabad, Saran, Muzaffarpur and Gaya the rate of increase varies from 0.6 to 8 per cent, and one may suspect that in these districts there was a fair proportion of Rajput enumerators who exercised a strict censorship over the entries in the caste column.

I may fittingly close this lecture with a brief reference to the marked change which has taken place during the last decade in the position occupied by women. The spread of female education is

inimical to the perpetuation of the *purdah* system, and there is no doubt that the increasing participation of women in political controversy has accelerated the process of emancipation. There are other influences at work, too. Indians who have been abroad for educational or other purposes and have mingled in a society where both sexes stand on an equal footing return to this country with a new outlook on such matters. On their part and on the part of many of their countrymen who have never left India there is a growing demand for social accomplishments in their brides and a growing impatience with the conventions that stand in the way of their acquisition. One can, however, detect a certain hesitation or lack of enthusiasm—a grudging acquiescence, as it were—in the attitude of the more orthodox towards these modern tendencies. A Muslim correspondent from Orissa writes:—“A girl of average family tries to live in a more up-to-date way than her antiquarian comrade. The imitation of false show of fashion, though not a healthy sign, is still an advancement nowadays”. And again: “A record of the names of females as voters in the voters’ list, *although they never go to record their votes*, is another healthy sign”. I am responsible for the emphasis laid on the saving clause, but one feels that the author would not have it otherwise.

LECTURE VI.

The Depressed Classes and the Primitive Tribes.

“ The depressed classes ” is a term freely used nowadays in political parlance, but, so far as I am aware, it has never yet been clearly and authoritatively defined. Certainly it had not been so defined when I received instructions from the Census Commissioner for India about two years ago to tabulate separate statistics for all castes which should be regarded as falling within this category in Bihar and Orissa, and you may suppose that the task with which I was faced was a difficult and somewhat invidious one.

Some months ago public interest was focussed on one particular aspect of the problem presented by the depressed classes, namely, the method of securing adequate representation of them in the legislatures that are to be set up under the new constitution. At the moment attention is concentrated on a still narrower issue—that of “ temple entry ”, as it is popularly called. To avoid misunderstanding, I should explain that the census list of depressed classes was not compiled with sole reference to either of these criteria. Broadly speaking, the objective adopted was to confine the term to those castes which, by reason of their traditional position in society (and more particularly in Hindu society), suffer from serious social disabilities.

From this point of view the distinction between the depressed classes and what are commonly known as the "untouchable castes" may appear to be a fine one. But, so far as Bihar and Orissa is concerned, the term *untouchable*, though possibly easier to define in the abstract, gives rise to still greater difficulties and complexities when an attempt is made to distinguish the castes which in actual practice are comprehended in that category. In this province conditions are very different from those which, it is believed, obtain in Southern India, where the line of cleavage between the caste Hindus and the untouchable castes is much more distinctly marked. There are certain castes which, on account of their traditional occupation, are technically unclean, and which in other parts of India are possibly subject to real social disabilities for this reason; but in Bihar and Orissa, although here and there a high-caste Hindu may still seek to avoid personal contact with them, they do not really labour under any special handicap. For example, the Telis in this province cannot be described as depressed. Educationally, they are above the average for all communities taken together. In point of material prosperity they are as a rule far better off than the great cultivating castes. It may be that in an orthodox assembly they would be denied access to the interior of a Hindu temple, but this in itself was not thought to afford sufficient ground for including them in the list of depressed classes. Much the same remarks apply to the Sunris and Kalwars, many of whom have risen high in the social scale. A Chamar, on the other hand, is genuinely depressed. Not only is he almost always ill-educated and poverty-stricken, but the stigma attaching to his caste operates to deprive

him every day of his life—in a greater or less degree—of what may be regarded as the ordinary rights of a citizen. This indeed is the crux of the matter, and is perhaps as near as we shall get to a working definition of the depressed classes. But here again conditions vary from district to district, and even from village to village within the same district. In a village which contains a number of orthodox Brahmans or conservative Rajputs the disabilities to which a Chamar or a Dom is subject are likely to be more severe than elsewhere; indeed, there are undoubtedly places where their use of the village well, school, etc. is not challenged at all, and, so long as they “keep their place”, they may participate in the daily life of the village without let or hindrance. But even in such places the “inferiority complex” is still there, and a Musahar who aspired to climb the social ladder on his own merits (as distinct, let us say, from one who might be propelled up it by friendly, if not wholly disinterested, hands to a position of uncomfortable eminence) would always and everywhere find the dice heavily loaded against him.

To the question, which of these castes—or how many members of any particular caste—would themselves elect to be numbered among the depressed classes, a direct answer cannot be returned. For one thing the implications of the question would seldom be understood. A Dosadh, intercepted on his way home from a meeting of his caste *sabha* at which it has been firmly impressed on his mind that he is a *Gahlot Rajput* and must live up to it, would doubtless repudiate with scorn any suggestion that seemed to reflect on his social status. But, were it a question of securing special educational facilities or of the reservation of a specified quota of Government appointments, not

only the average Dosadh but an overwhelming majority of other castes which do not figure in the present list at all would clamour for inclusion.

As I mentioned the evening before last, statistics of literacy have been tabulated for each of the castes treated as depressed (except the Musahars, who were omitted from this particular table by an unfortunate oversight), and these statistics show that they are all very backward educationally. Taking the depressed castes all together, out of every thousand males only 15 are literate and out of every thousand females less than one is literate. The corresponding proportions for the province as a whole are 95 literate males per mille and 8 literate females. But, while it may be assumed that every depressed caste is educationally backward, it does not follow that every backward caste is depressed. The proportion of literate persons among the Goalas, for instance, is very small—not much larger than among the Dhobis and Pasis—but the Goalas are emphatically a “clean” caste, which nobody looks down on, and no social disability attaches to membership of this caste.

Take again the aboriginals, or primitive tribes. Excepting those of them who have been converted to Christianity, the standard of education among these tribes is extremely low, and in many cases lower than what is found in castes treated as depressed. But they stand on a different footing. In the first place, they are (or originally were) entirely outside Hindu society, and were thus unaffected by its laws and inhibitions. Food touched by a Munda might be anathema to a caste Hindu, but so also would be food touched by an European or a Muslim. A Santal formerly was conscious of

no inferiority complex, nor is the unspoiled Santal to-day. He is sturdy, independent and intensely proud. In areas where these aboriginal tribes are concentrated in large numbers—where in fact they still feel that they are “at home” and that the Hindus and everybody else except themselves are interlopers—they do not as a rule suffer from any disabilities. But even in these areas they are being gradually “Hinduized”, and the further this process is carried the more are they in danger of becoming identified with the depressed classes. With some tribes the process has already gone so far that they are practically indistinguishable, and for this reason it was thought proper to include some of them in the “depressed” list, even though they are without doubt non-Aryans and have much the same origin as the Chota Nagpur aboriginals who have been more successful in maintaining their identity. These tribes or castes are eight in number, namely, Bauri, Bhogta, Bhuiya, Bhumij, Ghasi, Pan, Rajwar and Turi. Ninety-nine per cent of them were returned as Hindus by religion at the present census, and a large proportion of these have probably adopted much the same outlook on life, and are exposed to much the same disadvantages, as the depressed Hindu castes. At least, this would be so in localities where the aboriginal element is otherwise comparatively weak. At the same time, it should be stated that the Indian Franchise Committee of 1932 (in agreement with the provincial committee) excluded these tribes from the category of the depressed classes by reason of their aboriginal origin. Their view apparently was that, in any scheme which might be devised for the electoral representation of special communities, the interests of the Bhuiyas, etc., would be more closely akin to those

of the primitive tribes proper than to those of the depressed Hindus. And there is much to be said in support of this view. Indeed, there is some overlapping between the lists of primitive tribes and depressed classes which appear in the census report and which, as already explained, were not compiled solely with a view to the particular problem confronting the Franchise Committee. At the same time, it may be borne in mind that large numbers of these border-line castes or tribes are resident in localities where it may be found impracticable to make separate arrangements for the representation of aboriginals, and in such localities at least it may well be a matter for consideration whether they should receive the benefit of any special measures of protection that may be extended to the depressed classes. In Gaya district, for example, where other aboriginals are few and far between, there are over 160,000 Bhuiyas; and in their social and religious customs—even, it is said, in their physical characteristics—this community has many points of dissimilarity with the Bhuiyas residing in the Orissa States and in other areas where they mingle freely with other primitive tribes. Again, more than 80 per cent of the Pans enumerated in British territory are inhabitants of the three coastal districts of Orissa, which in general are not aboriginal tracts.

Having attempted to explain the general principles on which the census list of depressed classes was compiled, I may briefly summarize the results. The list contains in all 31 castes, the aggregate strength of which is just over $6\frac{1}{2}$ million persons. These castes, therefore, represent about 15.5 per cent of the total population of the province and about 18.5 per cent of the Hindu population. Roughly, you may say that in Bihar and Orissa

one Hindu out of every five is a member of the depressed classes. If we were to exclude the eight castes or tribes of aboriginal origin, the total strength of the depressed community would be reduced to something over $4\frac{1}{2}$ millions, which is equivalent to about 10.5 and 13 per cent respectively of the provincial and Hindu populations.

Three outstanding castes—the Chamars, Dosadhs and Musahars—comprise between them as many as 3,307,000 persons. In other words, these three castes account for fully half of the depressed Hindus in the province—or, if the eight doubtful tribes be left on one side, for nearly three-quarters. They reside for the most part in the districts of Bihar proper, though some are to be found in parts of the Chota Nagpur plateau. There is a small community of Chamars in the coastal districts of Orissa, but their traditional occupations are basket-making and toddy-drawing, not tanning. The sweeper castes—Haris, Halalkhors, Lalbegis and Doms—claim altogether about 406,000 members, and under one designation or another they are naturally distributed over the whole length and breadth of the province. The same applies to the Dhobis, whose number is 414,000. Another caste of some numerical importance is the Pasis (172,000). More than half of these are found in the two districts of Patna and Gaya, the bulk of the remainder being divided between the other districts of Bihar proper. Nine of the depressed castes (apart from Pans) are confined almost entirely to Orissa—or at least to the Oriya-speaking tracts, including Angul, Sambalpur and the States. The most important of these are the Kandras and Gokhas, who between them account for rather more than 200,000 persons.

Before leaving the subject of the depressed classes, I will add only one word. Nothing that I have said this evening should be taken as expressing the official views of Government. A Census Superintendent is allowed a good deal of latitude in expressing his personal opinions, and although his report is an official publication does not necessarily follow that Government endorse everything he says. In this particular case they did not even set the seal of their final approval on the list of 31 castes which I have prepared. I need hardly say that the list was prepared in consultation with local officers, whose advice was followed as closely as possible having regard to the varying conditions in different localities and the necessity of preparing a uniform list for the province as a whole; but in the last resort I must (for the present at least) accept responsibility for any sins of omission or commission which may be laid to its charge.

The task of arriving at an accurate estimate of the strength of the primitive tribes in Bihar and Orissa is replete with difficulties no less formidable than those presented by the depressed classes. If we go back far enough, the Chama, Musahars, etc., will probably be found to be pre-Aryan "aboriginals", but with these we are not here concerned. The present survey is confined to the two great families of indigenous tribes known respectively as the "Munda" and "Dravidian" families. But even among these tribes there are some, as we have already seen, which have been Hinduized to such an extent that they are practically indistinguishable from the low Hindu castes.

Among the larger tribes those which have so far been most successful in maintaining the

separate identity and to some extent (on the Chota Nagpur plateau at least) their old tribal organizations are the Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Hos, Kharias and Khonds. The total strength of these six great aboriginal communities is about 3,884,000 persons. To them we may add seven of the smaller tribes, namely, Asur, Birhor, Birjia, Juang, Korwa, Mal Pahariya and Sauria Pahariya—which between them comprise something over 131,000 persons; so that in all rather more than 4 million persons are numbered among the purest aboriginal communities of the province. At the other end of the scale come the eight semi-primitive tribes who were included in the list of depressed classes and whose numerical tally is about 2 millions more. In between these two extremes there are a score of tribes, some fairly large and others quite small, among whom the process of absorption into Hinduism is steadily going on, but who yet retain in varying degrees their distinctive tribal characteristics. Among these mention may be made of the Bathudis, Cheros, Gadabas, Gonds, Kharwars, Kisans, Koras, Mahlis, Savars and Tharus. These intermediate tribes are about a million strong. It may therefore be said that roughly 7 million persons are comprehended in the primitive and semi-primitive races of the province, which thus represent about one-sixth of the provincial population.

The figures which I have just quoted, and which are set out with greater exactitude in a special appendix to the census report, should not be regarded as absolutely complete. Although the enumeration of the primitive and semi-primitive tribes was the object of special attention at the present census, considerations of economy precluded an exhaustive classification of the returns.

Particular tribes were only sorted for in those localities where they were believed to be present in appreciable numbers. As a result some 10,000 persons whose religion was returned as "tribal" do not appear in the caste table at all, and it is probable that a somewhat larger number of Hinduized aboriginals remained unclassified for the same reason. Again, some few may have escaped classification because they were returned under unfamiliar or mutilated names. Nor do the figures so far given take any account of the Kamars (Lohars) of Chota Nagpur, who are believed by some eminent authorities to have a Munda origin. This theory is to some extent supported by the fact that even at the present census nearly 5,000 Kamars (mostly in Ranchi district) returned their religion as "tribal". It is also relevant to note that in Chota Nagpur, unlike other localities, this caste is—or was—regarded generally as "impure", and water might not be taken from their hands by the higher caste Hindus. On the other hand it is of course possible to maintain that these and other characteristics of the Chota Nagpur Kamars are derived from their long and close association with primitive tribes in predominantly aboriginal tracts. The Kurmis of Chota Nagpur are another community which in course of time have come to occupy a peculiar position, and I may perhaps take this opportunity of giving some account of the views that have from time to time been advanced in regard to their origin and of the more recent developments in the situation.

In the course of yesterday's lecture mention was made of the claim to Kshatriya status advanced by the Kurmi caste. It was at first supposed that this claim was confined to those Kurmis who reside mainly in Bihar proper and

in the United Provinces and whose traditional pursuits are cultivation and domestic service. For census purposes it has always proved impossible to distinguish this community from the *Kurmi Mahtos* of the Chota Nagpur plateau, as their habitat is not in all cases a reliable guide; in the census tables therefore they all appear together simply as "Kurmis". It has, however, generally been assumed in previous census reports that the Kurmi Mahtos are a semi-aboriginal people, whose ancestors were allied to the Santal and Bhumij tribes. Instructions were accordingly issued on the present occasion that a return of Kurmi-Kshatriya might be accepted in the case only of the Bihar community. These instructions gave rise to a flood of protest. The "All-India Kurmi-Kshatriya Association" took up the cudgels on behalf of the Kurmi Mahtos, and stoutly affirmed that "they and the Kurmi-Kshatriyas of the western provinces are the same, proofs of which, if necessary, can be produced before the Government". It must be confessed that, when invited to produce these proofs, the Association showed no great eagerness to respond and eventually took refuge in the following generalities which, besides being unsupported by evidence or illustration, would undoubtedly be contested by many persons who have considerable experience of the Kurmi Mahtos:—"(1) The sections and sub-sections are similar. (2) The occupations are the same. (3) The habits and customs are similar". But the favourite authority of those who maintain the kinship of the two communities is Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), in which the following passages occur:—

"In the province of Chota Nagpur the ancestors of the people now called

Kurmis appear to have obtained a footing among the aboriginal tribes at a very remote period, and in more than one part of Manbhum have supplanted them. There are traditions of struggle between them and Kolarian aborigines of these regions, and, though the latter generally managed to hold their own, we find in some places Kurmi villages established on sites which, we know from the groups of rude stone pillars or cenotaphs still conspicuous, were once occupied by Bhumij or Mannas, and in others vestiges of ruined temples appertaining to Hindu or Jain settlements, both most likely belonging to successive generations of Kurmis, amidst villages that have for ages been occupied by Bhumij.....

“Though the Kurmis include so many noble families, their social position in Bengal is not high. They are not even *jalacharaniva* or a tribe from whose hands a Hindu of the higher castes would drink water, but in Bihar this honour is accorded to them. The social customs and religious observances vary much in different districts. Where they are found in common tenancy with non-Aryan tribes, they conform to many usages which they must have acquired from the latter, and, following their examples, swerve considerably from orthodox Hindu practices. The Kurmis employ Brahmans as priests in all ceremonies except marriages.”

Finally he describes them as “unquestionably Aryan in looks” and thinks it probable that they are the descendants of some of the earliest of the Aryan colonists of Bengal.

An entirely different view was taken twelve years later by Risley in his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. In his opinion Dalton’s remarks about their physical appearance “referred only to the Kurmis of Bihar, and the caste bearing the same name in Chota Nagpur and Orissa belonged to an entirely different type”. He found them to be “short, sturdy and of very dark complexion.... closely resembling in feature the Dravidian tribes around them..... In Manbhum and North of Orissa it is difficult to distinguish a Kurmi from a Bhumij or a Santal, and the latter tribe, who are more particular about food than is commonly supposed, will eat boiled rice prepared by Kurmi; and according to one tradition they regard them as half brethren of their own sprung from the same father, who begot the Kurmis on the elder and the Santals on the younger of two sisters. The distinct and well-preserved totemism of the caste is noticed at length below.” After finding that “the sections in use among the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur are purely totemistic and that a large portion of the totems are capable of being identified”, he comes to the conclusion that “the Chota Nagpur Kurmis are derived from the Dravidian stock and are perhaps a Hinduized branch of the Santals”.

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differently with a smooth instead of a hard *r*. These two quite distinct tribes have been mixed up in the census." Many of these people speak a language of their own, commonly known as *Kurmali*, although, as Sir George Grierson points out, in Manbhum this language is not confined to the Kurmis alone but is spoken by people of other tribes also. In Bamra state, where it is spoken by undoubted aborigines, it is known as *Sadri Kol*. This language is a corrupted form of *Magahi*, but, to quote again from Sir George Grierson, "in this belt Magahi is not the language of any locality. It is essentially a tribal language"—just as *Mal Pahariya*, a corrupted form of Bengali, is the language of the aboriginal tribe bearing that name. With regard to the spelling of Kurmi with a hard *r*, it has been verified from the local officials that this differentiation is observed still. It may possess real significance, but the general tendency in Chota Nagpur to make the *r* hard is a circumstance that should be borne in mind.

In the District Gazetteer of Manbhum (1910) Mr. Coupland writes that the distinction between the Kurmis of Bihar and those of Chota Nagpur, "which is now generally accepted, is exemplified in this district by the fact that marked traces of the characteristic Kolarian village system remain, the *Mahto* or village headman of the Kurmis corresponding exactly with the *Manjhi* of the Santals, the *Sardar* of the Bhumij and the *Munda* of the Ho races". The Kurmi Mahtos are included among the tribes exempted from the Indian Succession Act. By a printing error the name appeared in the original notification (issued about twenty years ago) as "Kurmi, Mahto" and in the revised notification which was issued very

recently the word "Kurmi" only is retained. There is no doubt that, until quite recent years, the two communities were agreed in repudiating any connexion with one another. The Bihar contingent would commonly allude to their namesakes of Chota Nagpur as the "Kol-Kurmis", and the latter were no less spirited in asserting their independent identity. Not only inter-marriage, but inter-dining, was entirely out of the question. Even to-day, although it will presently be seen that these restrictions have been formally abolished by resolutions passed in solemn conclave, and although it is probably true that the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur no longer take the same pride in their ancestry that they used to do, no authentic case has come to notice of inter-marriage between the two peoples. The Superintendent of the Leper Hospital at Purulia writes that "a Kurmi constable from North Bihar at present resident in this hospital was very scornful when I suggested his eating with our local Kurmi patients." The same correspondent states that, in spite of Risley's observations about the (then) prevalent totemism of the caste, he himself had for years been unable to find a Kurmi with a totem name. "Within the last few months, however, at a village 21 miles from here I was assured by a fairly educated villager, very proud of being a Kurmi, that his name was *Bok* (paddy bird)—obviously a totem name."

The question at issue has in late years been agitated in courts of law. In the case of *Ganesh Mahto v. Shib Charan Mahto*, which was taken to the High Court (A. I. R. 1931 Patna, 305), both parties were Chota Nagpur Kurmis and they both admitted that they were aboriginal by race, the dispute being in regard to the succession law by

which they were governed. It was eventually held that, where parties to a suit admitted that originally they were aboriginals but their families had subsequently become Hindus and had adopted the Hindu religion, it was upon the party alleging that they were not governed by the ordinary Hindu law of inheritance and succession to prove any special custom or rule of custom prevailing among, *e.g.*, the Kurmis Mahtos of Chota Nagpur. This ruling, while of considerable interest in itself, clearly does not help to establish the kinship between the two Kurmi castes. More pertinent to this question is the decision in *Kritibash Mahton v. Budhan Mahtani* (6 P. L. T., 604, 1925) that the term *aboriginal* in Chota Nagpur denotes race only and implies nothing as to religion; on the other hand, the term *Hindu* has in Chota Nagpur reference only to religion. There can be no question but that the Kurmi Mahtos are completely Hinduized and have been for many years. They are in general much better educated, much more prosperous and enterprising, than the other aboriginal tribes or the low-caste Hindus, and they have succeeded in retaining their self-respect in a degree which is uncommon among primitive tribes converted to Hinduism. It is doubtless this circumstance which is now leading them not only to identify themselves with a Hindu caste which happens to bear the same name but also to join with that caste in affirming their Kshatriya origin.

Whatever the motives may be, there has certainly been a great deal of agitation in this behalf during the last decade. In the year 1923 caste *sabhas* were held in more than one centre of Manbhum district and various resolutions were passed. It was decreed that Kurmis should no longer eat chickens or drink wine; Kurmi women

should not work as casual labourers for persons belonging to other castes; they (the women) should wear a second garment, and should not go to the *bazar* by themselves but should always be accompanied by menfolk of their own caste; when a Kurmi died, his *saradh* ceremony should take place on the twelfth day after death, as with the Kshatriyas of Bengal, instead of on the tenth day as heretofore. The 17th session of the "all-India Kurmi-Kshatriya conference" was held at Muza-farpur in the year 1929, and three delegates from Manbhum were present as representatives of the Chota Nagpur Kurmis. "There it was settled that there is no difference between the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur and the Kurmis of Bihar proper. The three delegates returned home from the conference after taking the sacred thread". This was followed in the same year by another large *sabha* at Ghagarjuri in Manbhum, which was attended by a representative of the Kurmis of the United Provinces, and on this occasion "it was settled that the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur and Kurmis of U. P. and Bihar are akin to each other and there will be inter-dining and inter-marriages among the said Kurmis"; also that "the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur would join closely with the *all-India Kurmi Kshatriya Association* and will be guided by the directions of it." At this gathering "it was explained that the Kurmis are Kshatriyas and they have right to wear sacred thread, and some fifty Kurmis wore the sacred thread in the conference with the help of genuine Brahman priests." The correspondent from whom the foregoing extracts are quoted, himself a Kurmi Mahto and a member of the legal profession, adds that "thereafter the Manbhum Kurmis began to take *jangupabit*, though less in number". His

ingenuous narrative continues:—"The Kurmis' conference caused a great sensation among the Kurmis, and the caste got the courage of raising their status. And there was much wonder in the mind of the non-Kurmis of Manbhum that Panchet raja, having come up from the ancient Kshatriya royal family of the district, accepts the Kurmis as Kurmi Kshatriyas." In 1931 the session of the all-India Kurmi Kshatriya conference was held in Manbhum, and was signalized by the adoption of the sacred thread by more of the local Kurmis—the estimates vary from two hundred to a thousand. The same correspondent notes that "some orthodox Kurmis residing in Para and Barahbhum P. S. made protest meetings against the use of sacred thread by Kurmis, but the use of sacred thread is increasing day by day in all parts of the district of Manbhum."

It may be questioned whether this movement is calculated to promote the best interests of the Kurmi Mahto community. As aboriginals, they receive the benefit of a special measure of protection from the revenue laws of Chota Nagpur; for instance, the transfer of their holdings to non-aboriginals is not permitted. It may be that the true position in this respect is not appreciated by many of them. On the other hand, they may be prepared to forego such privileges for the greater honour and glory which they believe will accrue to them in their new status; and it is quite true that, in view of their material prosperity, they do not stand in the same need of protection as the other aboriginal tribes of the locality. As already stated, it is not possible to give accurate statistics of the Kurmi Mahto community, but something over 660,000 "Kurmis" were enumerated on the Chota Nagpur plateau, and the overwhelming

majority of these (about half of whom were found in Manbhum district) would undoubtedly be Kurmi Mahtos.

After this lengthy digression, we may return for a very few moments to the primitive tribes in general, whose strength may perhaps be said to have expanded in the meantime from 7 to 7½ millions as a result of this latest accession to their numbers. The aboriginal communities figure conspicuously amongst those which recorded a particularly rapid growth during the last decade. There are two main reasons for this. In the first place, they are commonly supposed to be more prolific than the Aryan races, or at any rate more hardy. (The vital statistics for the Chota Nagpur plateau suggest that the big increase in numbers in that part of the province since 1921 is due more to a specially low death rate than to an exceptionally high rate of births). Secondly, these tribes are peculiarly prone to emigrate to the tea-gardens of Assam and the industrial centres of Bengal when conditions at home are unfavourable, and their numbers at the present census must have been materially swelled by the return to their native villages of many who had thus journeyed abroad during the dark days at the close of the previous decade. These two factors probably explain why the Mundas, Savars, Hos, Kharias and Santals all record an increase since 1921 of between 15 and 20 per cent, as compared with the provincial average of 11.5 per cent. The variations in the strength of the "semi-primitive" tribes, however, are frequently due to vagaries of classification. The Rajwars, for instance, who are now completely Hinduized, show a remarkable growth in numbers, amounting to over 25 per cent in a single decade. It is said that many *Bhuiyas* pre-

fer nowadays to call themselves Rajwars, and it is significant that the districts which are primarily responsible for the boom in Rajwars (namely, Gaya and Manbhum) contain Bhuiyas in plenty. There are other designations under which the Bhuiya sometimes elects to conceal his identity. The more prosperous and advanced among them aspire to Rajput status. Others have taken to returning themselves as Ghatwars. When the slips of Bhagalpur district were originally sorted at the present census, only 5,000 and odd Bhuiyas were discovered, although for the past fifty years their number in that district had always been between 20,000 and 30,000. At the same time the Ghatwars, who in 1921 had numbered less than 5,000, were found to have jumped to over 23,000. In this particular instance the latter were re-classified under their old name, as there was no doubt what had really happened; but as a rule such re-classification cannot be carried out. Thus, in the Santal Parganas there has been a decrease since 1921 of 11,241 in the number of Bhuiyas, coming on top of a decrease of 35,624 in the previous decade; but it cannot be said with confidence what has happened to them. In the province as a whole Bhuiyas are more numerous by 8.1 per cent than they were at the previous census, the rate of growth being distinctly below the average. And they are only 1.1 per cent more numerous than they were at the beginning of the century.

I have no time left in which to discuss the territorial distribution of the aboriginal races, though this is a matter of great interest and one to which considerable attention was devoted at the present census. Financial stringency was responsible for the curtailment or omission of several tables which have been wont to find place in the

census reports, but the Census Commissioner for India is a staunch friend of the primitive tribes (rumour has it that he returned himself as an animist by religion in his unregenerate days), and he took good care that they at least should not be sacrificed on the altar of economy. Indeed, the tables volume of the present report contains two entirely new tables—both of them particularly elaborate and expensive ones to compile, and both primarily designed in the interests of the aboriginal peoples. In one of them you may learn in considerable detail the distribution, not only between districts but also between subdivisions and revenue thanas, of 24 tribes which are regarded as being of special ethnological interest, and may trace the variations that have occurred in their numbers from place to place at every census since 1881. This same table reveals also the progress made from decade to decade in the weaning of these peoples from their old tribal religions, either by way of absorption into Hinduism or by conversion to Christianity.

The other new table is concerned with bilingualism. At previous censuses the schedules had contained only one column relating to language, in which the enumerators were directed to enter "the language ordinarily spoken by each person in his own house". Now a Santal in the bosom of his family will often speak his own tribal language, while in the *bazar* or in every-day conversation with a non-Santal he will speak Hindustani or whatever else happens to be the *lingua franca* of the countryside. It not infrequently happened that in such cases his language would be recorded incorrectly as Hindustani, etc. On the present occasion two columns for language appeared in the schedules. The first was reserved

for a person's "mother-tongue", *i.e.*, the tongue spoken by him from the cradle, and any other language or languages commonly used by him in daily life were entered in the second column. — this way it was possible not only to obtain a more complete and accurate record of the continuing prevalence of the old tribal languages, but also to ascertain the extent to which, in what are known as the cultural zones or the areas of overlapping culture (among which Chota Nagpur occupies a prominent place in India), the members of one particular race or culture have found it necessary or expedient, without entirely abandoning the use of their own mother-tongue, to adopt as a subsidiary language the tongue of some other race or culture with which they are brought into close contact.

Into the results of this particular enquiry, or indeed of any other enquiry undertaken during the recent census operations, we cannot probe further here. For my task is done, and it remains only for me to thank you for the patient and attentive hearing you have given to me. I count myself singularly fortunate in that my first, and in all probability my last, course of lectures should have been delivered under the auspices of this University. The census is generally regarded as a dull and uninteresting affair. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I have discovered for myself in the course of the last two years. If I have failed to make you share in that discovery, the fault lies with the lecturer and not with his subject.
