

CHAPTER III

PEOPLE

POPULATION

The district, said to be once traversed by the legendary Sarasvati river, has been under human occupancy since long. The frequently recurring famines and political strifes prevented the stabilization of any definite pattern of population.¹ The famine of 1783, known as *Chalisa kal*, depopulated almost the whole area. As a result, most of the villages were re-established after this great calamity. Gradually, the tract became populated again by both the pre-famine inhabitants as well as new migrants. When in 1803, the district came under the British control, a large part of it was uninhabited waste. There was demographic stagnation in the district until recent years.

Some demographic account of the district is available in settlement reports conducted during the 19th century. Enumerations were taken in 1855 and 1868 before census became a decennial event. The first decennial census operation took place in 1881. Since then it has been a regular feature but the boundaries of the district went on changing and the comparison of earlier inter decennial census figures is not possible. The district as constituted at present, however, had 1,65,167 persons in 1901 and 5,33,604 persons in 1971. The population further increased to 7,07,068 persons (3,76,602 males and 3,30,466 females) in 1981 with an overall growth rate of 32.51 per cent (89.48 per cent in urban population and 23.01 per cent in rural population) during 1971—81. The following figures give the population trend in the district since 1901:—

Census Year	Population			Decadal variation (percentage)
	Total	Rural	Urban	
1901	1,65,167	1,40,045	25,122	..
1911	1,70,733	1,56,104	14,629	+3.37
1921	1,73,476	1,57,235	16,241	+1.61
1931	1,90,772	1,71,863	18,909	+9.97
1941	2,13,522	1,86,149	27,373	+11.93
1951	2,21,282	1,83,300	37,982	+3.63
1961	3,70,665	3,17,802	52,863	+67.51
1971	5,33,604	4,57,344	76,260	+43.96
1981	7,07,068	5,62,572	1,44,496	+32.51

1. Gill, Mehar Singh, *Demographic Dynamism of Hisar District 1951—1971*, A. Spatial Analysis Phd. Thesis, MSS 1979 (Panjab University, Chandigarh).

The major portion of the increase in population in pre-Independence period occurred during the years 1931—41. The decade 1901—1911 was marked by severe ravages of various diseases and droughts which took a heavy toll of the population. During 1911—21 occurred the great influenza epidemic. The decades 1921—31 and 1931—41 were generally healthy and population showed upward trend. During the decade 1941—51 the population remained more or less static, the increase was not substantial which was just 3.63 per cent over the decade. This low rate of growth of population must be due to the Partition of the country. After 1951, there was a healthy trend of growth of population in this district. The decade 1951—61 recorded all time high increase of 67.51 per cent. The next two decades i. e. 1961—71 and 1971—81 also provided a substantial growth rate of population. Roughly speaking the population of the district in 1981 rose by 4.3 times to that of 1901.

The population growth experienced by the district during the current century reveals thus two sharp breaks in the district's population growth curve, one in 1921 and the other in 1947 (1951). The population of the district which was 1,65,167 persons in 1901 increased to 1,70,733 persons in 1911 and to 1,73,476 persons by 1921, but thereafter started increasing steadily until Independence, reaching 2,21,282 persons in 1951. In post-Independence period, however, the population of the district grew at an unprecedented rate. Thus while only 56,115 people were added to the district's population during the fifty years preceding 1951, as many as 2,12,323 persons were added to its population in just twenty years thereafter. In fact, nearly two-fifth of the district's population of 1971 came only during the decade 1961—71. Further, about 24.4 per cent of the district's population had been contributed by the decade 1971—81. The post-Independence demographic history of the district therefore, is marked by several vicissitudes of far reaching implications. The changes in the pattern of its population growth have been most fundamental to the changing demographic character of the district.

The percentage decadal (1971—81) variation in population of the district was more pronounced in urban areas than in rural areas. In Sirsa tahsil, the percentage decadal variation in respect of towns was as large as 108.58 which seemed to be due to steep rise in the population of Sirsa town and notification of Rania as town. The rural decadal increase in population was higher in Dabwali tahsil than the tahsil of Sirsa. The table below gives percentage decadal (1971—81) variation in population in the two tahsils.

Population									
Name of tahsil	1971			1981			Percentage decadal variation (1971—81)		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Dabwali	1,38,513	1,17,592	20,921	1,78,472	1,49,401	29,071	28.85	27.05	38.96
Sirsa	3,95,091	3,39,752	55,339	5,28,596	4,13,171	1,15,425	33.79	21.61	108.58
District	5,33,604	4,57,344	76,260	7,07,068	5,62,572	1,44,496	32.51	23.01	89.48

The post-Independence socio-economic development has infused a new set up in the State—a notable redistribution of population. The growth of population during the last two decades when viewed in its regional perspective, reveals striking variations. Five districts viz., Hisar, Sirsa, Jind, Faridabad and Kurukshetra recorded rapid increase in their population (over 35 per cent) during the decade 1961—71. During 1971—81, the decennial increase in population remained maximum in Faridabad district (40.41 per cent) followed by Sirsa, Kurukshetra and Karnal districts (around 32 per cent for each).

Density.—The density of population of the last century shows that the district was sparsely populated. The density of population of Sirsa tahsil was 87 persons per square mile (34 persons per square kilometre) in 1868 which increased to 95 (37 persons per square kilometre) in 1881. The Dabwali tahsil registered a higher density growth during this period which increased from 70 persons per square mile (27 persons per square kilometre) in 1868 to 87 (34 persons per square kilometre) persons in 1881.¹

Exactly after 100 years i.e. in 1981 the number of persons per square kilometre in the district was 165 (133 rural and 4,515 urban) against 292 in the State. Sirsa even today is the most sparsely populated district in Haryana. The density of population of each tahsil is given below as recorded in the last two censuses :

Tahsil	Population Density (per square kilometre)	
	1981	1971
Sirsa	180	129
Dabwali	142	115

It is evident that Sirsa tahsil continues to be more densely populated than that of Dabwali tahsil. Within the Sirsa tahsil, the centenary increase (1881—1981) in the density works out to be 143 persons per square kilometre, resulting in the annual pressure rate of 1.43 persons per square kilometre. In Dabwali tahsil the corresponding increase in the density remains to be 108 persons per square kilometre registering an annual population pressure at the rate of 1.08 persons per square kilometre.

The density of population makes a gentle gradient from high to low in the different segments of the district. According to 1981 census, in 61.83 per cent of the villages of the district, the density of population per square kilometre

1. J. Wilson, *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Sirsa district in the Punjab*, 1879—83, pp. 78-79.

fell in the range 101—200. In one village only, the density was above 500. Table below shows complete density distribution of the villages :

Range of density (per square kilometre)	Total number of villages in each density range	Percentage of villages in each density range
—10	7	2.21
11—20	6	1.89
21—50	11	3.47
51—100	60	18.93
101—200	196	61.83
201—300	29	9.15
301—500	7	2.21
501—	1	0.31
	317	100.00

Density of population in the urban areas has come down considerably because the urban area has grown almost three times as compared to 1971 census. Table below shows, the urban density of the district in relation to the State :

Census year	Urban Density of Population (per square kilometre)	
	Sirsa District	Haryana State
1961	5,796	3,479
1971	7,094	3,928
1981	4,521	3,702

The density of population of new Rania town in 1981 was the highest (5,704 persons per square kilometre) among the four towns of the district while Kalanwali town had the lowest (3,723). The density of remaining towns i.e. Sirsa and Mandi Dabwali was 4,608 and 4,089 persons per square kilometre respectively.

The noticeable feature of increasing trend in population and its impact on land during the last two decades may be seen from the table given below :

Category	Density of Population (per square kilometre)					
	1971 Census			1981 Census		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
Sirsa District	125	7,094	106	165	4,521	133
Haryana State	227	3,928	189	292	3,702	232

It may be concluded that the rural area of the district is not so heavily populated in relation to overall state rural area. In contrast, the district urban population is comparatively denser to overall State urban population. It may also be seen that during the last two decades the rural density of population both in the district as well as in the State continued to increase but the urban density of population in district declined considerably more in the district than in the State. This paradoxical situation is attributed to the increase in urban area in the district.

Distribution of Population

When the area covering the present Sirsa district came under the British in the beginning of the 19th century, it was very sparsely populated. There were roughly 15-16 villages which had some population, the largest of them was Rania. The Bagar tract comprising the area south of the Ghaggar had only a single village whereas the Nali, a slightly better hydrographically, had 11 villages and the Rohi lying towards north-west had 10 villages.¹

When the first decennial census operation took place in the district in 1881, the whole of the district seemed to be fairly covered with villages. Probably the average distance between two villages was not more than four miles (about 6.5 kilometres). While the villages steadily increased in number they rose in size too and the average population of a village varied between 200 persons to 500 persons.² The growth rate of population between 1868—1881 remained 9 per cent in Sirsa tahsil and 23 per cent in Dabwali tahsil. The trend changed thereafter and the growth rate of population in Sirsa tahsil remained higher than that of Dabwali tahsil throughout the period between 1881—1981. During the last decade 1971—81, the growth rate was 33.79 per cent in Sirsa tahsil and 28.85 per cent in Dabwali tahsil. The size of villages continued to increase during the last few decades due to development in agriculture and other allied sectors.

1. J. Wilson, *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Sirsa District in the Punjab, 1879—83*, p 74.

2. Ibid pp 74-75.

In 1981, there were 323 villages—317 inhabited and 6 uninhabited. The inhabited villages had 5,62,572 persons (79.6 per cent of the total population) and the remaining 1,44,496 persons (20.4 per cent) lived in towns. The average number of persons per inhabited village in the district was 1,775. Over 42 per cent of the rural population of the district was residing in 85 villages each having population in the range 2,000 and 4,999 while another 32 per cent was concentrated in 120 villages each in the population range of 1,000—1,999. Ellanabad in Sirsa tahsil with a population of 14,731 persons is the biggest village of the district followed by Jiwan Nagar (10,756 persons) of the same tahsil. In Dabwali tahsil the biggest village is Chutala having population of 9,522 persons followed by Abub Shahar (6,271 persons). The smallest village of the district as per 1981 census is Nai Dabwali (Dabwali tahsil) where just 5 persons were residing. Next to it, were Khandanwali (10 persons), Rampura (16 persons) both of Sirsa tahsil and Ramgarh (33 persons) of Dabwali tahsil. The total rural population tabulated below has been classified into different units according to size of the population as per 1971 and 1981 censuses :—

Unit of Population	No. of Villages		Total Population	
	1971	1981	1971	1981
Less than 200	21	17	1,636	1,456
Between 200 and 499	26	16	10,359	5,796
Between 500 and 999	92	66	70,627	51,575
Between 1,000 and 1,999	120	120	1,72,449	1,73,985
Between 2,000 and 4,999	52	85	1,52,427	2,39,215
Between 5,000 and 9,999	5	11	37,382	65,058
Between 10,000 and above	1	2	12,464	25,487
Total	317	317	4,57,344	5,62,572

The above table shows that now 58.68 per cent of the villages in the district are medium sized having population in the range 500—1,999, where as 26.81 per cent of the villages fall in the population range 2,000—4,999. The population statistics of each village has been given in Table III of Appendix.

The decennial growth of rural population in the district was 43.91 per cent in 1961—71 and 23.01 per cent in 1971—81 as against the State growth rate of 31.53 per cent and 22.16 per cent, respectively.

The urban population concentrated only in 4 towns experienced the growth rate of 44.26 per cent in 1961—71 and 89.48 per cent in 1971—81. Leaving aside the most industrialised district of Faridabad, the urban growth rate in the last decade was the highest in the Sirsa district.

In terms of area, Sirsa is the least urbanized district, having only 4 towns spread over into 32 square kilometres. The urban population in the district was 15,800 in 1901 which increased to 1,44,496 in 1981. During the last 80 years, only three villages have been ranked as towns and none of the four towns have qualified as Class-I town (i.e. having population over one lakh) so far. Historically Sirsa is the oldest town of the district and is categorised as a Class-II town (population between 50,000—99,999). The second biggest town is Mandi Dabwali classified as Class-III town (20,000—49,999) followed by Rania as Class-IV town (10,000—19,999) and Kalanwali as Class-V town (5,000—9,999). The growth of population in these towns has been depicted in the table given below :—

Town	1981	1971	1961	1951	1941	1921	1901
Sirsa	89,068	48,808	33,316	24,980	20,718	16,241	15,800
Mandi Dabwali	29,071	20,921	15,421	10,380	6,655	..	..
Rania	16,714	12,464	..	..	..	..	..
Kalanwali	9,643	6,531	4,079	2,622	..	..	..

About 61 per cent of the urban population of the district is concentrated only in Sirsa town. The population of this town went over 5.5 folds between 1901—1981. Similarly, the population in other towns increased steadily. Sirsa town registered a higher growth of population between 1971—1981 as it was made district headquarters of newly created Sirsa district in 1975. In general, it may also be added that percentage of urban population to the total population of the district increased from 14.29 in 1971 to 20.44 in 1981 against the proportion of urban population in the State as 17.67 per cent in 1971 and 21.88 per cent in 1981. The decennial growth rate in the Sirsa district as compared to that of the State may be seen in the following table :—

Category	Percentage Decennial Growth Rate					
	1971—81			1961—71		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
Sirsa District	32.51	89.48	23.01	43.96	44.26	43.91
Haryana State	28.75	59.47	22.16	32.23	35.58	31.53

Scheduled Castes

The Scheduled Castes population in the district was 1,29,848 in 1971 i.e. 24.33 per cent of the total and 1,78,655 persons in 1981 which was 25.27 per cent of the total. The representation of Scheduled Castes in State population was 18.89 per cent in 1971 and 19.07 per cent in 1981. Among all districts of the State, percentage of Scheduled Castes to the total population is the highest in Sirsa district. The proportion of Scheduled Castes population to the total population showed an increase in the district during the decade 1971—81. Recent developmental activities carried in the district has attracted the migration of weaker sections for employment here. The population of Scheduled Castes is, however, unevenly distributed in the district. The table below gives the proportion of Scheduled Castes to total population in the villages. In more than 60 per cent of villages, percentage of Scheduled Castes population to total population was 20 per cent in 1981. In 2.52 per cent of villages there was no Scheduled Castes population at all —

Percentage range of Scheduled Castes population to total population	Number of Villages in each Range	Percentage of Villages in each Range
Nil		
5 or less	8	2.52
6—10	11	3.47
11—15	13	4.10
16—20	36	11.36
21—30	51	16.09
31 and above	101	31.86
	97	30.60
Total	317	100.00

Nearly 19 per cent of the total urban population in the district belongs to Scheduled Castes. The following table indicates the proportion of Scheduled Castes population in towns as per 1981 census :—

Name of the town	Total Population including Institutional and Houseless Population	Total Scheduled Castes Population	Percentage of Scheduled Castes Population to total Population
Sirsa	89,068	14,949	16.78
Mandi Dabwali	29,071	6,414	22.06
Rania	16,714	4,103	24.55
Kalanwali	9,643	2,098	21.76
All towns	1,44,496	27,564	19.07

1. Census of India, 1981—District Census Hand Book, Sirsa District, p. 12.

The Scheduled Castes people are far less urbanized than the non-Scheduled Castes because of their rural-oriented traditional functional roles. The growth rate of Scheduled Castes population in the district remained 37.6 per cent against 32.5 overall growth rate of the total population during 1971—81.

Sex Ratio

Although in number the two sexes are not widely divergent, the disparity is of great interest to social scientists because of the different roles of the two sexes in society and its economy. Like other districts of the state, Sirsa too is a female deficit district. The following table gives the sex-ratio of the district and the state since 1901 :—

Sex-Ratio (Females per 1,000 males)

Sirsa District	1981	1971	1961	1951	1941	1931	1921	1911	1901
Total	877	865	845	843	878	855	877	837	871
Rural	887	867	846	842	888	865	885	839	870
Urban	841	850	842	846	817	766	795	818	879
Haryana State									
Total	870	867	868	871	869	844	844	835	867
Rural	876	870	874	877	879	851	848	834	861
Urban	849	853	842	845	806	792	811	842	908

The number of females per 1,000 males is relatively high in rural areas in comparison to urban areas. It reflects male selective migrations to urban areas. The following table gives the sex-ratio of different towns in different census years :—

Sex Ratio (Females per 1,000 males)

Town	1961	1971	1981
Sirsa	835	840	817
Mandi Dabwali	853	860	885
Kalanwali	855	891	858
Rania	..	..	889

PEOPLE

Literacy.—Sirsa district falls in the low literacy belt of the State. Educationally, but for Jind district, it is the most backward district of the State. The literacy rate in the district was 29.9 per cent in 1981 as against the State's average of 36.1 per cent. In spite of overall development in the district, the literacy rate increased marginally by 6.2 per cent during 1971—81. Male literacy increased from 31.6 in 1971 to 39.5 per cent in 1981 while the female literacy rose from 12.4 to 18.9 per cent during this decade. The male and female literacy figures for the State were 37.3 per cent and 14.9 per cent in 1971 and 48.2 per cent and 22.3 per cent in 1981 respectively. Literacy among the Scheduled Castes in the district in 1981 was the lowest (10.91 per cent) among all the districts and was approximately half of the overall State literacy rate (20.15 per cent) of the Scheduled Castes. It is revealed that in 1981, the smaller and bigger villages had higher literacy than the medium villages which is evident from the table given below :—

Range of population	Number of Villages in each Range	Literacy Rate (per cent)
—200	17	29.53
200—499	16	24.29
500—1,999	186	23.92
2,000—4,999	85	23.55
5,000—9,999	11	23.58
10,000 +	2	36.58
Total	317	24.32

The overall urban literacy of the district was 51.51 per cent in 1981. The two towns Mandi Dabwali and Sirsa had literacy rate around 54 while the literacy rate of Kalanwali was about 48 and over 34 per cent that of Rania.

LANGUAGE

Hindi is spoken by the majority of the people in the district, Haryanvi and Bagri are the main dialects. Bagri is spoken in the south-west of the district and Haryanvi in the east and there is no hard and fast line at which Haryanvi ends and Bagri begins. In the Nali tract and towards the north, the dialect is affected by Panjabi.

The various scripts used are Devnagri for Hindi, the official language of the State, Gurmukhi for Panjabi, Persian for Urdu, Roman for English and Lande for book keeping. The use of Urdu is limited to the older generation. The younger generation mostly uses Hindi, both in speech and writing.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

The distribution of various religious groups in the district is based on the factors of original settlement and subsequent migration patterns. As elsewhere, Hindu religious groups comprising Hindus, Sikhs and Jains make the basal population amounting to 99.4 per cent (72.3 per cent Hindus, 26.9 per cent Sikhs and 0.2 per cent Jains) in the district in 1981, followed by the Muslims and Christians.

Hindus

Hindu religion is vast and liberal in practice. The Hindus believe in worship of God in various ways. Majority of Hindus follow traditional Hindu beliefs and practices. They believe in Hindu trinity i.e. Barhma, Vishnu and Mahesh and their incarnations. Rama and Krishna are said to be the incarnations of Vishnu. Shakti in her different forms and names and Hanumana are also worshipped. Spirits of streams, trees and other lesser deities are the objects of worship particularly for the people of rural areas. Some people, however, do not believe in idol worship and pray to God who is omnipresent. Worship in temples is not strictly necessary for them. Generally people visit places of worship either daily or on special occasions. A few do ritual worship in their homes before the images and idols of gods.

The religious practices of the Hindus all over Haryana are almost identical. The variations, if at all, are due to customs peculiar to each caste and family. Most of the temples are those of Lord Krishna and Radha, Hanumana, Shakti and Shiva ; while a few temples are dedicated to local deities.

Shiva.—Shiva worship is prevalent here as in other parts of Haryana. Shiva temples or *Shivalas* are numerous as compared to other temples, as the people in rural areas perhaps have the highest faith in Shiva worship. People visit *Shivala*, generally on Mondays and on Shivratri festival and worship the deity by pouring milk and water on the *linga* (*Phalus*). *Shivala* at Dera Baba Sarsai Nath at Sirsa is an important and the oldest *Shivala* in the district. The *Shivala* at Jodhkan (Sirsa tahsil) is also said to be 135 years old.

Rama.—Rama is worshipped by all Hindus as the incarnation of Vishnu. The idols of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are placed in temples. Rama is worshipped on various occasions such as Dussehra, Diwali and Ram Navami and Ram Lila the story of **Ramayana** is staged on the occasion of Dussehra. The temple at Pohrakan (Sirsa tahsil) dedicated to Rama is of worth mentioning.

Krishna .—Lord Krishna is also worshipped here as in other parts of the country. Temples dedicated to him are found everywhere in the district. Bansi Vatt Mandir near Bhadra tank, Radha Krishan mandir near *goshala* and Shamji ka Mandir in Noharia Bazaar at Sirsa town deserve mention. The temples one each at Ding, Ludesar and Fagu also carry wide significance.

Hanumana.—Hanumana is also worshipped with great devotion and his temples are also found everywhere in the district. The deity is worshipped on Tuesday and on this day people offer *parshad* at his shrine. *Sawa Mani* i. e. distribution of $1\frac{1}{4}$ *maund* of *parshad* of *churma* is observed when a wish is fulfilled. Moreover, Hanumana is considered as the god of strength. A Herculean task is initiated by chanting *Jai Bajrang Bali*. In Sirsa town, Hanumana temples at Rania road and *goshala* road deserve mention. Other important temples are at Ellanabad, Kuranganwali and Farwain.

Shakti or Devi.—Shakti in different forms is also worshipped here along other deities. The worship of Shiva's consort Durga is increasingly worshipped these days. *Jagratas* (vigils) are performed to get her blessings. People worship the goddess on *Chet Sudi Ashtami* (March-April). Two *Devi* temples at Dabwali town are important.

Shani Devta.—*Shani*, one of the 9 planets (*Nakshatras*) of the solar system, is also worshipped in the district. Two temples, dedicated to *Shani Devta* at Sirsa town, are located in Noharia bazaar and Bhadra bazaar. People worship *Shani* idols in these temples on Saturdays by offering mustard oil. Since *Shani* is not worshipped in temples elsewhere in the state, the existence of these two temples in the Sirsa district is quite significant.

Minor deities.—Most of the malevolent deities are worshipped by women and children. Some Muslim *pirs* are also worshipped. At Sirsa town, shrine of Khwaja Abdul Shakur in Mohalla Gujjar is worshipped on Thursdays.

Bhumia or Khera.—Bhumia, or the god of homestead or the village itself often called Khera is highly significant. Bhumia is worshipped on Sundays and people light earthen lamps and offer *gur* or *shakkar* at the shrine. Significantly Khera worship is connected with the rabi and kharif harvests and likewise the first milk of a cow or buffalo is offered to Bhumia. Bhumia is also worshipped on other occasions. The bridegroom before proceeding to the bride's house and again after marriage along with his bride worship Khera and seek blessings for happy married life. When a woman is blessed with a son, she lights lamps in the shrine.

Gugga Pir.—Gugga or Jahar Pir, considered to be the greatest of the snake-kings is worshipped throughout the district on the 9th Bhadon (August-September) i. e. the Gugga Naumi and generally the 9th of any month and all Mondays are his days. His shrine usually consists of a small one-room building with a minaret on each corner and a grave inside. It is called a *mari* and is marked by a long bamboo with peacock plumes, a coconut some coloured threads, and some *pankhas* and a blue flag on the top. On Gugga Naumi, this fly-flap known as *chhari* is taken round the village with the sound of *derus* and the devotees salute it and offer *churmas*. Devotional songs known as 'Pir Ke

Solle' are sung in honour of the Pir to the accompaniment of *deru*. It is believed that the spirit of Gugga temporarily takes abode in the devotee dancer. Gugga Pir is also a subject of folk songs.

Smallpox sisters.—*Mata* is worshipped for protection against smallpox. Of the seven sisters, *Sitla Mata* is supposed to be the greatest and most virulent and is worshipped on *Sili Satam*, 7th of *Chaitra* (March-April). Beside, *phag* the day after Holi, and Mondays, especially in *Chaitra* or *Asadha*, are favourable days. Women and children participate in the worship.

Other Saints

Ramdevji.—Ramdevji is said to belong to Tanwar Rajput clan hailing from Runicha in Bikaner district of Rajasthan. The people who immigrated from Rajasthan especially revere Ramdevji.¹ He is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna in Rajasthan. His devotees visit Runicha to pay homage to the deity. His male devotees are known as Kamads and females are called Terah Taalis and they sing songs in praise of Ramdevji. The important temples dedicated to him are at Sirsa, Dabwali, Kagdana, Ludesar, Ellanabad, Rampura (Bagrian) and Kuranganwali.

Jhambha Jee.—Jhambha Jee² believed to be incarnation of Vishnu is worshipped by Bishnois. His main preaching was not to harm animals and trees. The birth anniversary of Jhambha Jee is celebrated by Bishnois in temples dedicated to him. The place of pilgrimage of Jhambha Jee is at Mokam a small village at a distance of 16 Kilometres from Naukha Mandi in Rajasthan.

Ravidas—As elsewhere Hindus especially Chamar community worship Ravidas, a great saint. Guru Ravidas was a disciple of Ramanand and a contemporary of Kabir. Temples for his worship have been erected at Sirsa and Dabwali. The birth anniversary of the guru is celebrated on the *purnima* of *Magh* (January-February). On this occasion *jhankies* from the life of the guru are taken out in procession with *bhajan mandlis* singing devotional songs.

Maha Rishi Balmiki.—Balmiki community revere Rishi Balmiki, the composer of the *Ramayana*. Rishi Balmiki's birth anniversary is celebrated

1. His shrine consists of an idol of blue horse with Ramdevji.

2. He was born in 1485 at Pipasar in Bikaner. When a lad of five years, he used to take his father's herd to water at the well, and had for each head of cattle a peculiar whistle, which it knew and recognised, at the sound of his whistle the cows and bullocks would come, one by one to the well, drink and go away. One day a man, named Udaji, happened to witness this scene and struck with astonishment, attempted to follow the boy when he left the well. He was on horse back, and the boy on foot, but gallop as fast as he would, he could not keep up with the walking pace of the boy. At last in amazement, he dismounted and threw himself at his feet. The boy at once welcomed him by name though he then saw him for the first time. The bewildered Udaji exclaimed "Jambha Jee" (omniscient) and henceforth the boy was known by this name.

on the *Purnima* of *Asuj* (October), with great enthusiasm. On the occasion, *jhankies* from the life of the Rishi are taken out with *bhajan mandlis* singing devotional songs. Mass *kirtan* is performed in the temples dedicated to Rishi Balmiki.

Arya Samaj.—A socio-religious movement for the eradication of illogical and superstitious beliefs began to flourish in the district towards the close of 19th century. The Arya Samaj was established at Sirsa in 1892 and influenced remarkably the social and religious life of the district.

Sikh Faith.—The Sikh faith evolved during the Bhakti movement with the preachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The followers of Sikh faith believe in monotheism. Guru Granth Sahib is their holy book which consists teachings of ten Gurus and various Hindu saints and Muslim Pirs. They rever this holy book as *Guru*. Besides observing some Hindu festivals, the Sikh celebrate GURPURBS (birthdays and martyrdom days of the Sikh Gurus) and Baisakhi. *Akhand Path* is organised on the occasion of birth, marriage and death. Gurudwaras one each at Chormar Khera and Naurang in Dabwali tahsil and one at Hassu and two at Desu Malkana in Sirsa tahsil are held in high esteem.

Jains.—Followers of Jainism worship 24 Tirthankaras, the last Tirthankara was Mahavir. There are three temples of Svetamber and Digamber sects of Jains in Sirsa town and one at Dabwali. Like other Hindus, they celebrate all other festivals.

Christians.—Christians are in small number in the district. There are four churches, two each at Sirsa and Dabwali. They gather at churches on Sundays for prayers. The community celebrates Christmas, Good Friday and Easter.

Muslims.—Some Muslim families are settled in the district. There is a mosque known as Jama Masjid at Sirsa where the Muslims offer *namaz* and celebrate their religious festivals. Mosque-Shah-bu-Shah at Panihari (Sirsa tahsil) and a mosque at Chutala (Dabwali tahsil) are also of great significance.

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

The people in the district still continue to follow the old festive traditions of observing *Amavasya* and *Purnmashi* in lunar month. *Amavasya* is the last day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month and Hindu say special prayers and give alms. *Puranmashi* is end of the lunar month and stands for the full moon-night. However, the most significant festivals celebrated here are Teej, Raksha Bandhan, Janmashtami, Gugga Naumi,

Dussehra, Diwali, Sankrant, Vasant Panchmi, Shivratri, Holi, Gangor and Ramanavami. All these Hindu festivals in the district as elsewhere are celebrated with full devotion and gay. The festivals of Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians are also celebrated with equal enthusiasm. The two festivals viz, Teej and Gangor carry wider local significance. The former is celebrated on *Sawan Sudi-3* (July-August) while the later on *Chet Sudi-3* (March-April) every year with great festivity and fairs on these occasions are held at many places. Teej commonly called as Haryali Teej closes the torturous dry spell and sets in the rainy season in full bloom. The greenery and wet season inspire for excitement particularly among teenaged girls. The newly married girls too grace the occasion with them in their respective villages. All in their best, assemble in groups under the shadows of tall trees for swing and sing threading their emotions into songs. The humour, pathos and passions contained in these songs are really touching. The Teej thus is a hale of cultural activities and various social customs relating to newly married girls who make this festival more alive and significant.

Teej opens the gala of festival celebrations which continues till Gangor. Next to Teej and equally important for the teengad girls is the *Kartik Snan* which falls in the month of *Kartik* (October-November). The girls after a regular bath and worshipping Lord Krishna for full month in the early hours of the day in the village pond go for *Ganga Snan*. The festival is connected with Lord Krishna who is said to have promised the *gopis* that he would meet them in future in the month of *Kartik*. The idol of Sanjhi is made on the wall of the house with clay and is fully decorated with clothes and ornaments just ten days before Dussehra. The girls daily sing in praise of Sanjhi till her erected idol is immersed into village pond on Dussehra with full honour and show. Goverdhan Puja is observed on the day following Diwali, when cow dung collected in the courtyard is worshipped. This worship is connected with Lord Krishna.

Sankrant is celebrated on *Magh-1* (January-February). People take bath in the morning, clean their houses and the newly married women honour the elders of the family by presenting gifts to them. *Phag* which is ceremonised on the day following Holi is an occasion to play with colour, water and *korda*. Men who throw water on women are chased by the women for pleasant beating. The joyful battle and fun continue till the conclusion of celebrations at late night.

After fourteen days of Holi, Gangor celebration falls. On the day, idols of Ishar and Gangor are taken out in procession and songs in their praise are sung till they are immersed into water.

Most of the fairs are of religious origin, however, they also exhibit a bit commercial colour as thousands of people participate. The traders

obviously grace the occasion to sell their goods. The brief account of important fairs held in the district are discussed below :

A fair popularly known as Mela Ram Dev is held annually at Kagdana, Ludesar, Ellanabad, on *Magh Sudi-10* (January-February), on *Magh Sudi-9* at Kuranganwali and bi-annually at Mandi Dabwali on *Bhadon Badi-10* (August-September) and *Magh Badi-10* (January-February). This fair is dedicated to Ram Devji Maharaj (1469—1575) who is said to be a saint of Tanwai—Rajput clan hailing from Runicha in the then Bikaner State.¹ A fair of Gangor is held in the district at Ellanabad and Sirsa town on *Chet Sudi-3* (March-April) and at Bhagsar a day earlier i.e. *Chet Sudi-2*. This fair is held in the memory of Ishar and Gangor.²

A particular type of fair called Mela Sacha Sauda is held at Sirsa town on the last Sunday and at Shahpur Begu and Jagmalwali on first Sunday of every month. This fair is celebrated in the memory of a faqir Shah Mastana,³ who preached thankfulness and fair dealings.

1. In 1914, one Panchan who belonged to the priestly class of Kamaria among the Chamars and who had faith in the saint, constructed a platform in the village in his name. In 1932, a Brahmin, Thakur Dass by name, fell a victim to leprosy, as a result of which he began to live away from the village in a hut. One day the Brahmin saw (had *darshan* of) Ram Devji Maharaj riding horse. Thakur Dass joined Panchan in worship of Ram Dev and got constructed a pukka temple by raising subscriptions from the Chamars. The Brahmin got cured of leprosy. This strengthened the belief of the villagers in the saint and they began to hold the fair in his honour.

2. Legend is that these two lovers tried to run away but were detected before they could cross the village boundary. To escape the wrath of the villagers they drowned themselves into a tank and died. Then onwards, they are being taken as divine souls.

3. Baba Shah Mastana was a great saint. His name was Khema Mal but for remaining always in meditation, people started calling him as Mastana Shah. He was the disciple of Baba Sawan Shah belonging to Radha Swami cult. He was very fond of singing and dancing. When he used to meditate, he started dancing which was against the principles of Radha Swami Sect. Baba Sawan Shah asked Shah Mastana to refrain from his habit of dancing as women followers were also among the devotees. Mastana Ji, however, failed to do so and Baba Sawan Shah asked him DIG, KHOH WICH (jump into the well). Mastana Ji like a sincere pupil jumped into the well. When other followers of Baba Sawan Shah reached the well they found Mastana dancing into the well. They asked him to come out from the well but Mastana Ji refused to do so until Baba Sawan Shah came himself there. Then Baba Sawan Shah came to the well and asked him to come out and allowed him to establish his own way of preaching. Since then Baba Mastana set up *Sacha Sauda* and his followers used to dance when they perform *Satsang*.

Another such type of fair known as Mela Baba Bhuman Shah¹ is held at Mangla, Maujain, Kuta Budh and Gidranwali. The date of fair varies from place to place and coincides with the visit of Baba Bhuman Shah (Belonging to Kamboj community) to above places.

Another socio-religious fair called Hola is held at Jiwan Nagar on *Chet Badi-1* (March-April). It is widely celebrated by the people belonging to Namdhari sect. Mass marriages among Namdharis are performed on this occasion.

The Baisakhi fair is held at Sirsa town on *Baisakh-1* (April 13) with full zeal which reflects the joy among peasantry in particular and masses in general. On this day, a fair known as Mela Baba Boota Singh is also held at Suchan (mandi) in the memory of the Baba.²

A fair known as Mela Shah-bu-Shah is held at Panihari on *Bhadon-1*. (August-September). It is celebrated in the memory of a Muslim saint Shah-bu-Shah. People worship *samadhi* of the saint on this day.

The fair dedicated to goddess Devi held at Kagdana on *Magh Sudi-10* (November-December) and the Gugga fair held at Chutala on *Bhadon Badi-9* (August-September) are other important fairs of the district.

SOCIAL LIFE

Social Groups

The important social groups in the district are Jats, Bishnois, Rajputs and Sainis. They are notable caste groups of cultivators concentrated in the rural areas. The displaced persons have settled in many parts from where the Muslims had gone out. In addition to towns, their main concentration emerged in the irrigated areas and around the towns and in various rural service centres. The uprooted people conspicuously avoided the unirrigated areas of *Bagar* which did not suit to their agricultural expertise.

1. Baba Bhuman Shah was born in Samvat 1744 (c 1688 A.D.) at village Bahalolpur, district Mintgumri (Pakistan), in a respectable family of Chowdhri Hassee. His mother's name was Rajo. He died in Samvat 1818 (c 1762 A.D.). There are many legends attached to the name of Baba Bhuman Shah. To quote one such legend, once when he was two and a half years old and was sleeping in a cradle, a snake spread its hood over his face to protect him from the sun shine. His mother was stunned to see a snake near him. But the snake disappeared immediately. After this incident, people started to see Baba Bhuman Shah in a very large number. The family shifted from Bahalolpur to Dyal Pur. He used to take cows to the forests where he always kept plenty of food with him to serve passers-by and the saints. Once Guru Govind Singh, while passing through the forest alongwith followers saw Baba Bhuman Shah serving saints. Guru Govind Singh and his followers took meals to their full and Guru Govind Singh blessed Baba Bhuman Shah with open hands to serve the *Sadh Sangat*.

2. Baba Boota Singh was born in the house of Baba Khushal Singh (who belonged to the family of Baba Guru Nanak Dev in Samvat 1862 (c 1806 A.D.) at village Mehmodpur, tahsil, Pak-Pattan of Pakistan. He died at village Bhaudain, district Sirsa on *Magh Badi-10*—sankranti in Samvat 1922 (c 1866 A.D.).

To carve out a respectable place in the new social environment they had to work hard. Compared with the local people they are geographically as well as occupationally more mobile.

The other important social groups are of Brahmans and Banias or Mahajans. A sizeable section of the society known as backward classes has also been described for their distinct position.

Jats.—This is the largest social group in the district. They are of two types Deswali and Bagri and the latter are in majority. The Bagris are found in large number in the western part of the district. They are largely concentrated in a pocket of **pantalis**—a compact tract of 45 villages in Sirsa tahsil. Deswali (**Deswala-desi**) Jats claim to be the original Haryanvi and Bagri Jats are immigrants from Rajasthan. Though not prevalent earlier, inter-marriage now takes place between them. Occupationally all Jats are agriculturists and are fine cultivators. They have also joined defence forces in large number. Both these professions are traditionally followed by them. They are also turning towards other professions with success.

Bishnois.—Bishnoi sect originated during the 15th century. The Bishnois are followers of Jhambha Jee believed to be an incarnation of Vishnu. They observe twenty-nine principles laid down by Jhambha Jee. Most of them have migrated from Rajasthan and settled in different parts of the district. The use of tobacco and meat is forbidden. They abstain from taking animal life and cutting trees. They prefer camels to bullocks for agricultural operations. They all are fine agriculturists and are coming into other fields also.

Rajputs.—They trace their origin from Rajputana. Beside agriculture, they have joined into defence as well as civil services. A few of them, still wander as Bagri Lohars/Gadia Lohars.

Sainis.—They are mostly agriculturists. They prefer vegetable cultivation to foodgrains. They are scattered in various parts of the district.

Brahmans.—There are different sections of Brahmans in the district. Some Brahmans practise astrology and palmistry and besides getting fee for their service, they also receive offerings in various forms. The Brahmans, however, are leaving their hereditary professions with the time. Many of them have shifted to agriculture, trade and services.

Banias (Mahajans).—Banias are all Aggarwals and they trace their origin to Maharaja Agarsen whose capital was at Agroha in Hisar district. Most of the Banias are engaged in trade and industry. They now have switched over to other occupations also with equal success.

Aroras and Khattris.—Aroras and Khattris have migrated from West Punjab (Pakistan).¹ They have mostly settled in urban areas. Majority of them are engaged in trade and services. They have been able to make up what they lost in Pakistan with zeal and untiring efforts.

1. A small number of Aroras lived in Sirsa tahsil before the Partition of the country. They used to work as traders.

Kambojs.—They are known as Kambo in the district. They have migrated from Pakistan during the Partition and are scattered in various parts of the district. They were good cultivators but now they are shifting to trade and services. They specially rever Baba Bhuman Shah.

Backward Classes.—A section of the society which is socially and economically backward comprises several social groups. Broadly they belong to Chamar, Balmiki, Dhanak, Bawaria, Bazigar, Nayak and Sapela communities. These communities are very conscious of their social and political rights. Few safeguards provided for them in the Constitution have helped them for their uplift and betterment.

The Chamar is occupational term and its members used to work in leather and also worked as agricultural labourers. From their old profession of leather they are now shifting to agriculture and services.

Like Mochis, Raigars also work in leather. They are engaged in shoe-making and repairing, but they have no inter-marital relations with Chamars.

Balmikis were the scavengers and even now follow this profession in urban areas. However, in the rural areas they have turned as cultivators or agricultural labourers and a few work as sweepers. They also rear pigs, goats and sheep. They rever Maharishi Balmiki and their *guru* Lalbeg.

Dhanaks were weavers but with the advancement of textile industry they have changed their profession. In the urban areas some of them now work in allied pursuits while in rural areas, many work as agricultural labourers.

Bawarias were fond of wandering. They were hunters of wild animals and still they are fond of hunting. In past, they used to cooperate with thieves and depended upon them for their livelihood. But now they have given up such unlawful activities and most of them are working as agricultural labourers. Like Bawarias, Nayaks or Aheris was a hunting class in the past. They are still fond of hunting but do not take it as their profession. Now they are agricultural labourers.

Bazigars belong to a gypsy tribe. They are jugglers and acrobats and are settled in a few villages in the district where they work as agricultural labourers. The Bazigars specially rever their *Guru* Makeem Shah.¹ The religious gathering of Bazigars is held at Rania for four days on 3rd to 7th of *Asadh* (June-July). There is another class of wandering tribes known as Sapelas or Saperas. Some of them have settled permanently in Rania, Bharolanwali and Sirsa and the head of the family goes alone for his pursuit even now. The Sapelas also prepare and sell certain indigenous medicines for curing snake and scorpion bite.

1. The living *Guru* Makeem Shah is the son of Baba Shaver Shah and grand son of Baba Hari Singh. According to one legend Baba Hari Singh was none else but Hari Singh Naluwa and is revered by Bazigars.

INTER-CASTE RELATIONS

In the changed circumstances the caste-system has become flexible. It, however, persists here and there in the district and liberal laws have helped to remove the rigidity in the caste system even in rural areas. Some social groups such as Jats and Aroras are more liberal in inter-caste relations which have influenced the social behaviour of other people also. The evil of untouchability is vanishing and the people have less hesitation to mix or dine together. Inter-caste dining is not so restricted as inter-caste marriage is. Caste-system thus has some bearings on social and democratic life of the district and in political campaigns, caste still plays a prominent role. Otherwise inter-caste relations are cordial and all live happily together in villages.

JOINT FAMILY SYSTEM

In the past, the people in the district were strongly family centred. This could probably be due to adverse circumstances prevailing in the district due to frequent occurrence of famines and droughts. All their ventures were family oriented. The family is locally called as *Kunba*. A group of families having common ancestors is called *thola*. Two or more *tholas* are jointly called *Panna* or *Patti*. A new trend is to settle on farm lands and these new settlements are called *dhanis*. Any decision to break with the tradition and employ new method could usually be a family rather than individual decision. In most of the cases it must be group decision involving several families. These conditions were till recently found in many villages. The joint family system which was very successful until recent past has, however, lost its roots now. The joint family system which has been distinguishing feature of Hindu society since long, is weakening its fibre because of individualism. Various factors are responsible for this change. The most important factor which is responsible for this slow and steady change in the rural areas are pressure on land, increase in population followed by spread of education and seeking of employment by people elsewhere. In urban areas the people are generally engaged in tertiary sector for their livelihood. It is no longer possible for one earning member of family to support the whole undivided family and obviously an individualistic bias emerges to look after one's own family. Even the trend of latest legislation on inheritance has hardly been conducive to the continuance of the joint family system.

INHERITANCE

According to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, sons and daughters, the mother and the widow alongwith other heirs¹ of the deceased, inherit the inter-state property simultaneously. A daughter has as good a claim to her father's property as a son, provided the father does not debar her by law

1. Specified in clause I of the schedule,—vide section 8 of the *Hindu Succession Act*, 1956,

(in case of his self-acquired property only). However, inspite of the right conferred by law, it appears to have become a general practice for the girls not to claim any part of the inter-state property. In the absence of a brother, a girl may some time give her land to her near relatives, though in such cases, she usually retains her right to property.

CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

Customs and rituals of different communities of the district do not fundamentally differ from that of the corresponding communities of other districts of the state. The intensity of regional influence on these practices, however, vary from district to district. An exhaustive treatment of customs and rituals prevailing among each of the communities is not possible. However, in order to depict a broad spectrum, customs and rituals prevalent among major communities have been described.

Different customs prevail among various social groups. As elsewhere, life in this district too starts with celebrations and ends with various rituals. The birth of a child particularly that of male is an occasion to celebrate. To mark it an auspicious and happy time, *thali* (a brass plate) is rung in the house. A *Thapa* (sign of hand) is made with *geru* (saffron colour clay) at the gates of houses of nears and dears on *chhati* (6th day). The parents of *jachha* (mother of the baby) are informed immediately who send ghee, gifts, ornaments and clothes etc. for their daughter and her baby. Other relatives also send greetings and gifts for the new arrival in the family. Some superstitious ceremonies also accompany the birth of a child. A branch of tree (mostly of *neem* tree) is hung on each side of the main gate of the house to ward off evil spirits. Among Khattris a small bag of *mehndi* (in liquid form) is also tagged at the gate.

On the tenth day, *hom* ceremony is performed when sacred fire is lighted and whole house is sprinkled with the Ganga water. Generally Brahman does the *hom* and he is consulted for the child's horoscope. The name of child as proposed by Brahman after studying *nakshatras* was almost final in the past but it is not necessarily binding now a days. However, many people still do not like to deviate from initial word of the name proposed by family Brahman. The Brahmans, relatives and friends are entertained to a feast.

Among Bishnois, the house is cleaned after 30 days and the ceremony is performed by *Gayana* i.e. their religious priest and not by Brahman. *Gayana* performs the *hom* ceremony by burning the sacred fire and chanting *mantras* of Bishnoi faith. Among Aroras, the *chola* is an important ceremony which is celebrated on 11th or 40th day of the newly born son when new clothes consecrated by Brahman are worn. A feast is given to friends and relatives. Muslims summon a *kazi* who repeats *azan* in the infant's ear. On the 60th day, the mother takes a bath and sweetened rice are distributed. The name is given on the 40th day by opening the Koran.

There is another ceremony relating to the birth of a son among Hindus. If a son is born after a long wait or in older age of parents, *dasottan* is performed. Bishnois call it *sirdohan*. The Brahman or *Gayana* gives *aahutee* in the sacred fire, for long life of the boy. A feast of sweets (*ladoos*) is given to friends and relatives after this ceremony. Almost all Hindus perform the *mundan* ceremony when the boy is a few years old. On this occasion his hair are cut and head shaved for the first time and friends and relatives are entertained to a feast.

Various rituals and ceremonies are performed on the occasion of marriage. The most important is *sagai* (betrothal). In the past, *sagai* among Hindus was settled through the institution of family barber but now it is settled either through relatives or other dears and nears. Generally, proposal for betrothal comes from bride's side. Among Bishnois betrothal is on reciprocal basis, however, this system is on wane and like other Hindus, Bishnois also follow the traditional system of engagement. *Sagai* is performed at boy's home by girl's father, before the village panchayat and relatives, who applies *tilak* on the forehead of the boy with turmeric and rice. Generally, sweets, fruits and cash are given by girl's father on this occasion. Later after consultation with the Brahman, the girl's father sends a letter on paper stained yellow with turmeric to boy's father, which announces to him the date fixed for wedding. This is called *lagan* (or *dora* in case of Bishnois). After that, various rituals such as *bann*, *bhat neotna* are observed on both sides. The maternal uncle of the girl or boy presents the *bhat* on wedding day (a day earlier in case of boy) consisting of presents including wedding suits for the bride or bridegroom. Friends and relatives used to present *neota* to the parents of the boy or the girl until recently but *neota* is on wane and is taking the form of gifts and presents. In case of girl, *kanyadan* in form of cash and presents is still given by all the nears and dears on the eve of *phera* ceremony. Generally the marriages start from *Dev Uthani* Giyas (11th *Sukal Pakasha* of *Kartika*) and end with *sili sattam* (7th *Sukal Paksha* of *Asadh*). Among Bishnois, marriages are performed mostly in summer season. A day earlier or on the wedding day friends and relatives join *Jeman* (feast) hosted by boy's parents. Before the marriage party leaves for bride's house, the *ghurchari* is performed. The bridegroom, dressed in his wedding suit brought by his maternal uncle, *kangna* or seven knotted sacred thread tied on his right wrist (though on wane) and head dress consisting of a crown or crest over the turban and sometimes a *sehra* and *kalgee* is made to sit on the mares' back. No *ghurchari* is performed among Bishnois and the boy covers his head with turban only and goes to his temple for worship and blessings. Among Aroras and Khatriis the bridegroom cuts branch of *jandi* during *ghurchari*. Among the Hindus the barber leads the decorated mare with bridegroom on its back. The women follow the *ghurchari* and boy's aunt or an elderly woman carries a utensil of water. One of his married sister puts her wrap over the right hand and on it places rice which she flings at his crown as the bridegroom goes along. He goes and worships

the god of the homestead. Thereafter the *janet* or *baraat* (marriage party) usually comprising the relatives and friends, set out midst music. The *baraat* is received by the bride's side and is taken sometimes in procession with the bridegroom on the mare to a place where arrangements have been made for their stay or towards the bride's house. After *barauthi* or *milni* (welcome of the *baraat* by the village panchayat), *jaimala* is exchanged between the bride and bridegroom. Among Bishnois this ceremony is called *dukao* when the bridegroom performs *chari marna* with the branches of *ber* tree.

For actual marriage ceremony the Brahman lights the sacred fire and calls upon the girl's father to perform *kanyadan* (formal bride-giving). Then takes place *phas* or binding ceremony. The *phas* are performed in accordance with Ayrya Samaj or Sanatan Dharma system. Among the Deswali Jats, the girl leads in the first three *phas* and the boy in last. The Bagri Jats reverse this ; with the boy leads in the first three and the girl in last. The latter is followed generally by all other communities. After the fourth *phera* the boy and the girl sit down, their positions, however, changed, the bridegroom now sitting on the girl's right. Bishnois do not have *phas*. Among them binding ceremony is *piribadal* or exchange of stools by the bride and bridegroom who also take each other's hand (*hathlewa*). *Anand Karaj* prevails among Sikhs. The bride and bridegroom go round the holy *Granth* and hymns from *Granth* are recited. The civil marriage is very rare. The departure of *baraat* is ceremonised with *vidai thape* where bride's eldest aunt marks *mehndi* painted hand on the chest and back of bridegroom's eldest uncle or grandfather. The *baraat* generally returns the same day or at the most next day unlike past when it used to stay for two days.

The ceremonies are highly colourful, picturesque, and at times interesting also. However, there are minor variations among certain castes in the performance and observance of these ceremonies. Few ceremonies have become extinct and a few now have evolved with the time.

In old days, *muklawā* (consummation of marriage) took place after a long time as girls were married at an early age much before they attained puberty. Early marriage is no more in practice and *patra pher* is performed just after *phas* along with other concluding ceremonies. But in few communities, *muklawā* is still observed as before. After the *muklawā* or *patra pher* the bride is finally settled in the bridegroom's house. Among Muslims, *nikah* is the binding ceremony of marriage. *Nikah* which is read first to the girl and then to the boy and on acceptance, the marriage is contracted.

The dowry system prevails everywhere. In the past, the girl's father out of love and affection for her, used to give some daily necessities of life. But of late, the dowry system has become a great social evil. Now it is very difficult for a poor father to marry even an able daughter without money. Even

the dowry legislation of 1961 has not succeeded in achieving its object. People by-pass the law. However, the most simple and dowryless marriages are performed among Namdhari Sikhs even today in the form of mass marriages on Holi festival.

WIDOW MARRIAGE

Karewa is a simple sort of a marriage for widows. It is in essence, the Jewish Levirate; that is to say, on the death of a man his younger brother has first claim to the widow, then his elder brother and after them other relations in the same degree; though *Karewa* cannot be performed while the girl is a minor, as her consent is necessary. But it has been extended so that a man may marry a widow whom he could not have married as a virgin, the only restriction being that she is not of his own clan. In Jats, it has been prevalent for centuries and other castes except Rajputs, Brahmans and Banias followed the Jat tradition. The father of the widow gives one rupee to the brother of her daughter's deceased husband as a mark of giving the daughter to him. On fixed day before the assembly of relations the man throws a red wrap over the women's head and puts wristlets (*chura*) on her arm. Such a marriage generally does not take place within a year of the husband's death. Among Rajputs, Brahmans and Banias, the *Karewa* has also made its appearance recently.

Punar vivah is more common than *kerewa* among Rajputs, Brahmans and Banias. When none of the brothers accept their sister-in-law as wife, *punar vivah* is performed anywhere in their caste. The important ceremony in *punar vivah* is putting *jai mala* (garland) around each other's neck. Under no circumstances can a woman perform the *pheras* twice in her life. But in case the husband died shortly after marriage and the girl has not lived with him or if she has no issue, she is re-married with all the ceremonies usual at marriage. This type of *punar vivah* is mostly adopted by the Banias.

Kara is another form of widow marriage. It is marriage of a widow outside her husband's clan. There is no ceremony attached to *kara* and a mediator helps in the marriage. A woman married by *kara* is socially regarded as lower than other women, as she is brought for rearing her new husband's children and as a life companion in middle age.

Widows who do not wish to marry live on the property left by their husbands. In urban areas, however, the educated ones take up employment or engage in some kind of paid or honorary social work.

Hindus and Sikhs cremate their dead. On the third day the knuckle-bones and other small fragments of bones (*phul*) are collected. If they can be taken to be immersed in the *Ganga* at once, well and good, but they must not be brought into village till finally taken to the *Ganga*. The post cremation rites include *chautha* (4th day), *Dashmi* (10th day), *Tehrvi* (13th day) or

Satarvi (17th day) relating to final mourning and *pagri* ceremony. Children under 8 years of age are buried without ceremony. Bishnois, Muslims and Christians bury their dead. Earlier the Bishnois used to bury their dead in the *poli* (house) close to entrance but now they use a separate burial ground outside their village.

The orthodox death rituals are disappearing fast. The death as the ultimate course of life is being accepted. People no longer follow in toto what they used to do earlier on the advice of priests and nothing extraordinary is spent on death rituals.

DIVORCE

The marriage ties are solemn and sacred in the society and hence divorce is not prevalent on any scale. There is a general tendency to suffer hardships resulting from ill-matched marriages and people lead a miserable life rather than to dissolve the marriage. However, with the coming into force of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, a few cases of divorce are being instituted in law courts.

POSITION OF WOMEN

The age old social dogmas which has debarred women to rise, are disappearing. *Purdah* system though prevalent in the district is no more called a taboo to women upliftment. Dress and ornaments have undergone change with the modernisation. The traditional concept of women being nothing more than a house wife or at best an ornamental being has undergone a revolutionary change and today we see women successfully invading what were previously exclusive men's domains. Now they are participating zealously in all activities of life. Education has brought about a welcome change in the status of women in the society, however, female education is still at its infancy in the district regarding the desired change in women status.

HOME LIFE

Dwellings—Until recent past, the towns contained as a rule one main street with well built shops on either side. The residential houses were built in *mohallas* where central street was usually broad. Sirsa within its old four walls is built in architectural style of Jaipur city and is divided into square blocks each intersected by wide roads. The recent settlements in the towns have, however, developed according to modern town planning and the houses are airy and have all modern facilities. The villages on the other hand are of much more humble appearance. A common dwelling in Bagri villages was the *jhumpa* or *jhompra* a round hovel with walls made by inter-weaving branches of the *ak*, *jal* or *kair* bush and filling up

the interstices with mud, and a thatch of *bajra* straw (*karbi*). Another Bagri dwelling was the *chaunra* or *dunda* against a round hovel with mud walls (*bhit*) and a roof of *bajra* thatch and only one opening to serve as door, window and chimney closed by a wicket. Sometimes the villagers were contented to use unshapen clods (*dhims*) of earth dug out of dried pond to construct a wall. Initially the people made a shelter at new place locally called as *parwa* or *chhappar*—an oblong house with mud walls and thatched roof. Gradually it was developed into a house having a *sal* and *kotha* with the walls of sun-dried bricks plastered over with mud and a flat roof of rafters and branches covered with clay. Many of the poorer immigrants even when settled down permanently in a village were contented with the rugged huts. The bigger or richer villages, however, boasted of a few pukka houses. But in general a village was a conglomeration of kacha houses with courtyards which had sprung up in a haphazard fashion and to which the only access was by a tortuous insanitary passage. Outside the residential part of the village was an open space where manure, fuel and fodder were stacked (*gatwara*). Near the *abadi* was at least one large and deep pond (*johars*). The tank was generally surrounded by a thick fringe of large trees, chiefly *pipal*, *bar*, *kikar*, *jal*, etc. Most of the villages were settled at the edge of a natural depression where the drainage water collected in rainy season.

With the prosperity, the faces of the villages have undergone a change. The new houses have been constructed with bricks suiting the local requirements and look airy and comfortable. In general, immediately after the entrance to a house, there is a room called *dahliz* or a big hall called *darwaza* or *pauli*. Besides, having a drawing-room or meeting-room, it is used particularly at the sides, for cattle and there are mangers and stables where fodder is chopped. There follows an open space or yard known as *angan* or *sahan* and at the rear of this or on either side is a verandah called *dallan* or *bichala* and behind this again are inner rooms for sleeping and living called *kotha/kothi* or *kothliya*. There are innumerable variations and sometimes two or three minor enclosures will be found inside the main enclosure which are sub-divided by walls. Within the enclosures are *chuhlas* or hearths. The *hara* in which the daily porridge is cooked and milk boiled, is generally outside the entrance and built against the outer wall of the house. The houses are generally single storeyed and the roofs are used for drying wood, fodder or grain and also for sleeping in the summer. The houses usually lack bathrooms and latrines. Some old pukka houses have beehive-shaped receptacles (*burj*) built with bricks in a circular form with pointed dome-shaped roof. The modern houses in the villages like in urban areas, however, have separate kitchen, bathroom and drawing and bed rooms and many of them are double storeyed or even three storeyed. By and large, the old settlements were compact and the village had one or at the most two

entrances (*Phalsa*) and there was generally no passage right through it. But now the villages are scattered and the trend now is to build houses outside along the roads or in the fields.

FURNITURE AND UTENSILS

There are few articles of furniture and utensils of daily use. The articles of furniture consist of bedsteads (*khats* or *manjis*) and a few small stools (*pidas* and *patras*). The clothes are generally kept in *pitara* made of sticks, wooden box or in iron trunk which are being gradually replaced with steel almirah or attache case. The utensils consist of churning stick (*rai* or *madhani*) for making butter ; and an array of earthen and metal dishes (*bhanda*) for use in the work of the household. These are of different shapes and sizes, from the large earthen jar (*ghara*) used for bringing water from well to the small earthen mug (*matkana*) used to ladle out water from the *ghara* for drinking ; or the metal pot (*bhartiya*) in which *randher* or vegetables are cooked ; the small metal cup (*chhana* or *batka*) out of which milk, water etc. are drunk. Most of the furniture and utensils are made in the village and are very cheap and simple, but metal vessels are comparatively expensive and are bought from outside. The metal vessels generally made of brass and bell-metal (*kansi*) consist of large narrow mouthed cauldrons (*toknas* or *degs*) for storing water or cooking at feasts, smaller vessels of similar shape (*toknis*) for carrying water to the field, some tumbler shaped drinking vessels (*gilas*), a tray (*thali*) to eat, a larger tray (*parant*) for kneading dough, a brass ladle (*karchhi*) and a spatula (*khurchana*) for turning *roti* etc. Some notable iron vessels are iron disc (*tawa*) for baking *chapatis* and a pair of tongues (*chimta*), a frying pan (*karahi*), a sieve (*chhalni*), an iron bucket (*balti*) for drawing water from the well and huge iron cauldrons (*karahis*) used for large scale parties. Besides, *ghara* or *painda* the other earthen utensils are the *handi* for cooking vegetables and pulses, the *kadhoni* for boiling milk and the *biloni* for churning curd, the *chhaj* made of straw and *tokra* or *tokri* made of branches of trees are the two important items of the household, the former is used for separating the waste from grains and the latter is used for carrying out rubbish. The spinning wheel (*charkha*) and cotton ginning machine (*charkhi*) are the two other important articles in the house.

In *dahliz* or *pauli* or *darwaza*, the resting place of male members, one may come across a few bedsteads, *palangs*, *moorahs*, hookah and agricultural implements.

The above detail relates to a traditional house. With time, the inside appearance of the house has undergone a significant change. Modern furniture, utensils of stainless steel and aluminium and porcelain and glass

wares have found a place according to social status and taste. Tables, chairs and sofas of different descriptions are also in use. Pressure cookers and oil stoves are now familiar articles of the kitchen. Consequently, some traditional furniture and utensils are becoming extinct day by day. With the use of electric appliances, radio sets, transistors and decoration materials, the houses appear more lively and attractive. The houses of upper class people in towns, of course, seem more beautiful in design, decoration and have the facilities of refrigerators, room coolers etc. With rapid modernisation, some people in villages, too, are leading life close to town life where ample furniture and other basic household amenities are available.

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

The dress of the people is simple and minimal. Till sometime back, a little boy could be seen wearing nothing except a string round his waist, while in grown up stage a small cloth in the form of *langoti* between his legs was provided. However, the children now have a complete wear at least a shirt or a frock even at tender age. The traditional Bagri summer dress of male comprises a *dhori* tucked up between the legs, wrap (*chadder*) thrown over the shoulder, a turban (*pagri* or *potiya*) on head and *juti* on feet. Until recently, a Bagri did not wear *kameej*, however, a few wore a vest (*kurti*), or long coat *bugtari* or *angrakha* of cotton, the sleeves of the latter were sometimes very long and wide so that they could hang down from the wrists in a peculiar fashion. Now instead of *kurti*, most of the Bagris wear *kurta* or shirt. The every day clothes were usually made from coarse cloth (*gada*) but now machine-made cloth is preferred. The typical Bagri *pagri* is of red or coloured cloth and is typically worn. The Bagri *juti* is also peculiar in look, generally heavier than ordinary *juti*. In cold weather most of them carry comfortable woollen blankets (*kambal* or *loi*). The *khes* or *dohar* of cotton are another type of wrap used in winter. Men in service put on pants or *pyjamas* and *dhori* along with shirt, bushirt or *kurta*. The young mostly wear pants, bushirts, shirts, coats, sweaters, leather footwears of different types but no head wear. This change is almost universal in urban areas. Some men particularly among Bishnois, Sikhs and displaced persons wrap variously known as *chaddar/chadra* or *tehmed* instead of *dhori* or payjama/pants. Every Sikh uses headwear called *pag*, some using it in unmindful way while the other wear it properly bleached and fashioned.

Murki or *tungal* different forms of ear-rings, worn by men earlier are becoming out of fashion now and a gold finger-ring and to a lesser extent a gold hain in neck are popularly worn by men in rural as well as in urban area. A wrist watch and *kara* are also used by many.

Bagri women by and large wear a petticoat (*sariya* or *ghagra*) of coloured, striped or printed cotton and a wrap of cotton (*orhna*) worn over the head. It is generally striped or coloured and is called as *chunri*. Sometimes the wrap is of a bright colour (*phulkari*) ornamented with bits of looking glass. Instead of *kurti* as elsewhere put on, the women here wear *kanchli* or *angi*, richly embroidered covering up to waist. Another equally significant dress of women consists of *lehnga* of different colours and lighter than *ghagra* and *peelia* (substitute of *orhna*) which is multi-coloured and yellow in the centre. The Bishnoi women wear slightly different dress. They wear long *ghagras* unlike the women of other communities. Their *orhna* is also multi-coloured and is broader as to cover the abdomen. They have a distinction in wearing *borla* (prepared from beads) on the forehead. Traditional dress of Sikh women in the past comprised trousers (*suthan*) or *ghagra* both generally of blue colour, *kurti* and a cotton wrap (of a dark colour ornamented with silk *phulkari*) known as *utla* or *dupatta*. The complete dress of a woman is called *tiwal*. The traditional dress is on wane and is generally worn by elderly women. The general dress of the young females is *salwar* and *kamiz* or *jumper*. The wrap of cotton worn over the head is called *orhna*, *dupatta* or *chuni*. After marriage, the ladies also wear *petticoat*, *sari* or *dhoti*, *choli* or blouse.

In the cold weather the women used to wear woollen petticoat (*dhabla*) and woollen shawl (*lonkariya*). The *sopli* or *dupla* though of coarse cotton cloth were also used to protect against winter. Now a days woollen shawl, cardigans, sweaters, and other woollen garments are frequently used.

Women of all classes are fond of ornaments (*tum* or *gahne*). The ornaments are usually made of gold and silver, and when the women cannot get them of gold or silver, they wear artificial jewellery and bangles or armlets of coarse glass (*kanch*) or lac. The designs and the types of ornaments are varied and numerous. The ornaments worn by women earlier, in the district numbered no less than 81 including five for the nose alone.¹ These included *tikka*, *singarpatti*, *borla*, *phini* on forehead, *hansli*, *jhalra* (long hanging of silver or gold coins), *haar*, *patheri*, *torgor*, *kanthi* or *kuthla*, *galsari*, *guliband*, *jaimala*, and *hamel* etc. round the neck. *Karanphool*, *bugli* or *bujni*, *kante*, *bundi*, *tops*, *baliyan*, *murki* on the ears, *koka*, *tili*, *nath*, *purli* for the nose, *tad*, *chhann*, *pachheli*, *kangani*, *chara*, bracelets in order from shoulder to wrist, *kara* on hand, ring in the finger, *tagri* round the *lehenga* or *sari* and *ramjhol* (*jhanjhan*), *kari*, *chhaip*, *kare*, *nevani*, *tati* and *pati*, *pajeb* worn on the legs.

The use of traditional jewellery which was very heavy, as described above has now become out of date and at present jewellery in common use include necklace for the neck, *purli* or *koka* for the nose and *pajeb* for the

.1 M.L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, 1925, p. 64.

ankles. The educated women do not use much jewellery except a chain round the neck and a few bangles on the wrist. A widow does not wear bangles of lac or glass and use very few items of jewellery. The use of ornaments otherwise, except on special occasions or ceremonies is on the decline. Putting up of hairs in braids (*chunda*) and the practice of tatooing (*khinana*) once common have almost disappeared.

FOOD

Majority of the people in the past, lived round the year, on *bajra*, *moth*, barley, milk and milk products (curd, butter milk, butter, *ghee* etc.). Their simple meal was in the form of *roti* (made of flour of *bajra* or barley or wheat) and *randher*. *Kalewa* (break fast) and *sanjh* (supper or dinner) was taken mostly in the form of *randher*. Lunch was generally in the form of *roti* along with pulses, vegetables or *karhi* (made of gram flour and curd or butter milk). *Randher* even today is the major constituent of breakfast and the dinner. It is a typical food consisting of *rabri* made of *bajra* and curd or butter milk or *khichri* made of *bajra* and pulses. *Sattu* made of barley and *dalia* made of wheat are also other forms of *randher*. *Rabri* and *sattu* are the summer diet while *khichri* is that of winter. *Dalia* is taken all round the year but more frequently in summer. *Randher* is by and large taken along with milk or butter milk. The poorer classes who could not afford milk or butter milk had to be contented with *rabri* and *khichri* made with water only.

For lunch or other meal of the day, *roti* prepared on *tawa* along with fresh green vegetable such as green pods of *moth* or *guar* or gourds, and melons was considered much prized and relished food. When these were not in season, the vegetable-sellers from the river valleys travelled long distances to the villages of this dry tract to sell turnips, carrots and other vegetables.

In the absence of vegetables pulses or *karhi*, people had to take *rotis* along with *chatni* made of salt and red chillies. The other cheap substitute of *chatni* was pickle of *teet* and *gur/shakkar* if available was taken fondly with *roti*. Some locally available green vegetables were *channa saag*, *sarson saag* or *bathua* in winter and *powar* in rainy season. *Bhuije* or *raita* made of *bathua*, raw gram leaves and *guar* beans also constituted a common man's diet. The people in towns too depended considerably on milk and milk products, however, in their food, pulses and vegetables were appreciably consumed.

Bajra was staple grain with wheat and rice to be consumed on festive occasions. The guests were generally served with wheat *chapati* and *bura* (sugar) mixed with *ghee*. The delicacies like *halwa* (*seera*), *kheer* and

pureh were prepared on festive occasions. Other preparations consisted of sweets like *ladoo*, *jalebi* etc. Besides *lassi*, the favourite cold drink were *sharbat* made of sugar and water and was served on social and religious occasions. People were generally fond of smoking tobacco and a group of them could be seen sitting over *hookah*. This habit still dominates the rural scene particularly among village elders. Of late, the cigarettes and *biri* have become common in the district.

The prevailing local saying "*Bagar ka mewa; pilu aur pinju* (the fruits of the Bagar are *pilu* and *pinju*) indicated the local fruits. The *pinju* is the fruit of *ker* tree and *pil* or *pillu* that of *jal* tree and both are available in summer season. The common fruit of winter was *ber*. Among other fruits special mention could be made of *matira* or *kachara* (water-melon or melon). With the development of horticulture and irrigation, citrus fruits and vegetables are grown locally and others not grown locally are readily marketed.

Milk and its products were the major constituents of the diet of people. The parents possibly gave a cow as gift to their daughter on her marriage so that she could not be deprived of milk while entering into her married life. Low consumption of wheat, rice, vegetables and pulses and too much dependence on coarse grains were the peculiar features of rural diet in the past. The past glimpses of the food consumption in the district is distressing, the present, however, looks bloomy. The district has witnessed a recent revolution in agriculture and that has transformed the rural life. Wheat and rice consumption are no more luxury for the people here. The district is surplus in foodgrains and harvests a rich cash crop of cotton. Consequently, the people spend unreservedly on food items. The prosperity has brought a change in food habits. Instead of milk and *lassi*, tea and soft drinks have become popular. Tea stalls are very common everywhere in the district. Restaurants and other eating places have come up. The consumption of liquor is common and is increasing day by day.

Varied food preparations are within easy reach of a common man. Gone are days when people had to take *churma* for long journeys. On the way to their destination, they take snacks or other bakery products. Customary presents in the form of *sidha*, *kothli*, *sindhara-kasar* or *gur* are substituted with sweets and fruits.

With the arrival of displaced persons the number of non-vegetarian people has gone up considerably. The local population is also gradually developing non-vegetarian habits. Along vaishnav *dahbas*, *tandoori* and non-vegetarian *dahbas* have sprung up considerably.

Desi ghee is still preferred to vegetable and hydrogenated oils. The Bishnois by and large try to avoid vegetable *ghee* in their kitchens. The people of the district are now no longer isolated from the rest of the state in food taste and diet.

The overall development in the district has brought modernity without deviating from old social food habits and customs. Still the visitor or guest is fed with the best available food in the house. The kitchen is kept sacred. The daily chores of village women is cleaning the kitchen with cow dung, yellow clay and water early in the morning before preparing meals. Generally, male members take the meal first and then follow the female members, however, in towns, the young generation prefers to take meal jointly irrespective of sex. Before meal people do remember God. The meal is mostly taken on the floor close to kitchen. The village life thus still revolves round the old eating habits and social values. In towns and among rich families of villages, western influence on food and the etiquettes is noticeable.

GAMES AND RECREATION

In the past, the villagers old and young, were fond of games and sports and had a wonderful variety of ways in which they amused themselves. They took a great interest in races and many people from far and wide witnessed horse, camel and donkey races. They also enjoyed themselves with various competitions like sack-races, blindfold races etc. The wrestling was the most exciting event in the country side and the fame of a champion wrestler was spread far and wide.¹ Similar to wrestling *saunchi* (like boxing) was played by *jawans* or *gabhrus* (youths).

Other equally interesting games were *mugdar* (dumb-bell) similar to weight lifting, *kabaddi*, *tap* or *chhal* (high jump) over a buffalo, *khuddu khundi* (hockey), *rassa khichma* (tug of war), *guli danda* (tip cat) etc. *Dasa bise*, *chhori-chhora*, *lukan-chhipan* (hide and seek) *charak chundi* were a few games which were the source of entertainment for the children. The cow-boys generally played *jhurni danda*, *cheera*, *bad kua* and *ka kundrali*. They also took pleasure in playing flute or *algoja* while rearing the cattle. Girls were fond of swinging on a swing (*jhula*) during *sawan* (July-August). The village housewife found little time for amusement. However, in spare time, she turned at *charkha* (spinning wheel) and amused herself with folk songs in the company of others. The month of *Phalguna* (February-March) had been month of merry-making for women. Singing of traditional songs and dancing in moonlight nights was noticeable feature.

The old men entertained themselves with *pasa* and *chopar*. Strolling bands of players, dancers, buffoons and acrobats usually of Nat and Bajigar communities gave ample entertainment to the masses with their skill. Kanjars, Jogis, Mirasis, Doods and Sapelas too amused the people very often. The *saang*, however, was the most important source of entertainment for the public.

1. J. Wilson *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Sirsa district, in the Punjab*, 1879-83, P. 204. |

There were thus varied sources of entertainment for the people in the past. Most of the games played in the past have now become extinct. Wrestling and kabaddi, however, continue to be popular sports among young and middle-aged. Modern games like hockey, football, basket ball, *kho kho* and net ball played in schools and colleges have more or less replaced the other games. The boys now may be seen playing games like *buntas* (marbles) and *pithoo* (games of ball and pieces of stones) while the girls play *bijho bandre* known as *pehal dooj* also and rope jump etc. *Chopar*, playing cards and chess are some of the indoor games which are played and enjoyed everywhere in the district.

The *Saang*—a strong cultural and community entertainment till some-time back has received a set back due to cinema. The steps, however, have been taken to revive its popularity with concerted effort of the government. The recorded music whether by gramophone, tape recorder, transistor, or radio set has penetrated into the simple life of village-folk. Cinema seems to be the most attractive source of entertainment for urbanites in particular and ruralites in general. Women and girls still amuse themselves with community singing. Around Teej they assemble and swing and sing while around Holi they assemble in moonlit night in the open and sing and dance. *Daphla* dance is very common among Bagri community and is quite common in *Phalguna* (February-March). The life of women folk is changing and they now take part in various games and other recreational activities.

Community listening is another popular entertainment of the villagers. Drama parties and *bhajan mandalis* roam from village to village round the year for the entertainment of the people. Religious ceremonies, festivals, fairs, marriages and visiting relatives too regale the masses when they free themselves from routine work.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Until recent past, the life in the district revolved round bread and butter. Community life was so well knit that the society as a whole struggled to survive against hardships. *Kaal Bagar se upje* (famine comes from the Begar) was the well known saying in the area and such miseries, led to evolve a cohesive community life which exists even today in the villages though famines and like distresses are now things of the past. People from all walk of life still retain the homogeneous character and they have close contact with each other. Almost the whole village shares joy and sorrow together. The social, cultural and religious functions require a combined attention in village life.

Folk Culture

Folk culture in its various forms viz., folk songs, dances and theatre gives a vivid description of community life of the district. Folk culture which

is broadly a Bagri culture has a rich inheritance. The *ragi* parties which roam from village to village help to accelerate the cultural rhythm. The cinema like in other districts has not penetrated so deeply in the district and folk culture still continues to enliven the country side, which hums with songs and dances on festivals and other occasions. The urban life, however, has been much influenced by the cinema and recorded music and the popularity of folk songs has faded. Apart from cinema, the social interactions like marital relations with the people of other parts of the state have also affected the urban community. Haryanvi folk songs like *Jeth Mera Das Padh Rya Ree, Ay Mera Dewar B. A. Pass...* (Elder brother of husband is matriculate whereas his younger brother is graduate), however, have everlasting impact on the urban culture also. Such songs are equally relished by women-urban or rural on merry-making occasions. Recorded music is making in road to the rural life too. The government through Public Relations Department and All India Radio is making efforts to maintain the folk culture of the area.

Folk Songs.—Folk culture is preserved through songs. These songs express hope, aspirations, love, longings, joys and sorrows of the masses. A good number of these are nature songs while the others relate to tales of events.

The month of *Sravana* (July-August) brings ecstasy in its wake. The village women go gay and sing *Sravana* songs and swing about 15 to 20 days before Teej or Haryali Teej. It falls on third of the lunar month. The women come out in colourful costumes for swinging, singing and merry-making.

During the month, there is greenery every where and the sky remains over-cast with dark clouds. There is a variety of songs each connected with the occasion. The long wait for Teej is expressed in this song :

*Neem ki nimoli paki, sawan kad awega
Awe re meri ma ka jaya, ke ke chiji lawega*

(The fruit of neem tree has riped and it is still not known when *sawan* would come. My brother would come then and bring innumerable sweets and gifts).

The starting of rainy season is thus explained in the following song :—

*Kali to ghata re beera umari
Umra baras lo meh
Meh walo jhar lagyo,
Chomaso jhar lagyo.
Mithi to karde re ma kothli,
Jaunga bebe nai len
Meh walo jhar lagyo,
Chomaso jhar lagyo.*

(O'brother, the sky is overcast with dark clouds. It may rain heavily as the rainy season has set in. O' mother. prepare the *sravana* sweets meant for gifts.

I will go to bring sister from her husband's house. It may rain heavily as the rainy season has set in).

The married girls visit their parents' house on Teej and celebrate the festival with their friends. Love and affection between brothers and sisters also become a key note of the Teej songs :—

*Tamle gi jar mai tamla ugyo,
Sichi dudh malai re*

*O kun beera hindo mandyo,
Aa kun hindan aae re*

*Satbir beera hindo mandya,
Kamla hindan aae re*

*Hole jhota deyee mera beera
Dare maregi bai re*

*Daran, maran ka hasla ghara dun,
Churian ki chatrai re.*

(There is every where green and a baby tree has grown near a tall tree. There is no dearth of milk and curd. Whose brother has come for giving the swing and whose sister has come to enjoy swing? Brother Satbir has come to give swing to his sister Kamla.

The sister requests the brother not to swing her too high as she fears to fall. However, the brother consoles her saying that he would get her *hasla* and bangles).

In the month of *Kartika*, the village women take bath in the early hours in the village pond. They take out mud from the pond and make *Pathwari* on its bank. They worship *Pathwari* as goddess and sing.

*Panch sakhi ral panni ne challe ye,
Ham panchoo rahi batlaye.
Hari ka nam barra se
Ye kuch dharam karo mere bahan,
Hari ka nam barra se
Pahli sakhi va nuver bolle,
Johar kudh vado, pewe banwa do,
Ye arre nahvenge sri Bhagwan.*

(The five young girls go to bring water. They talk to each other. God is supreme, we should do some pious deeds. One of them says, she would dig the pond and construct bricked steps where Lord would take a bath).

The month of *Phalguna* (February-March) is very pleasant and excited. The women sing and dance in the moon-lit night. On Holi, people play Holi and sing.

*Phul ke ser par chakre go cheera,
Phul ke hath me gulab ke chhari,
Holi khelo re kahniya, rut fagunee*

(One Phul the brother of wife carries water on his head and some one carries rose tree branch in his hand. It is month of *Phalguna*, O' Krishna join us for Holi).

Marriage is a special occasion when folk songs are sung.

Halwa halwa chal mhari lado

(Oh my dear one go slowly—an advice from friends of bride on the occasion of *phas*).

When the bride leaves her father's home her friends sing :—

*Yoh ghar chhorya dada tera
Mai chhori teri dehlarye,
Nyu mat kar ae lado meri tanne rakhu,
Ane Jane Mai*

(O grandfather, I leave your house, I leave for new house. No dear one, do not be sentimental, I will manage to have your frequent visits).

Another hearty send off is expressed in the following song :—

*Sathan Chal pari re,
Mere dab dab bhar aye nain,
Apni sathan ka main kurta simadyun,
Batna ki do do laar
Sathan chal pari re*

(Our friend is departing and we all are full of tears. I stitch a shirt with double lines of buttons. Our friend is departing).

The following song reveals a peculiar feature of the area. A girl married in Bagar tract grumbles :—

*Ek mere bap ke char dheewarian thee
Jo behayee char koont mein
Ek Bagar Me, dujee khadar me
Te ejee Haryana me, chauthi Desh me
Rovu nai ke tere jee ne
Bhot dukhi su Bagar desh mein*

(We are four daughters of our parents. All are married in different directions. One is married in Bagar second in Khadar, third in Haryana and the fourth in a nearby area. I curse the barber who got me married in Bagar where I am very much in trouble.).

There are songs connected with all religious, social and cultural occasions and of the heroes like Alha Udai, Fatta Jaimal, Bhoora Badal, Nal Damiyanti, Satyavan Savitri and Gopi Chand Bharthri. *Ragani* is another type of folk song which is sung when a *swang* is staged.

Bhopa Bhopi—the folk singers from the adjoining Rajasthan state, frequently visit the district. They sing in praise of local deities. They also sing other popular folk songs. They use musical instruments known as *ravan hatha* and *khanjari*.

Folk dances.—Folk dancing, an outburst of surging emotions is of various kinds. Folk dances like *Daph* and *Gugga* dances are common among males while *Ghumar*, *Gangor* and *Loor* dances among females.

After harvesting, youths gather at night at the outskirts of the village and enjoy loud singing with *Daph* dance. *Daph* dance is also popular on the occasion of *Phag* (Holi) festival. On *Gugga* festival, the devotees sing and dance before the *chhari* of *Gugga* Pir.

Around Holi, 15 to 20 days before, the women assemble and enjoy dancing late in the nights. *Ghumar* and *Loor* dances are popular on these days. In *Ghumar* dance, the girls dance in a circle. The following lines are sung during *Ghumar* dance, the hero and heroine invite each other :—

*Jad O piya tera bajega dhutara,
Khula rakhu ho chubara
Jad re majejan tanai chundri chahiye,
mere dhore aaiye re majejan*

(O love, I keep my door open to wait for the sound of your dhutara (a musical instrument). Come to me. O love, when you need *chunri* (head wear).

Loor dance, popular in the Sirsa tahsil, is associated with Holi. Songs with different themes are sung with *Loor* dance. In one of the songs, son-in-law entreats his mother-in-law to send his wife with him.

*Ibke hele chhor jawaira,
kardyun charkho pidho re,
Charkho pidho gaaran bhatera.
katan ali chahiye re,
katan ali ghal majejan,
gharki lobhan chahiye re.*

(O, son-in-law, do not take my daughter this time since I want to prepare for her *charka* and *pidha* (house hold items). I have plenty of these things, I need only my wife to work on them and one who can look after household.)

Gangor dance is associated with worship of idols of Ishar and Gangor by married and unmarried girls. One of the song with Gangor dance is :—

*Hari hari dub liyo,
gangor puj liyo,
rani puje raja nein
mahe pujan suhag nein*

(Remember the God and worship Gangor. The queen worships king and I worship my husband.)

Folk-Theatre.—*Swang*¹ or *saang* is the main form of the folk-theatre of the region. For sometime past, it has been on the wane due to popularity of cinema and recorded music. The government and some voluntary organisations are making efforts to revive this old form of folk theatre.

REHABILITATION

The large scale communal disturbances that followed Independence and the Partition of the country in 1947 inflicted vast suffering on lakhs of people who were forced to migrate from Pakistan to India and vice versa. Millions of uprooted Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan entered what was then called the East Punjab (India). The problem faced by both government and people were immense and were overcome with great courage. The areas now in Haryana took a leading share in the resettlement of immigrants. A number of migrants from Pakistan settled in the areas of the Sirsa district. These were mainly from Multan, Lyallpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Bahawalpur, as evident from the statement below :—

District of Origin (in Pakistan)	Number of Displaced Persons Settled		
	Rural Areas	Urban Areas	Total
Multan	9,848	3,260	13,108
Lyallpur	3,807	1,910	5,717
Dera Ghazi Khan	1,845	991	2,836
Bahawalpur	3,740	740	4,480
Others	2,871	911	3,782
Total	22,111	7,812	29,923

1. *Saang* is a form of open-air theatre and the stage is in midst of the audience. The formalities of the drama like costumes, curtains and make-up are hardly observed. All the artists are males who perform the female roles also. The audience sit on all the four sides of the stage.

Refugee Camps

Initially two relief camps were organised in the district ; one each at Sirsa and Dabwali. The educational institutions which kept closed for some months up to February 1948, provided some of the accommodation. The services of the staff and students were utilized in the management of the camps. Students who rendered three months' social service in the camps were considered eligible for the award of certificate/degree of the Panjab University, without taking the examination.

A number of facilities were provided in the camps including free food-grains ration and clothing. A dispensary was opened for immediate medical relief. Fruits, multi-vitamin tablets and some special items of diet were issued to refugees on medical advice. Arrangements were made for cleanliness and street lighting. The camps thus provided much needed immediate relief to the displaced persons and provided breathing time to all concerned to plan their future.

Steps were taken speedily to resettle the rural refugees in villages, evacuated by the Muslims, and the urban refugees in towns.

Rural Rehabilitation

Measures were taken for the resettlement of rural displaced persons so as to get them back to normal work and to help them with the sowing of the rabi crop of 1947-48. Initially, land allotment was made on group basis. Persons who were near relatives or were bound by ties of friendship, formed together into groups and secured temporary allotments. All agricultural displaced persons who owned or held land and were cultivating in Pakistan, were eligible for such allotment. These temporary allotments were later converted into quasi-permanent allotments in April, 1948, to encourage cultivators to improve the land given to them. This was a preliminary step towards their resettlement. Claims were invited from displaced persons, and orally verified at tahsil headquarters. Unfortunately, many displaced persons made exaggerated claims and obtained excessive allotments. To defeat these tactics, the government obtained the original revenue records from Pakistan and re-verified the claims of the displaced persons. These also showed that there was a substantial difference between the land left behind in Pakistan by the incoming displaced persons and that abandoned by the Muslims in East Punjab (India). The latter was smaller. To overcome this problem, available land was converted into standard acres, and graded cuts were applied in making allotments to displaced claimants, the bigger ones receiving the largest slab of cuts.

The work of conferring final proprietary rights on allottees was taken in hand in September, 1955. Bogus and excessive allotments were cancelled, and only the genuine claim of each displaced person, verified from the revenue record received from Pakistan, was admitted. This resulted in the return to the

evacuee pool the evacuee lands usurped by displaced persons. Every effort was made to allot land of the similar quality as that left by the claimant in Pakistan.

Out of 19,785 allottees, proprietary rights have been conferred on 19,002 by March 31, 1981.

Agricultural Loans.—Allottees of land were given assistance by way of agricultural loans for purchasing bullocks, implements, fodder, seed and for the repair of wells and houses. In order to minimise misuse, loans were advanced in kind instead of cash. The following figures show the loans advanced in the district during 1947-48 to 1951-52 :—

Year	Loan Advanced (Rs.)
1947-48	3,04,012
1948-49	4,17,863
1949-50	8,58,042
1950-51	3,21,232
1951-52	68,400

No resettlement loan was disbursed after 1951-52.

Rural Housing.—Heavy rains and floods had damaged a large number of houses. According to statistics available, there were 4,200 undamaged houses, 43 repairable houses and 410 houses beyond repair in the district. Even these houses were unevenly distributed. In some villages the number of houses was in excess of the needs of the allottees, while in others almost the entire *abadies* had crumbled and not a single house was available. Houses were allotted on a temporary basis in the first instance. Rules for allotment of these houses were framed thereafter. Record, including information of the details of evacuee houses in the villages, the number of rooms, the dimensions, the general conditions and the value of the houses were prepared and lists of the allottees showing the value of houses left by them in Pakistan were also made. The *Halqa* Revenue Officer, generally a Naib Tahsildar, did the allotment work. A list giving the order of precedence was prepared. After setting aside a few houses for common purposes, allottees were given a chance of selection according to their place on the merit list.

Urban Rehabilitation

The problem of providing residential accommodation became more acute with the tendency of immigrants to settle largely in urban areas. Consequently a number of schemes to utilise the available properties left by Muslims and to develop more housing were put through. All the Muslims abandoned properties were taken over under the Punjab Evacuee Property Ordinance IV of 1947, later replaced by the Administration of Evacuee Property

Act, 1950. Such properties comprising houses, shops, vacant sites, *khali* (dilapidated houses) and industrial establishments were temporarily allotted to displaced persons on rental basis. Their permanent disposal started in 1953-54. The properties valuing below Rs. 10,000 (below Rs. 50,000 for industrial establishments) were declared allottable, while those assessed above these figures were to be sold by open auction. Properties lying vacant or in unauthorised possession were similarly auctioned.

In the urban areas of Sirsa, Dabwali and Kalanwali, there were 1117 evacuee properties which were managed by the District Rent and Managing Officers. These became a part of evacuee pool for compensating displaced persons with verified claims. Allotable properties were given away permanently as compensation to claimants against such claims. If the value of a property was in excess of his due compensation, the claimant was allowed to deposit the difference by instalments. Properties occupied by non-claimants were offered to them on annual instalments. By March 31, 1981, 1112 properties stood permanently allotted to displaced persons.

Housing Schemes.—As stated in the foregoing paragraphs, the urban housing problem was acute, following from the fact that most of the urban Muslims evacuees were labourers and artisans and, therefore, their houses were unpretentious whereas the incoming urban displaced persons were businessmen and shopkeepers, used to better dwellings. To meet the grave situation arising from the inadequate residential accommodation available and to provide suitable shelter to displaced persons, the government drew up the housing schemes such as 4-marla (cheap) tenements at Sirsa and Dabwali numbering 100 and 150 respectively.

Small Urban and House Building Loans.

The refugees were encouraged to restart their business, trade or other profession. A scheme for providing loans and grants was introduced in February 1948, under the East Punjab Refugees Rehabilitation (Loans and Grants) Act, 1948. The loan was limited to Rs. 5,000 to an individual, Rs. 20,000 to a group of 4 or more displaced persons and Rs. 25,000 to a cooperative society. The grants were restricted to unattached women, widows and others who were unable to repay loans but at the same time wanted monetary help for resettlement. The maximum amount of grant was limited to Rs. 500.

Small Urban Loans.—These loans were advanced to displaced persons to enable them to establish themselves in different vocations. All classes of displaced persons comprising traders, artisans, industrialists, students, lawyers and medical practitioners were helped. These loans carried an interest at the rate of 3 per cent per annum and the recovery of the loan

was to be started after 3 years of disbursement. The loans together with interest were repayable in equal instalments spread over a period of 6 years. The loans and grants were strictly to be utilised for the purpose for which they were asked for by the applicants or sanctioned by the government. An amount of Rs. 1,12,800 was advanced to displaced persons during 1948-49 to 1956-57. The scheme to advance small urban loan was discontinued after 1956-57.

House Building Loans.—House building loans were advanced for the purchase of plots in model towns and housing colonies to build their own houses. The repayment of the loan was on easy instalments. The scheme was started in 1949-50 and it was discontinued after 1955-56.

Payment of Compensation

Compensation was paid to displaced persons who had abandoned immovable property in Pakistan, after verifying their claims, under the Displaced Persons (Claims) Act, 1950. Interim compensation was sanctioned for certain categories of displaced persons who were in urgent need of relief. The interim scheme was later replaced by the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act, 1954. Under it, scaled compensation was prescribed. It gave proportionately more to smaller claimants and less to the bigger claimants. This compensation was paid out of the compensation pool to which the central government had contributed.

IMPACT OF DISPLACED PERSONS ON LOCAL POPULATION

The rehabilitation of displaced persons in the district had a long term beneficial effect in a variety of ways. It has influenced the socio-economic pattern of the people of the district particularly those residing in the rural areas, since 73 per cent of the total displaced persons (29,923) in the district had settled there. They soon got down to hard work and gave evidence of superior skill in cultivation. In this way, they acted as an example and stimulus in improved agricultural practices. A small number of 7,812 (27 per cent) displaced persons settled in the urban areas of the district.

Aroras from the district of Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan were sharp witted and resourceful shopkeepers and businessmen. As compared with the local business community they were more energetic and their settlement in the urban areas of the district quickened process of change. They successfully set themselves up as shopkeepers and traders and completely changed the appearance of the bazaar and to some extent brightened rural life by providing modern paraphernalia like soaps, powders, mirrors, hair clips and celluloid toys.

The energy and resourcefulness displayed by displaced persons influenced the local population and helped to shake off inertia. Inhibitions against the education of the younger generation received a jolt. The mixing of refugees with local people also influenced the later's way of living including food habits. Dress and fashions also changed. Bushirts, trousers and pyjamas co-existed with the old types of shirts and *dhotis*. The *salwar* and *kamiz*, the traditional dress of the Punjabi women, was eagerly adopted by young girls, and even some of the grown up women abandoned their traditional *ghagras*. The local women also started discarding heavy silver ornaments like bracelets and anklets. However, there was little community intermingling and marriages continued strictly confined to the respective communities.

Displaced persons are now almost completely identified with their new habitat in the district. The process of an inter-mixture of dialects is also afoot, and the displaced persons from West Punjab (Pakistan) can often fluently speak the local dialect.