The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, Volume 1

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W. CROOKE, B.A.
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BY

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BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CALCUTTA:
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF GOVERNMENT PRINTING, INDIA.
1896.

Price Rupees Six.
PREFACE.

MUCH has been already written about the Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. The long series of such books begins with the famous "Supplementary Glossary" of Sir H. M. Elliot. Then comes Mr. Sherring's valuable account of the people, principally based on enquiries in Benares. For Oudh we have Sir C. A. Elliott's "Chronicles of Unào," Mr. Benett's "Clans of Râè Bareli," and Mr. Carnegy's "Notes." Besides these there is a large body of literature on the subject, such as Mr. Growse's "Mathura," Mr. Atkinson's Chapters in the "Himâlayan Gazetteer," General Cunningham's "Archæological Reports," General Sleeman's "Rambles and Recollections" and "Journey in Oudh," Mr. Grieve's researches about sweepers, and a great mass of miscellaneous memoirs included in the Settlement Reports, District Gazetteers, "Indian Antiquary," "Calcutta Review," and other periodical literature. The notes in the present book will show how much I am indebted to the researches of my predecessors in the same line of enquiry.

It is again fortunate that a long series of valuable books has been devoted to the races on the boundaries of these Provinces; for it must be remembered that these frontiers are purely geographical and not ethnical.
Thus we have a large mass of information collected by Mr. Risley, Mr. O'Donnell and Dr. Buchanan Hamilton for Behár, by Colonel Dalton for Chota Nágpur, by Mr. Hislop for the Central Indian tribes, by Colonel Tod and Sir J. Malcolm for Rájputána, and by Mr. Ibbetson and Mr. Maclagan for the Panjab. Of all these authorities it will be seen that I have made ample use.

This book so far differs from any previous account of the races of these Provinces that it attempts to supply some more detailed information regarding their manners, customs, marriage institutions and religion. It is perhaps well that this task should be essayed now, however imperfect and unsatisfactory the present venture may be. There can be little doubt that caste is undergoing at present a process of transition. The Dravidian races who skirt the great Ganges-Jumna valleys are becoming rapidly Bráhmanized, and will probably in a few years have lost much of what is peculiar to them and interesting to the Ethnologist and student of the development of popular religion. Even now our Kols, Kharwáras Cheros and Mánjhis are much less primitive people than their brethren, whose manners and institutions have been analysed by Colonel Dalton, Mr. Risley and Mr. Hislop. The improvement of communications, the facility for visits to the sacred shrines of Hinduism, the Bráhmanical propaganda preached by those most active of all missionaries—the Panda and the Purohit, the Jogi and the Sannyási—will before long obliterate much of the primitive ideas which they still retain though in a modified form. A long service spent in Mirzapur, the
last refuge of the Dravidian races, has, I trust, enabled me to supply some new facts regarding these interesting people.

For the races of the plains I have based my account of them on a series of notes collected throughout the Provinces by a number of independent enquirers, both official and non-official, whose services were made available by the District Officers. The work could not have been even attempted without much cordial co-operation on the part of District Officers and a large body of native gentlemen to whose generosity in devoting some of their scanty leisure to this investigation it is impossible for me to do full justice. At the opening of each article I have been careful to name the gentlemen to whose aid I am indebted.

There are some special causes which make an enquiry of this kind a work of more than usual difficulty. There is, first, the reticence of the lower castes which must be overcome before they can be induced to yield the secrets of their tribal organisation and religious life. To the average rustic the advent of a stranger, note-book in hand, who interrogates them on such subjects, suggests a possibility that he may have some ulterior objects in connection with a coming Revenue Settlement or Income Tax assessment. It requires no ordinary amount of tact and temper to overcome this barrier; and there is besides among the lower castes an uneasy suspicion that rites and ritual, which in the eyes of the average Brâhman are boorish and a survival of a degraded savagery, are a matter to be ashamed of and
concealed. Mr. Greeven’s experiences in connection with the sweepers of the Eastern Districts, whose sociology he has so carefully explored, are an ample proof of this. In connection with this there is another source of difficulty in the movement which has sprung up among many castes towards claiming a higher status than is usually accorded to them. The Shāstras and other religious literature of the Brāhmans have in recent years been ransacked by a number of castes whose so-called Aryan origin is more than doubtful to support a claim to kindred with races whose descent is universally admitted. Lastly, as the local patois varies from district to district, the manners and customs of the various castes vary from one end of the Province to the other. Hence care has been taken to guard as far as possible from general statements. A custom or a mode of worship prevailing among a caste in Sahāranpur or Ballia may or may not extend as far as Aligarh on one side or Allahābād on the other. The exact habitat, so to speak, of these usages or beliefs can be worked out only by the associated enquiries of a much larger number of investigators. The Subject Index which has been prepared may, it is hoped, be useful from this point of view.

I have specially to acknowledge the valuable work done by Surgeon-Captain H. E. Drake-Brockman in connection with Anthropometry, the results of which are given in the Introduction, where I have endeavoured to sum up in a general way some of the more obvious facts in connection with the origin of caste and some other sociological problems.
No one can undertake with a light heart such an enquiry as this connected with a population aggregating nearly forty-eight millions of souls; and, at the outset had I been fully aware of the difficulty of such a survey, I should have hesitated to undertake a work which has been carried out all through side by side with the multifarious duties of a District Officer. I shall be quite satisfied if the following pages supply a useful basis for further investigation; and, as the most satisfactory recognition of my work, I can only ask all interested in the matter to favour me with any corrections and criticisms which may tend to a greater degree of completeness and accuracy. I have avoided, as far as possible, the discussion of topics which are likely only to cause pain to sections of the people whose pretensions to a higher rank or origin are, to say the least, disputed.

The illustrations are reproductions of photographs taken at Mirzapur by Sergeant Wallace, R. E., of the Rurki College.