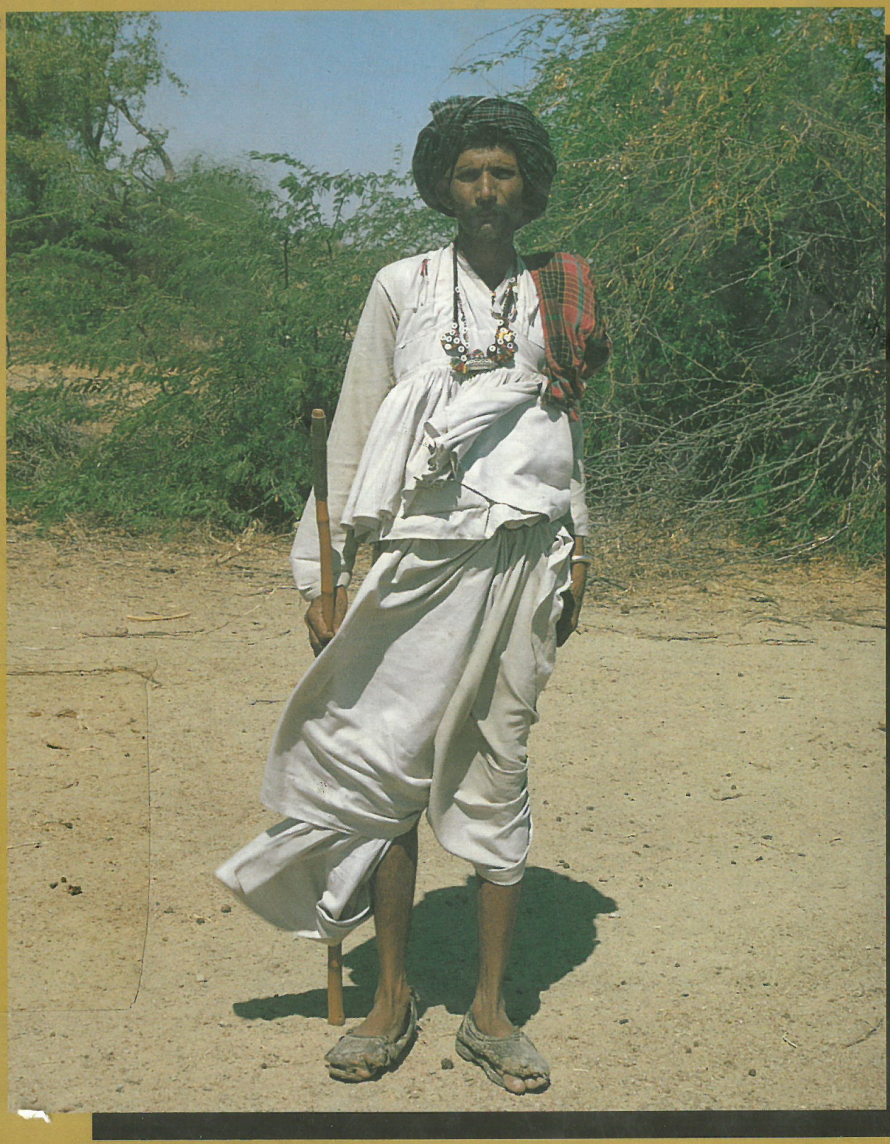
IHSAN H. NADIEM

THAR

THE GREAT PAKISTANI DESERT

LAND • HISTORY • PEOPLE



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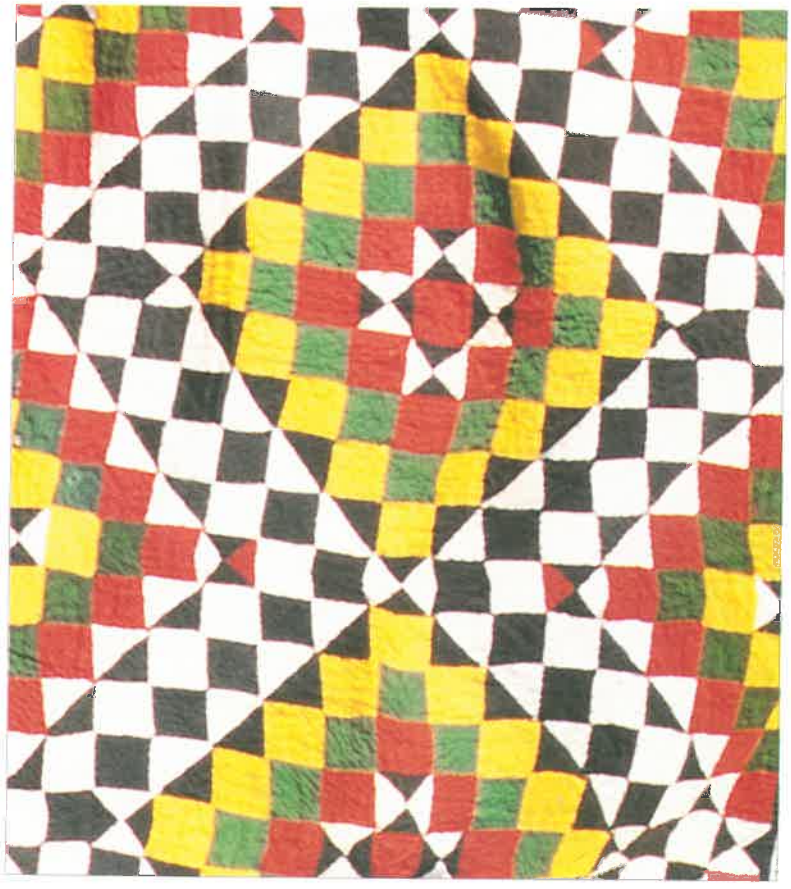

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To

Iram Ihsan Nadiem
With love and affection

Hard Day's Night

When the sun goes down,
The fiery desert winds
Turn soothingly cool.
Their shrilly bos
Change to lullabies
That force to close
The watery, reddish eyes
To a tranquil slumber
Which comes to foil
Agony of a hellish day
With scorching heat
And brazen toil.

Umerkot / May 1966

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Preface

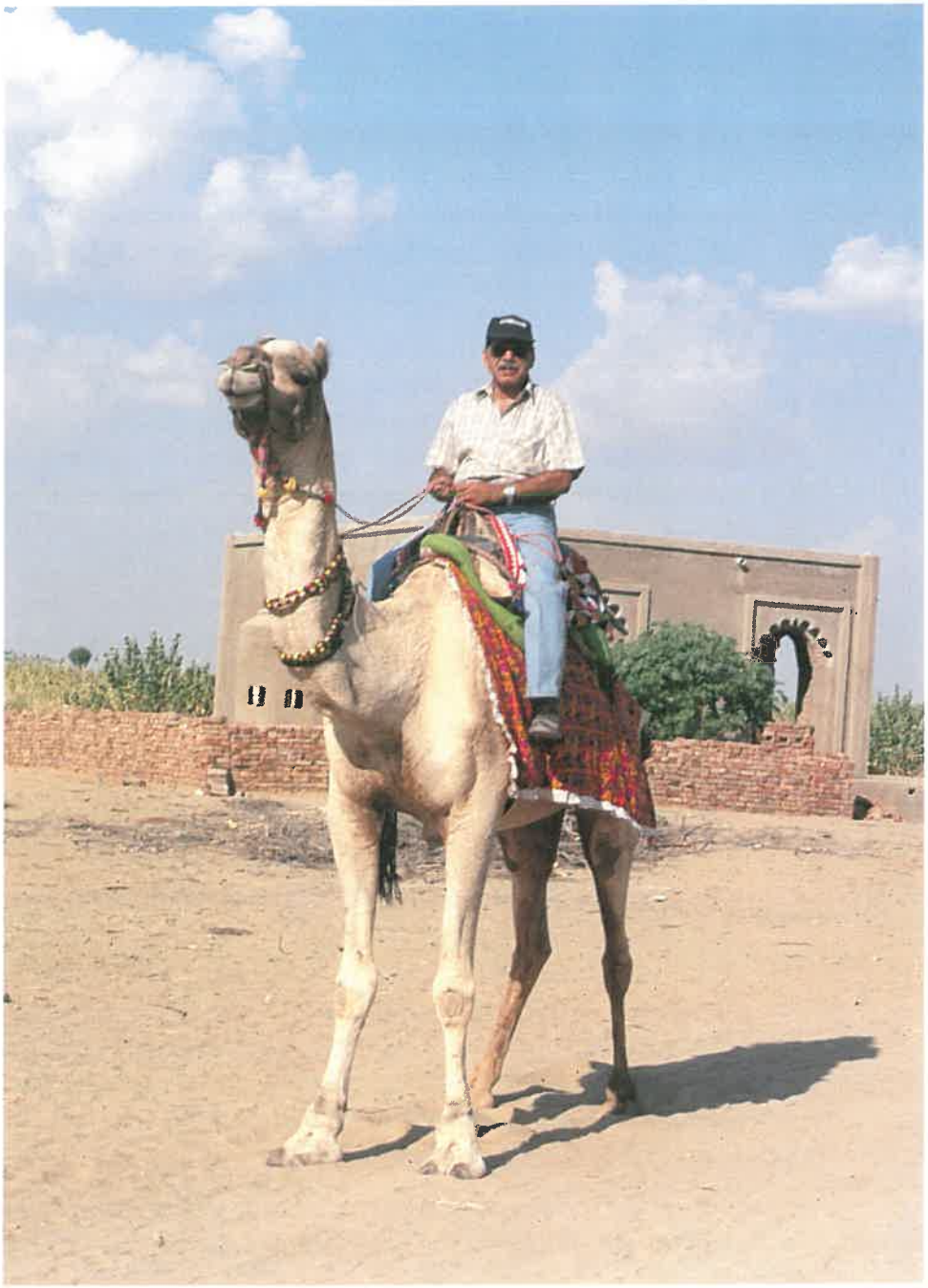
My first contact with Thar was in 1966 when I reached Umerkot on a special assignment of setting up the new museum. It was an awfully scorching May afternoon, with daytime temperature rising to over 50°C, when I arrived at my destination. The journey then itself was a real experience. There were no blacktop roads connecting Umerkot with any of the towns or cities. Either you travelled through an enormously dusty road for over 90km from Mirpurkhas, or took a metre-gauge train to Chhor railway station, some 24km, and then a rickety shuttle bus. There was no electricity to boot. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the evening had turned exceptionally cool the moment sun went down the horizon. My earlier fears of the weather being very unkind were dissipated with the fine experience of the night. Nature had compensated the troubles of the day with very enjoyable night. One of my poems written on Thar at that time, and titled 'Hard Day's Night' appears at the beginning of this book.

The sand dunes of Thar then started right from the southern edge of the fort. The coolness of the atmosphere combined with the romantic light of the full moon simply made the whole scene something out of the fairy tales. I could not resist the temptation of a walk in the wilderness over the very-inviting sand, in spite of the warnings about snakes. It was then that I experienced for the first time what sweetness the rhythmic music of wind in the desert has to

enchant any soul. I just fell in love with Thar. And since then I have been visiting it quite off and on and preparing notes, recording on audio-cassettes different interviews and taking photographs. Alas, some of these records have been misplaced or deteriorated in quality due to my frequent shifting of residences under the compulsion of my postings.

At that time I was a young officer without much of the basic infrastructure to satiate my desire of enjoying Thar. In those days some of my local friends came to the rescue. The foremost to mention is Mir Muhammad Bakhsh Talpur, a senior but very pleasing personality. He was then the Vice-Chairman of the District Council, Tharparkar. He was a very well read scholar and so kind that he would share his knowledge about history, ethnography and linguistics even with young students like myself. He had the necessary paraphernalia and other means to travel to and halt or study deep in Thar. He would even drive his Land Cruiser for hours only to see me comfortably sitting in the front seat. He was a wonderfully jolly character and much respected in the area where-ever we went. I lament his demise and pray to Allah to bestow on him His bounties in the other world. I missed him so much when I got the opportunity to write on Thar.

Another good friend who was always around to give company or to provide jeep on trips to different sites in Thar was Thakur Jaitmal Singh. Himself a member of the old ruling family of Rajputs he was a law graduate but keen scholar of history and ethnography. He would accompany me to the Shiva-*mandar* and translate for me the Sanskrit manuscript with the *Prohet,* so that I could take notes of the selected portions. We lost contact many years after my posting out of Umerkot. I am not aware as to his whereabouts presently but would most sincerely thank him



Author travelling through Thar

for the troubles he had then taken.

Still another friend who was a great help in my sojourns to Thar, especially on hunting trips, was Dada Shah. He belonged to the Pir family and later in life he ascended the *gadi*. He had his family's *murids,* disciples, scattered all over Thar. It was, therefore, always very convenient hence rewarding to travel with him. I also lament his sad and untimely death in 1999. May his soul rest in peace.

After setting up the museum at Umerkot, and getting it inaugurated by Kazi Anwarul Haq, then Minister for Education of the Government of Pakistan, in 1968, I was transferred to Lahore. After many years of serving at different places in various capacities I once again came in contact with Thar in 1992 as Director, Southern Circle of Archaeology. I was stationed at Hyderabad and then Karachi till 1995.In the second stint from 1998 to date I again had the chance of coming back to this region. With this background of my exposure to Thar, my friend Chaudhry Niaz Ahmad of Sang-e-Meel Publications forcefully urged me to write a monograph on different aspects of Thar. In fact he proved to be the moving force behind this book. He seemed to be in love with Thar even before he had set his sight on it. Allah granted his wish when I, with the arrangements of Dada Shah, took him deep into the Dhat area. I could see him simply fascinated with the experience. It was after I had nodded to his suggestion that I have had numerous more chances to visit Thar and meet people of different age groups and several strata of society. This has helped me especially in writing the chapters on Flora and Fauna, Cultural Traits and, to some extent, Races and Clans and Physiography.

I would fail in my duty if I do not mention my friends who helped me towards the successful completion of this project.

At Hyderabad, Mirza Fateh Ali Baig and Mirza Manzur Ali Baig were a great help in procuring the hard-to-find books and other written material so very necessary to complete such a project. Both of the Baigs are well-read persons and belong to a scholarly family of the area. I am indebted to their unstinted cooperation in seeing to the completion of the assignment. I also had the opportunity to discuss the subject over several sittings with Abdul Qadir Junejo, very well known playwright and once director of Sindhology. He himself hails from Thar and his knowledge of the desert is enviable.

No less I am thankful to some other friends who spared their precious time to divulge in lengthy discourses telling about their experiences of Thar and imparting their knowledge about the desert. Among them are *Chacha* Nawaz Ali, Muhammad Ashraf and Abdul Aziz, all Khosas of Nagarparkar. I am also grateful to Bhano Mál Bhil, Patail of village Gorri, and his brother Pehlaj who being at Mithi and in easy access through telephone was always helpful in making impressive arrangements. Their nephew, Guljee, a young boy with smiling face would act as guide most willingly.

My friend Ghulam Hassan Burdi, Officer-in-Charge of Umerkot Museum, was most helpful in many ways. He also arranged to prepare afresh some of the photographs which I had incidentally got lost during processing. He also managed well some of my trips to Thar and meetings with relevant persons like Seth Jagdesh Kumar, Madan Lal Sonara of Umerkot and Master Muhammad Idrees Rahuma and Veraro Meghwarr of village Annopani. I am thankful to him as also to those mentioned. Similarly, I owe my sincere thanks to Shehzor Tabani for the photographs of the dioramas showing Umer Marvi and Mumal Rano.

I am also grateful to my friend Qasim Ali Qasim, Deputy Director in the Federal Department of Archaeology and himself a prolific writer, to give me his time to discuss many a point.

Muhammad Abdul Qayyum did the fair work of some of my drawings of built heritage. I am grateful to him for working in his leisure hours.

During my present spell of posting in Sindh driver Arif Masih was most helpful in many ways. He not only used to take care of the vehicle but also proved himself to be a dependable manager of odd affairs encountered on such adventurous travels to Thar. With him I am also thankful to Ghulam Hussain and both the sons of Niamat - himself my old attendant.

Dr Harchand Rai, a very senior scholar, not only spared his time to discuss the subject but also showed the ethnographic material in his private collection. I am grateful to him too.

I also offer my thanks to Muhammad Rafique Dogar, a journalist and a renowned author of many books, for being readily available to discuss some scholastic points during the study of Thar, and writing of this book.

At Lahore, I am most appreciative of the cooperation and cheers offered by Chaudhry Ijaz Ahmad and Chaudhry Afzaal Ahmad, especially during the printing process of this book. For designing title, my thanks go to Ayaz Ali.

It seems incumbent upon me to record the words of encouragement from my family. Without such understanding of Suraiya, Asem, Iram and Asef - as also Ujala and Zoya Asef - it would have been impossible for me to take so much of their time to devote to Thar. I am thankful to them all.

I may also mention here that while writing this monograph I tried to find out if there were any standard set for transliteration of Thari words. I could not lay my hands on any that would be followed by all. I have, therefore, formulated my own in some cases to keep the flavour of the Thari language. The hard "r" in Thari, for instance, is usually changed with "d" in English e.g. Jarreja is written as Jadeja. However, I have preferred to use "rr" for it as the sound of "d" already exists and often goes to confuse some words with others, or take out the whole beauty from a vibrant word.

The time period has been denoted by following the Gregorian calendar and as such no abbreviated prefix or suffix has been used. However, the Hijra year precedes A.H. while Bikrami era has a prefix of the word Sambat. Similarly metric system has been followed for measures and the internationally acknowledged symbols like km for kilometre, m for metre and cm for centimetre appear in this monograph.

The photographs and drawings are my own love's labour, unless of course credited otherwise.

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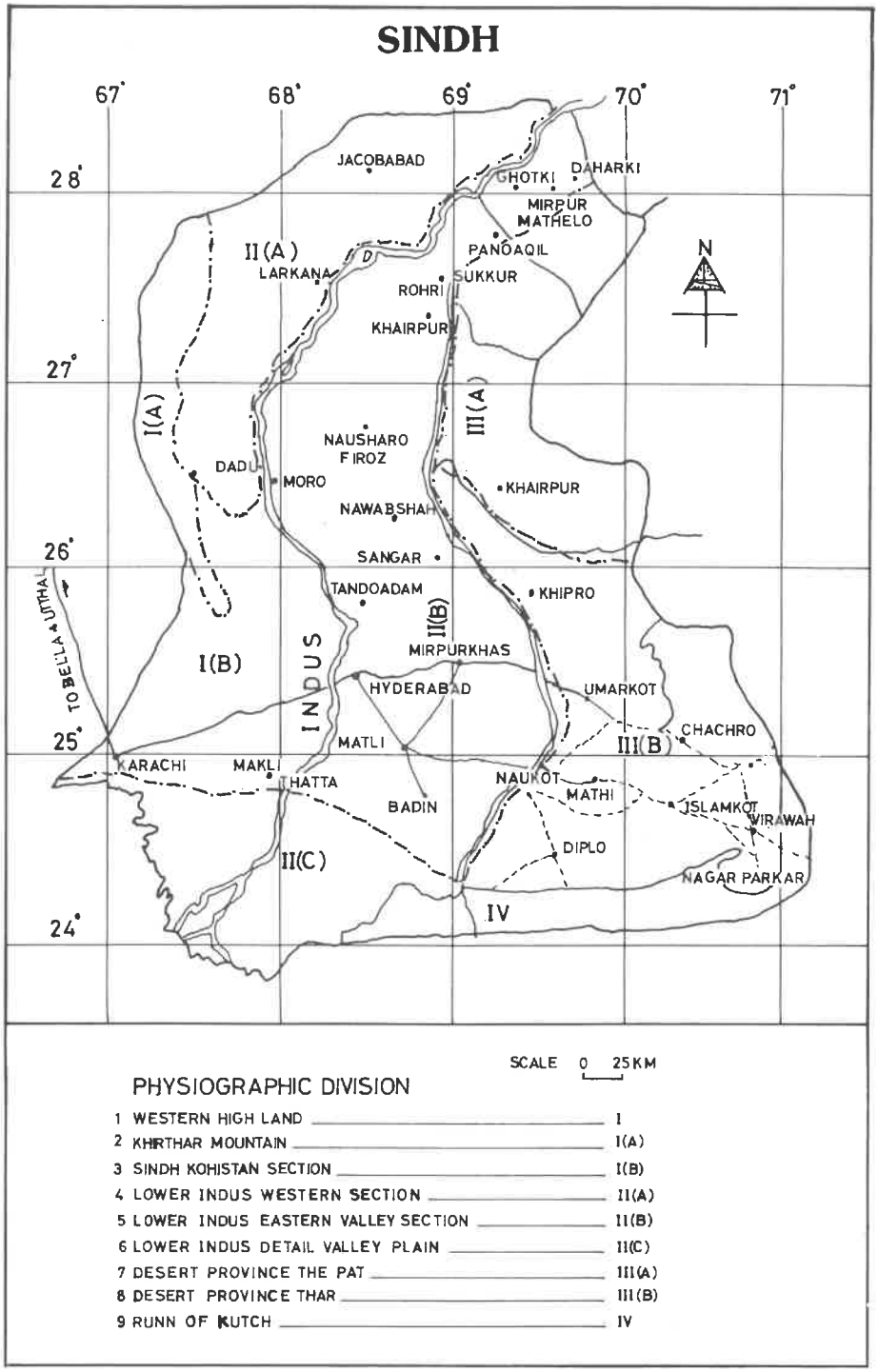
Ihsan H.Nadiem
Director of Archaeology
Southern Circle
Hyderabad
Dated: 4th March, 2000

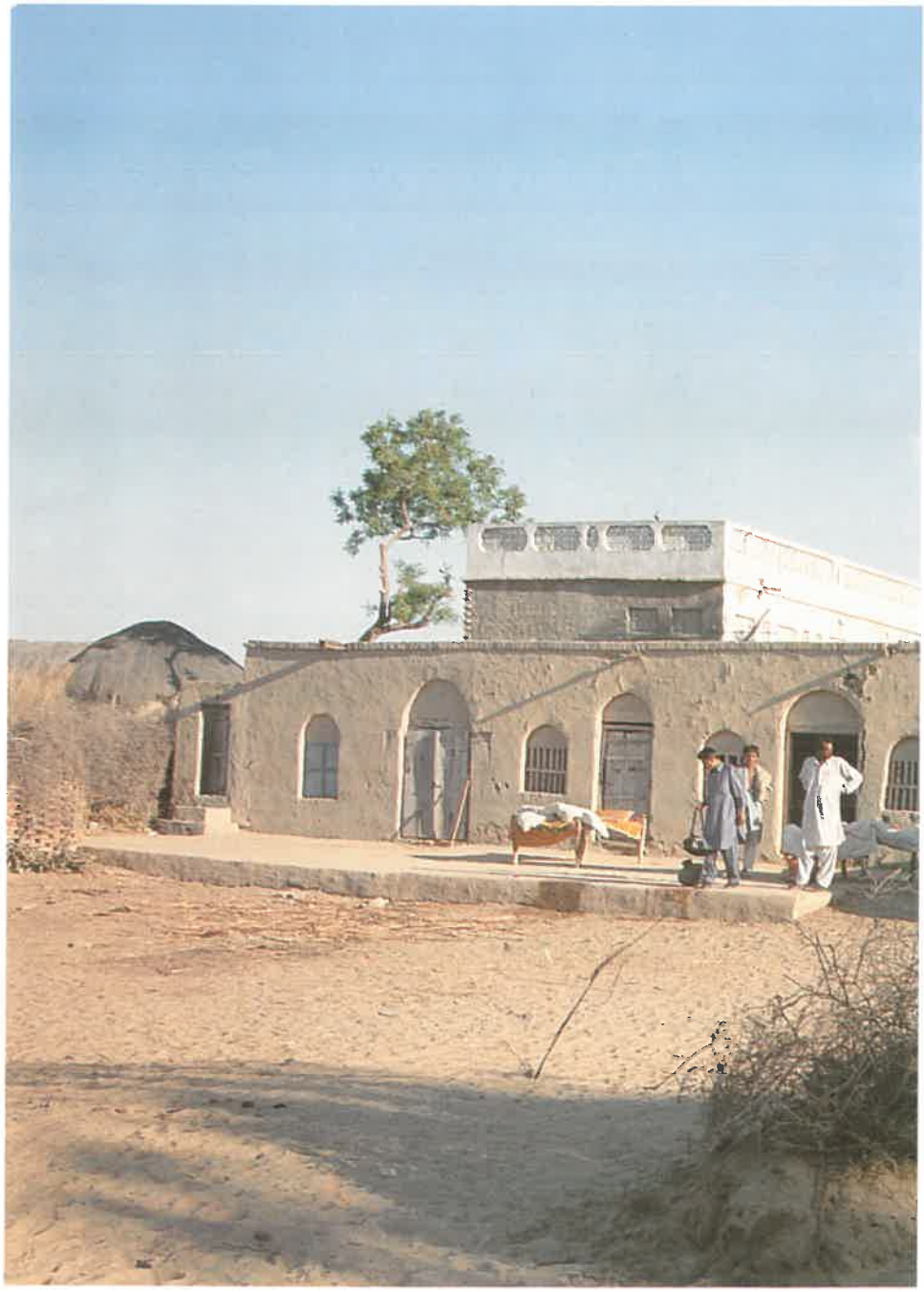
Prologue

The large tract of sandy area, sparsely inhabited, runs almost along the whole of the eastern length of the Sindh province of Pakistan. This desert land, known as Thar, consists of large sand hills or *bhits,* small sand dunes and some *dhands* or shallow salt lakelets which are fed by rain and dry up soon if the nature does not favour with more water from the sky. The phenomenon of drought is so frequent that mostly the whole desert area remains one of the worst hit regions of famine.

The Great Desert is such a vast region that it presents varied types of physiography, different types of microclimate, various languages and dialects, and change in vegetation and type of cultivation, where possible, from one part to the other. The hostile conditions of the land combined with virtually non-existent perennial sources of water, make the living in Thar a difficult proposition. While the pastoral tribes of Thar move about with their flocks and settle temporarily wherever they find a water spot or pasture for their cattle, the settled ones are no different in the making and styling their houses. They construct temporary dome-shaped thatched huts called *chownra* or *bhunji* depending on its size. Only occasionally are seen houses built of sun-dried or burnt bricks in villages or hamlets. These normally belong to the ones whom nature has favoured abundantly, or are those to be used as *autak* for the guests.

Thanks to the difficult terrain and hostile living conditions,


SINDH
67°
68°
69°
70°
71°
28°
27°
26°
25°
24°
JACOBABAD
GHOTKI
DAHARKI
MIRPUR MATHELO
PANOAQIL
SUKKUR
ROHRI
KHAIRPUR
LARKANA
II(A)
I(A)
III(A)
NAUSHARO FIROZ
DADU
MORO
KHAIRPUR
NAWABSHAH
SANGAR
TANDOADAM
KHIPRO
TOBE'LA UTTHAL
I(B)
INDUS
II(B)
MIRPURKHAS
HYDERABAD
UMARKOT
CHACHRO
III(B)
MATLI
KARACHI
MAKLI
THATTA
BADIN
NAUKOT
MATHI
ISLAMKOT
VIRAWAH
DIPLO
II(C)
NAGAR PARKAR
IV
N
SCALE 0 25KM
PHYSIOGRAPHIC DIVISION
1 WESTERN HIGH LAND — I
2 KHIRTHAR MOUNTAIN — I(A)
3 SINDH KOHISTAN SECTION — I(B)
4 LOWER INDUS WESTERN SECTION — II(A)
5 LOWER INDUS EASTERN VALLEY SECTION — II(B)
6 LOWER INDUS DETAIL VALLEY PLAIN — II(C)
7 DESERT PROVINCE THE PAT — III(A)
8 DESERT PROVINCE THAR — III(B)
9 RUNN OF KUTCH — IV



A village *autak*

Kekrra, deep in Thar

the whole desert is far less influenced by the outside world than a more receptive region would have been prone to. This has, on the other hand, helped in preserving local traditions and cultural traits for a much longer time. The large *bhits* - sand-hills - and smaller but scattered sand dunes have made it less accessible as the means of transport are limited to camel, donkey and, though not very common, horse. Lately the very odd type of motor vehicles locally nicknamed *Kekrra* has been plying on the sandy tracks. This mode of transport would carry on it human beings, animals and the loads of material all at the same time.

The land of Thar, the way of its inhabitants, peculiarity of its physical features, a particular type of climate and its natural life combine together to make it an interesting region to study and understand different elements making it a land different from others.

Origin of the Name

According to some scholars the word Thar has been derived from the Sanskrit '*stubble*' which goes to mean 'not flowing' or the arid land and without any river. It changed to *Hal* - again arid as against *Jal* meaning water. The word in its corrupted form was pronounced as *Thar* by local inhabitants hence the name. (Advani) However, there are others who think that the name *Thar* comes from *thul*, the general term for the region's sand ridges. (Britannica)

The desert - Registan

In ancient times the entire desert region 'from Sutlej to the ocean' was known as *marusthali* or *marusthan*, meaning land or region of death. It is also called *maroos-desa* or *maroos-des* - standing for country of death - simply abbreviated as *maroo*.(Tod-II:1) It is also commonly known as *maroo thul*, the death area of sands or desert.

The Thar is also known as *Registan* , the Persian combination of *reg* meaning sand and *stan* standing for place or region making it a place or region of sand. Similarly, the *bhits* or sand-hills are also called *Thari* by the locals. In this way in general speech the Thar is sometimes referred to as the *Thari* country (*Thari jo mulk*) or *Thari* land. (Harijan-I:2)

A closer view of Sand-dune

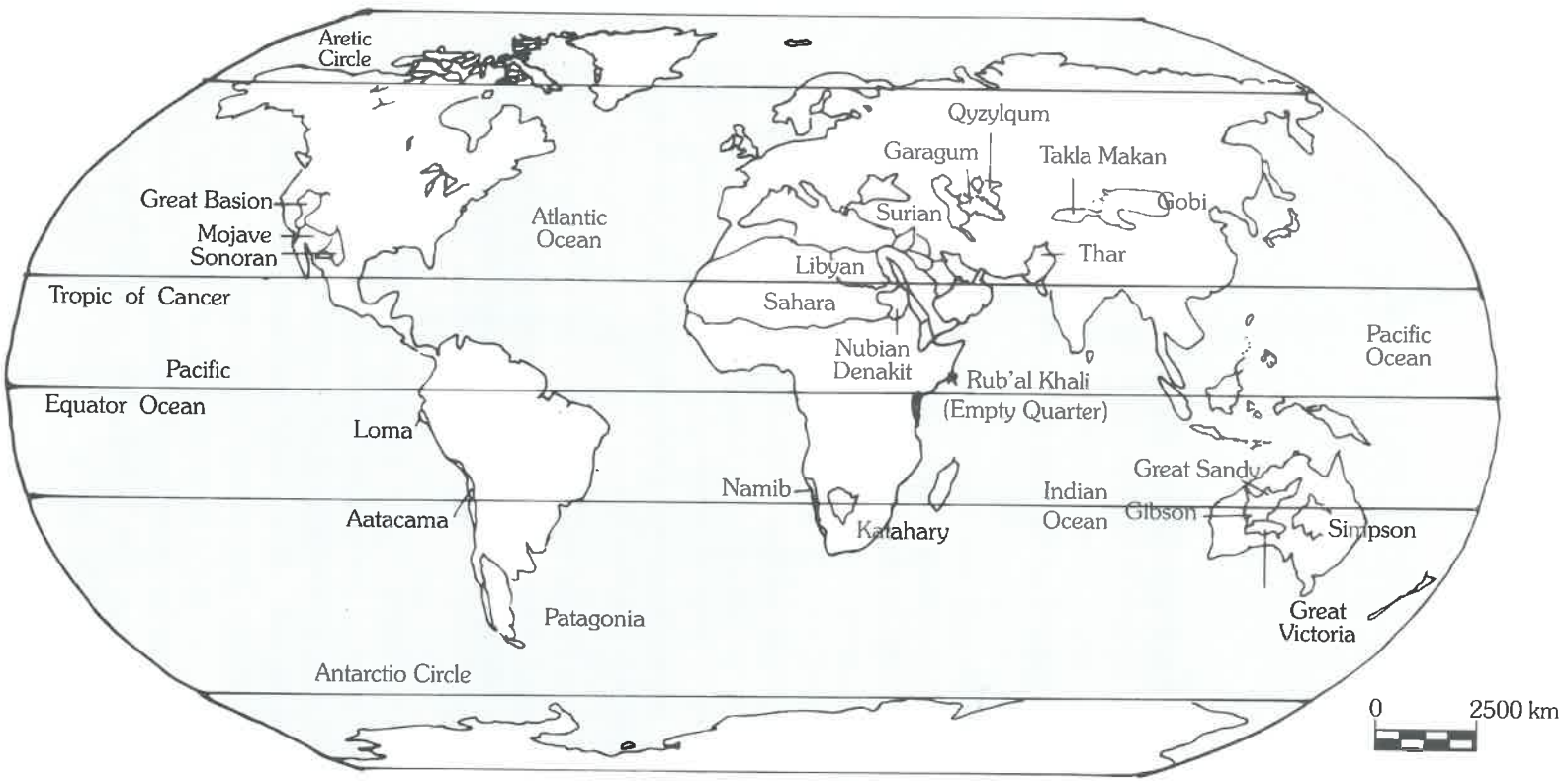
Formation of World Deserts

The term desert, Persian *Registan*, generally applies to those regions of earth with particular characteristics of having an average annual rainfall of less than 254mm, an evaporation rate that exceeds precipitation, and a high average temperature. The lack of moisture in the soil with low humidity in the atmosphere causes most of the sunlight to penetrate into the ground. It raises its daytime temperature, sometimes, to over 55°C in the shade. During the night the ground heat radiates back to the atmosphere causing temperature fall to near freezing point. This large variation in diurnal temperature affects, among other things, on the landmass producing sand by breaking up the hard rock into tiny bits.

Deserts are caused by a combination of climate patterns and geological features, the most prominent among them are the Wind Systems, Ocean Currents and Land Formation.

Most of the desert regions have been formed as a result of movement of air masses over the earth. As the planet turns over its axis, it produces gigantic air swirls. Hot air rising over the equator flows northward and southward: The currents cool in the higher latitudes and descend as high-pressure areas in the two sub-tropical zones. North and south of these zones are two more areas of ascending air and low pressure. Still farther north and south are the two polar regions of descending air hence high-pressure areas.

WORLD DESERT REGIONS



As a general rule when the air rises, it cools and loses its moisture. As it descends, it warms and picks up moisture, leaving the land dry.

The downward movements of warm air masses over the earth have produced two belts of deserts, one along the tropic of Cancer in the northern hemisphere and the other along the tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere. Among the deserts of the northern hemisphere are the Gobi in China, those of southwestern North America, the Sahara in North Africa, the Arabian and the Iranian deserts in the Middle East, and the Great Desert of the South Asia Subcontinent i.e. Thar. Along the southern belt lie Patagonia in Argentina, the Kalahari in southern Africa and the Great Victoria and Great Desert of Australia.

Some desert regions result from the influence of ocean currents on landmasses. As the cold waters move from the polar regions towards the equator and come into contact with the edges of the continents, they are augmented by the upwelling of the cold water from the ocean depths. Air currents cool as they move across cold water, carrying fog and mist but little rain. This causes the particular landmasses to turn into deserts. The coastal regions of Southern California, South West Africa and Chile are the examples of such deserts.

Land formation sometimes plays a major role in creating desert regions. Mountain ranges influence greatly the development of deserts by creating rain shadows. As the moisture-laden winds flow upward over the windward slopes of these high barriers, they cool and lose their moisture in the form of rain and snow. Dry air descending on the leeward slopes evaporates moisture from the soil. The Great Basin, a desert in North America, is a good example of this type.

The desert areas in the interior of some continents have been formed due to the prevailing winds being far removed from large bodies of water as a result of which they lose much of their moisture by the time they reach these regions. The Gobi Desert is also the result of this phenomenon of air movement.(Britannica)

Desertification Elements of Thar

The geographical reasons, which might have turned the Thar region into a huge desert, may be varied and complex. However, some of the causes of its origin may be as follows:-

a) Sub-aerial Denudation:

The geological evidence shows the one-time presence of solid rocks in the region. Whatever of it existed in the area, it has suffered destruction through "the process of desquamation" producing characteristic topographical features "of sand blasted, treeless landscapes, one sees for miles under a clear, cloudless sky". (Pithawalla:50)

The diurnal as well as seasonal variation of temperatures is noticeably large, which acts on the solid mass strongly. In the absence of any organic or chemical agency to turn this debris into soil or humus it is turned into hostile deposits of sand.

b) Aeolian Deposits:

There are enormous deposits of wind-blown sand, transported from the shallow Rann of Kutch and the coastal area in the south of Thar. Movement of sand grains by the wind causes dunes to grow in height as well as to migrate from one place to the other. Seen from the air, dune shapes vary from crescentic to ridge-like; however, all dunes are asymmetric in cross section. The side facing

the wind is always longer and less steep than the leeward side. The sand drifting takes place on a gigantic scale during SW monsoon season.

Rounded grains of quartz, felspar, mica and hornblende found in the sand of Thar, show the disintegrated igneous rocks from the Himalayas and the Aravallis, have been transported here in the past ages. The presence of calcareous grains indicates the decomposition of seashells on the coastline. (Pithawalla:50)

c) Lost Rivers:

The whole region witnesses quite a few old beds of rivers. Their drying up has left the area without water hence desertification.

d) Salts:

The presence of salts like chloride of sodium (common salt) in the soil, renders the land barren. The rainwater collected in ponds soon evaporates due to strong sun leaving behind salts on the ground.

Thar, to some scientists, cannot be called a typical desert, it is neither entirely barren, nor rainless. It is also not completely uninhabitable. There are certain dried up courses of ancient rivers, especially towards north, and remains of ruined habitation places along these beds. Even the course of Nara River shows that the area must have been far more prosperous than today. Unfortunately, no systematic archaeological survey has been conducted in this region to chart its past with some degree of accuracy. However, as a result of systematic survey in the neighbouring Cholistan about a dozen habitation sites have already been revealed along the dried-up Hakra river and some other courses of smaller rivers. (Auj)

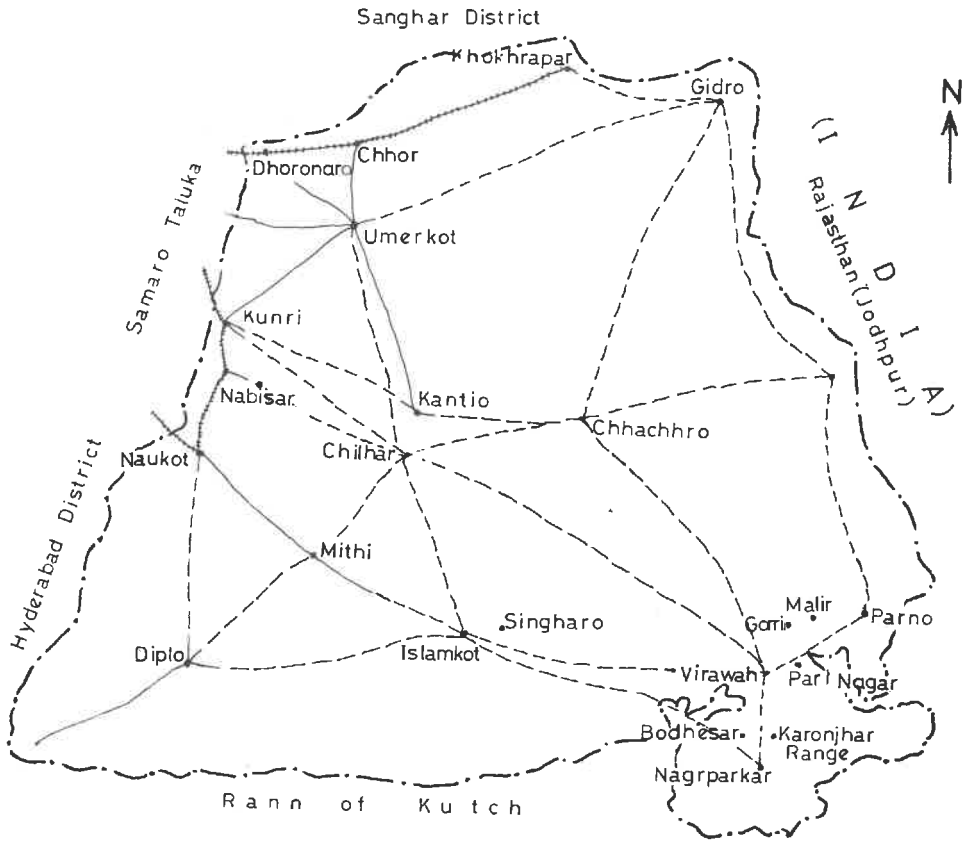
The Parkar Area

As against Thar, Parkar area - situated in the southeast corner, is flat and level except in the vicinity of the town of Nagarparkar, where there is an extensive area of elevated land - forming roughly a crescent shape - known as the Karunjhar Hills, composed mostly of syenite rock. (Hughes) These isolated hills differ materially from every other rock occurrence in Sindh. They belong to the Dharwar and other pre-Cambrian systems and are, therefore, associated with the neighouring Aravalli range. (Pithawalla:7) It also differs from the rest in the matter of rainfall, which averages a good 380mm.

Karunjhar Range

THAR & PARKAR

BOUNDRIES MAJOR ROUTES
AND CITIES / TOWNS



Geological Formation:

The desert sands of Thar cover early Precambrian gneiss, which are granite like metamorphic rocks formed in the oldest geologic era which began 3.8 billion years ago, sedimentary rocks from about 2.5 billion to 570 million years old, and more recent material deposited by rivers (alluvium). The surface sand is aeolian (wind-deposited) sand of the Quaternary Period. The latter is the most recent geologic period which began about 1.6 million years ago.

The desert consists of an undulating surface, with high and

Sand-dunes in stabilised condition

low *bhits* or sand dunes separated by sandy plains and low barren hills or *bhakars*, which crop up abruptly from the surrounding plains. Most of the sand dunes drift gradually taking on various shapes and different sizes. Other dunes, which are older ones mostly with arid-zone vegetation, are in semi-stabilized or stabilized condition. Many of these latter type of dunes rise to the height of almost 150m. The playas, called *dhands* are, however, found scattered throughout the region.

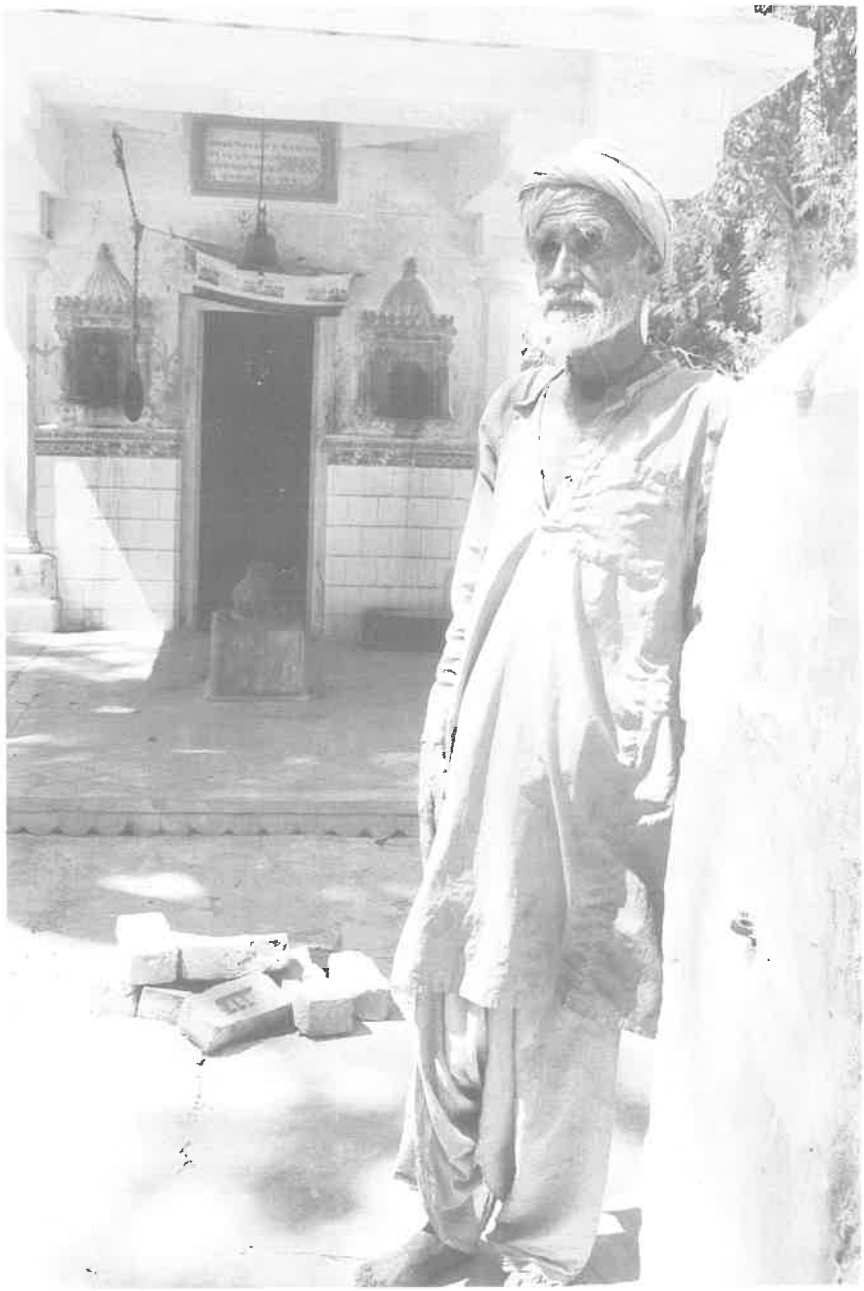
There are seven main groups of soils, which are found in the Thar proper. These are: desert soils, red desertic soils, sierozems (brownish gray soils), the red and yellow soils of the foothills, the saline soils of the depressions, and the lithosols (shallow, weathered soils) and rigosols (soft loose soils) found in the hills. All these soils are predominantly coarse-textured, well drained, and calcareous in nature. (Britannica) At varying depths a thick accumulation of lime may also be encountered. The soils of Thar are usually overblown with sand due to severe wind erosion. In general, these are infertile soils.

The *bhits* or the sand-hills are relatively smaller in the east though it is not uncommon to face some larger ones as well. Similarly, these *bhits* are comparatively smaller in the north than those in the south, especially in the latter region, towards Mithi, they are quite large in size. At some places they occur in large frequency while at others they are thinly scattered over vast areas. In the northern region, for example, there are over 140 such sand-hills over an area of about 50km from Umerkot to Kantio. (Harijan-I:4)

The *bhits*' higher side is locally known as *tarrkol* while other side is called as *gochar*. The portion where they meet is distinguished as *bukkarr*. The upper side is called *mathari* with the opposite as *puchhando*. The plain area

in-between two sand-hills has its name as *dhar.* As it is difficult to climb straight because of the sand factor, these *bhits* are scaled diagonally, the track so formed is called *ubhaj.* (Personal communication/Harijan:4)

These *bhits* have locally given names. The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India in the year 1863 recorded them, giving height of most of these hills of sand. Some of these, which are more prominent, and over 120m in height, are: Kankar Bhit, perhaps the most outstanding of all, Lonki Bhit (180m) - lies in the north of Dadai Tarr, Snador Bhit (125m) , Urniaro Bhit (149m), Rojhro Bhit (160m), Dharendro Bhit (162m), Alamsar Bhit (150m), Kari Bhit (183m) - lies about three kilometres off Goth Bhisarno, Jhond Bhit (120m) - located by the side of hamlets of the same name; Verahro Bhit (141m), Gangamaro Bhit (132m), Vesorhi Bhit - lies east of Sahu jo Tarr, Dinodhi Bhit (157m) - situated north of Tighosar, Dhokani Bhit - east of Charnor, Jharakali Bhit - east of Jendi jo Tarr, Bhaniari Bhit - by the side of Tarr Hameer, Kokar Bhit, Shahmeer Bhit - north of Shahmeer ji Tarr, Soniah Bhit, Hadari Bhit, Kasalkot Bhit - there are two sand-hills known by this name, one of them on the western side of Charnor while the other near Kantio, Sami Bhit - east of Meghe ji Tarr, Saini ji Bhit - west of Chhachhro, Keel Bhit - north of Mithi, Jhirkali Bhit, Kohrarhi Bhit - south of Chilhar, Mehki Bhit, Uttenhi, Gogtiari etc. etc.



Boundaries

The Thar which lies within the desert belt of the tropics, between latitudes 24°N and 28°N is bound on the western side by the course of the Eastern Nara or Dhoro Puran as far as latitude 26°N. From here it extends northeast along the edge of the sand-hills up to Cholistan which in fact can be reckoned as continuation of the same sandy tract into the province of Punjab. On east it crosses the political boundary and enters into Rajputana, the areas of Jaiselmer and Rajasthan beyond which lie the Aravalli Range and the chains and forests of Vindhyas and the Satpuras. (Pithawalla:7) In fact the whole region makes to become the Great Desert of South Asia. Towards its southeast lies the Parkar area with Rann of Kutch and Gujerat state beyond. The entire western boundary, as already said, is provided by Sindh where there are irrigated and settled plains.

The western portion is known as Pat or plain and Dhado or hard land, and consists of some of the areas of Umerkot (Hughes) Nara and Mirpurkhas. This Division, in its western part, lies from 15m to 30m higher than the dead level of the Sindh Plain, where some of the sand-hills may be up to a height of 30m, still not as high as those of Thar. On its northern and western sides, in the Sanghar *Taluka,* the soil is loose and sandy, but to the east it is covered with sand-hills. Prior to the introduction of canal system of irrigation, it presented a dry and arid appearance, due to the poor and insufficient supply of water in the Nara. (Hughes)

The whole area of Thar encompasses around 200,000 square km and is stretched over India and Pakistan. The area that falls in Pakistan is generally divided into 7 *talukas*, with 23 *tapas*, 62 *dehs* and over 2,000 small villages and hamlets. It consists of a

tract of sand-hills, in appearance like the waves of a sea, running northeast and southwest. These hills of sand continue to rise higher from east to west, and are composed of a fine but coherent sand. There are no canals or rivers of any kind in the Thar proper at present. However, in many parts of Thar numerous beds of rivers, locally known as *nadi*, long dried up, are found intersecting arid tract. This would go to show that the water of the Indus or some other lost rivers like Hakra once flowed through it, 'fertilizing what is now a wilderness' and finally entering the sea through one of the mouths or the Rann, the great marsh of Kutch. This extinct river, also known as Ghaggar, is said to rise in the Siwalik Range, northwestern Himachal Pradesh of India, and flows about 320km southwest through Haryana state, where it receives the Saraswati River. It eventually loses itself in the sands of the Thar Desert. The Ghaggar was probably once an affluent of the Indus (Sindh) River. Its seasonal flow now is dependent on monsoon rainfall. (Britannica)

It is not uncommon to find different names assigned to each of the rivers at different places. This makes it difficult to ascertain the path of any particular river over the centuries. The legendary river of Hakra, which is firmly reckoned by the archaeologists and historians, is one such body of water, which flowed here long time ago and had been known by different names. The Tarikh-i-Tahiri states:

> "Below the town of Alor flowed the river of Punjab, which was indefinitely called by the three names of Kakra, Wahind and Dahin and by others for the name changes at every village it flows by. After fertilizing the land the river pours its water into the ocean." (Elliot and Dowson-I)

The Ghaggar, Nara and Hakra are also the names assigned to the same river now lost to antiquity. In one of the old maps published by Major Raverty in his celebrated book 'Mihran of Sind' Hakra is shown as rising in the Himalayas east of the Sutlej and flowing down past the town of Umerkot into the Gulf of

Kutch. There it is called Ghaggar.

Long after it ceased to be an independent river, its bed Nara was used as channel through which the floodwaters of the Indus were guided down to the Dhoro Puran, the ancient channel of the Indus and into the Kori Creek.

In the Indus Delta Country M.R. Haig (Pp 2-3) writes about the lost rivers as,

> "This alluvial tract is everywhere furrowed by ancient river channels, some continuous throughout the Delta region, and for many miles above it, but very many other in a more or less obliterated condition, and traceable but for short distance. Among the former we find on the extreme border a channel with a very old and interesting history. This is the Hacro, which skirts the sand-hills and runs into the Puran about twenty miles north of the Rann of Kach. Hacro is a name in modern times restricted to the lower part of what has become a flood-channel of the Indus, and is now known as the Nara, but it once belonged to an entirely independent river, of which the Nara channel formed a part. The course of this river, may be traced throughout Sind, in the north of which it bears the name of Wandan; through Bahawalpur, where the name Hacra or Hacro reappears, but is eventually replaced by that of Sudharah and other; thence through the north of Bikaner, and onward beyond Rajputana to the foot of Himalaya. The opinion that this 'Lost River', as it has been called, was no other than the Sutlej, which some centuries ago forsook its original bed not far from the point where it leaves the mountains and turning north-westward into the valley of Biyah, eventually mingled its water with those of the latter river has been ably maintained by a writer in the Calcutta Review. Whether this has been proved or not, its certain that the Hacro of Lower Sind was formerly a part of an independent stream the drying up of which has been calamitous, not

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> only in reducing thousands of square miles of once fertile land and inhabited country to waste and solitude, but also in forcing a vast additional body of water into the already overcharged channel of the Indus, thus enormously increasing the risk of desolating floods along the lower course of that river."

There is also still echo of some of the names of other, though smaller, rivers. A few of them remembered by old folk are:1)Godhiro ji Nadi; 2) Fogarri; 3) Ghartiari; 4) Sankrio; 5) Kharririo; 6) Jhinger; 7) Saboosar; 8)Warrian wari Nadi; 9) Soodhran Nadi; 10) Sanghori ji Nadi; 11) Dahji Nadi; 12) Maoo ji Nadi; 13) Puranwah ji Nadi; 14) Bhatiani Nadi etc. etc. (Personal communication).

Physiographic Divisions

The desert of Thar is so vast and gigantic that its physiographic properties vary markedly from one region to the other. The area is thus divided into different parts, each unit having similar

physiographic nature, physical features, microclimatic division, ethnological significance, language spoken etc. etc. On the basis

of these, it is bracketed into nine divisions.(Harijan-I:12). These main physiographic divisions of the Thar are as follows:-

1. Kaerr Thar:

It covers the area from Chhachhro to Thoro towards east and goes up to Gadro towards north. In this area the sand-hills or *bhits* are relatively smaller and mostly look like *Darra* or mounds of sand scattered over the area, with some flat land in-between. The trees are conspicuous because of their scarcity. The inhabitants of the division are called *Kaerria.*

2. Kantho Thar:

This division encompasses the area between Kaerr in the north and Nagarparkar in the south. This region is distinguished by the presence of large *bhits* or sand-hills. The land is fertile hence cultivable provided it gets enough precipitation.

3. Parkar Area:

Although contiguous to the desert land of Thar it is not at all the sandy tract like the former. It covers the area consisting of southern portion of *taluka* Nagarparkar. There are no sand dunes or *bhits* in this area. It joins the marshy Rann of Kutch in the south. The outcrop of hills including Karunjhar range covers quite a bit of this area. The land is fertile and cultivable.

At the edge of Parker

4. Samroti Thar:

The area of Samroti Thar covers the south and western portions of *taluka* Mithi and the northern portion of *taluka* Diplo. The land here is also fertile and where water is made available wheat, onion and *jawar* are cultivated. The inhabitants of this region are called *Samrotia.*

5. Wango Thar:

This division consists of the desert portion situated west of *taluka* Diplo. The *bhits* are of medium size.

6. Wat:

It covers the area between Samroti Thar in the north and Rann of Kutch in the south, which makes southern portions of *talukas* Mithi and Diplo. The *bhits* are of smaller size and lie scattered over the area.

7. Mohrano Thar:

It consists of the Thar part of the western portions of *taluka* Chhachhro and southern and eastern parts of *taluka* Umerkot. There are large furrows in the area, it is why it is said that rivers especially *Mihran Nadi* or the river Indus did once flow here. Even now these old beds of probable rivers come to life whenever there are rains.

8. Dhat:

This division lies in the heart, middle, of the Thar and is by far

In Dhat

the largest of all in area. In it are included: A small part of *taluka* Umerkot, major portion of Chhachhro *taluka* and northern areas of *taluka* Mithi. This division in itself is locally known as *mulk* or the country of *Dhat*. The inhabitants of the area are known as *Dhati* whereas the language spoken here is called *Dhatki*, which is an admixture of Thari, Sindhi and Marwarri.

9. Achho Thar:

Achho or the white Thar is known by this name because of the colour of the sand found here. This division consists of the northern part of *taluka* Umerkot and north-eastern portion of *taluka* Khipro of Sanghar district. This part of the Thar extends to Khairpur on north-western side and Jaiselmer towards northeast. It is very thinly populated.

Climate

The precipitation in the Thar desert is highly erratic with wide fluctuation in the amount from year to year. It is not uncommon to face droughts most of the periods. The amount of annual

rainfall, when it occurs, is generally low, ranging between 100mm or less in the west but increasing towards east to about 500mm across the border in the Indian state of Rajasthan. (Pithawalla:54) About 90% of the annual rainfall is received from southwest monsoons ranging from July to September. The hottest months experienced in the desert are May and June when the mercury rises to, even over, 50°C. During the coldest

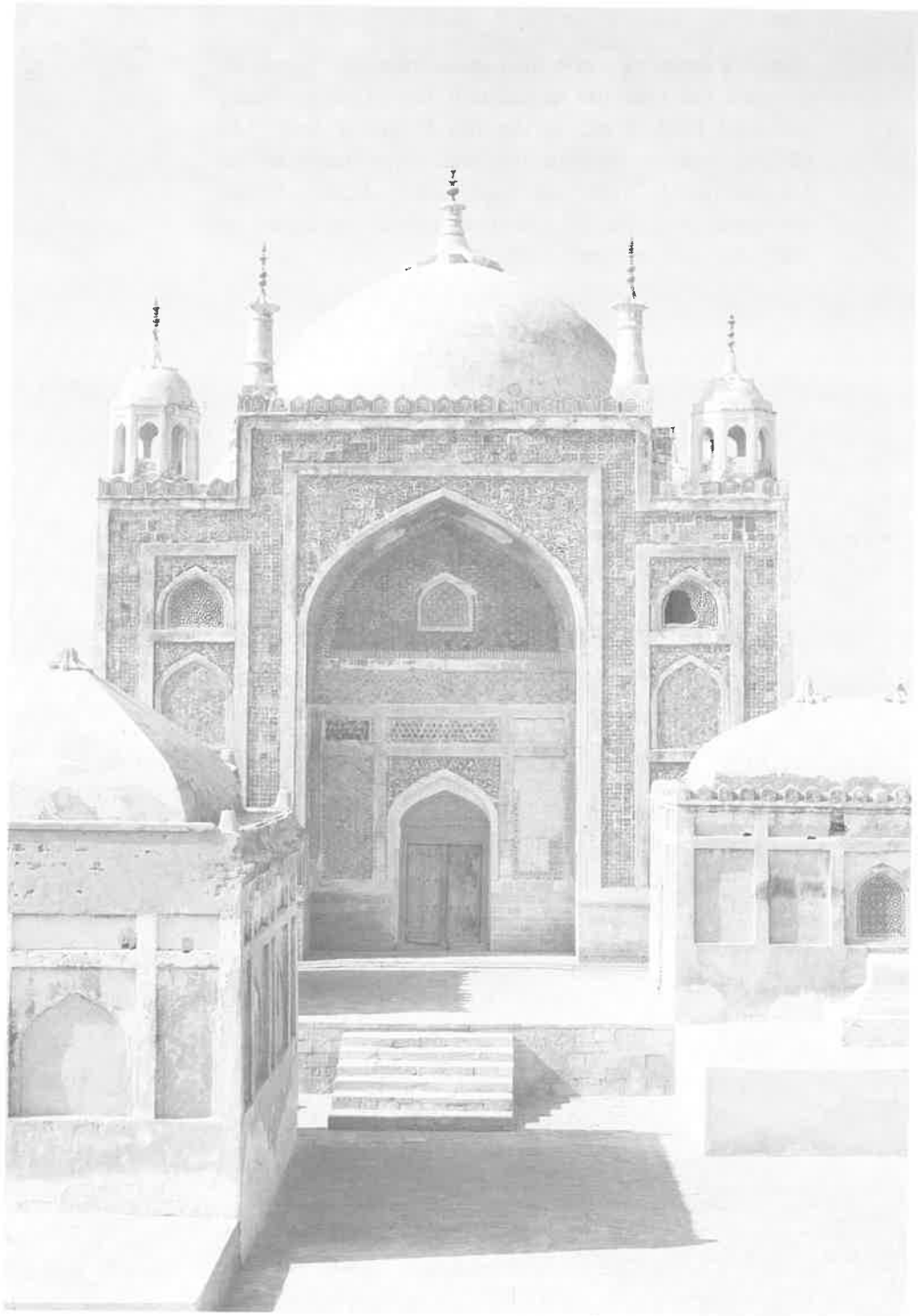
month of the year i.e. January the temperature ranges between 5° and 10° C, when frost is also frequent. Dust storms and dust-raising winds are frequent in May and June. Their intensity is so grave that their velocity may be recorded at 140 to 150 km per hour.

Pithawalla (53) says: During the monsoon, the southern parts of the desert are flooded by seawater and also by fresh-water from the channels swollen after rainfall. In the dry season and near the Nara, water is generally found at one to two fathoms from the surface, it is a little brackish, but because of its scarcity people drink it. It is obtained by digging temporary wells, at the bottom of which a wooden foundation of the shape of a wheel is placed, and the sides are then built up with wicker work of green branches and brushwood, to prevent the soil falling in. The water thus filtering through the sand is sweet, so long as the wells are regularly worked.

As we go further inland the conditions change. In the interior the depth of the wells varies corresponding to their distance from the Rann; where, of any considerable depth, they are built up with burnt bricks, stone not being procurable and wickerwork too insecure; "about 40km inland the wells are over 50m deep". In Chhachhro, however, the water table goes down to 92m or even more. It may be interesting to note here that it must be somewhere here that the fugitive Emperor Humayun's entourage faced some of the toughest times. His sister, Gul-Badan Begum, writes in Humayun Nama, on their journey to Umerkot:

> ".....For three days they found no water. On the fourth, they came to some very deep wells, the water of which was extraordinarily red. The Emperor halted and alighted near one of the wells; Tardi Beg Khan was at another; at a third, Mirza Yadgar, and Mu'neem Khan, and Nadim *kuka;* and at the fourth, Ishan-Timur Sultan, and Khwaja Ghazi, and Raushan *Kuka*.
>
> "As each bucket came out of the wells into reach, people

flung themselves on it; the ropes broke, and five or six persons fell into the wells with the buckets. Many perished from thirst. When the Emperor saw men flinging themselves into the well from thirst, he let anyone drink from his own water bottle. When everyone had his fill, they marched on again at afternoon prayer-time". (156-157)



Thar Through the Ages

Thar Through the Ages

In the absence of any scientific research on the early period of Thar it is very difficult to recount it with any accuracy or precision. Although not entirely ruled out yet sites belonging to the pre-historic period are not known to exist in this region. However, as has already been said, the neighbouring desert of Cholistan remained a subject of archaeological survey for some time. About a dozen sites belonging to the Harappan, or Indus Valley, Civilization were recorded there. Even otherwise the extent of this civilization is immense. It is now clear that sites assignable to the Early Harappan period lie over vast area from the Indus delta in the south, eastward into Saurashtra (India), up the Indus Valley to western Punjab in the north-west, south-eastward past Harappa (district Sahiwal) to the Bahawalpur region of Pakistan; and across the Indian Frontier into east Punjab and Haryana. The area of Early Harappans was co-existent with the mature Indus Valley Civilization itself. The discovery of the ancient site of Kalibangan belonging to the Indus Valley Civilization takes us across the Thar to north of Rajasthan in India. The location of Moenjodaro on the western side of the Thar, Harappa on its north-western direction (Nadiem:14) and Lothal with other sites in its south-east in Gujerat (Jansen 110) only go to prove that the region of the Thar may also not be a wilderness during the protohistoric era and must have settlements between the famous aforementioned sites already discovered.

The early part of the historic period of the area is also reconstructed by scholars on the basis of myth and legend. It is said that during this early period Thar was ruled by Parmar Sodhas, which was a branch of the Rajputs. The chiefs of this clan were some times under the rulers of Sindh while at others

became loyal to the kings at Delhi. It was also not uncommon for them to declare their own sovereignty whenever the fore-mentioned two centres of suzerains lost their grip over their subjects. (Harijan-I:26)

Sumras in Umerkot

Umerkot, usually spelt Amerkot by historians while talking of its early history (Harijan-I:37) has always been an important seat of governments in Thar. Its earliest mention comes during the

Umerkot

6th century when it was being ruled by Parmars. Although there is not a direct reference yet the history of Jaisalmer during 11th century does mention that even at that time the same dynasty was reigning Umerkot. At this time the southern Thar i.e. the present Mithi and Diplo and west of Chhachhro town, was being

ruled by Sumras. It was known as *dirak pargana*. From here gradually their influence spread northward and they were able to take over Umerkot as well. The rule of Sumras was not all that smooth. The Parmars who had held Parkar area had continuously been giving troubles while the Raja of Kathiawarr also attacked them for Umerkot. (William: 66, also Harijan-I: 25)

Sumras in Thar

Harijan deduces from the statements of Maj.Gen. Haig in Indus Delta Country that the Sumras were in control of most of the Thar since 711. The area they ruled mostly consisted of the whole of Thar except Parkar and Kaerr, which covers the northern portion of Chhachhro.

The later ruler of Sumra dynasty, known as Ibn Sumar, was inducted as Nawab of Multan by Ghazanvides. However, when the Ghazanvi Sultan, Abdul Rashid, turned weak, Ibn Sumar took over reigns and became independent ruler of Sindh including whole of Thar in 1051.

The local chronicles are clear on the point that most of the Sumras were in the areas of the Thar and the Thari town, which is known to be their first seat of rule, before shifting to Umerkot. At the time of the attacks of Sultan Mahmood Ghazanvi it is said that Sumras were in possession of Mansura from where they then ruled their country. During the days of Sultan Shahabuddin Ghauri they had moved to Uch in southern Punjab, from where they shifted their centre of control to Thatta. It is also recorded that they built forts and fortresses at a number of places including Umerkot, Thari etc. (Nadvi-I)

Sultan Mahmood Ghazanvi in Thar

Sultan Mahmood started from Ghazna on 6th October 1025 to

attack Somnath. After crossing Multan, Ajmer and other Rajput states he reached Somnath on 6th January 1026. After a successful adventure he thought to change his route on return to Multan, as he did not think it advisable to cross the same states again. He got the news that the Raja of Ajmer and Raja of Gujerat were ready with large armies to face him when he crossed their countries. (Bukhtchand/Harijan-I: 148). Under these hostile conditions the Sultan decided to reach Multan through Thar Desert, as it was the shortest route and taken to be more peaceful. He took a Hindu guide with him. The guide, however, had different designs and took them through most difficult places with acute shortage of water and most trying conditions. The sandy landscape was least friendly for a large army. As the Sultan's army started facing deaths of its men and

Umerkot town

horses a general restlessness mounted with every passing day. Sensing some foul play the Sultan put the guide to severe interrogation. The guide confessed that he was indeed one of the *pujaris* of the Somnath temple and with a view to take revenge wanted to destroy the Sultan's army by taking it through the most hostile areas of Thar. The Sultan arrested him and at long last reached a water tank, and then took a friendlier route and reached Multan. (Tarikh-e-Farishta-I: 57).

At the time of the crossing of the Thar by Sultan Mahmood Ghazanvi there were no large towns except Parkar and Umerkot. Old people of Thar do point out to some of the graves in the wilderness as those of the members of the Sultan's army who perished in the desert due to the treachery of the guide on this journey.

Rule of Sodhas and Rathors

The Sodhas, one of the branches of the Parmars, came to the country being ruled by Sumras in 1125 when they were received with kindness and granted Rato Kot (near Khipro) and the areas around it. According to some others, however, the Sodhas had wrested the region by force through fighting with the Sumras. (Harijan-I)

When the Sumras were defeated out of Umerkot by Sodhas in 1226, they divided themselves into two parts. One of these branches travelled to north towards Multan and the other went to southern side to Larr where they had already ruled. However, the Sodhas gradually overpowered them in the latter areas as well.

The Rathors were not in large numbers in Thar. However, at the time of capturing Rato Kot by Rana Sodha, Rathors also thought of flexing their muscles to gain rule over some areas of Sindh most of which was then under the control of Sumras. The Rathors, leaving Rato Kot aside, took control of the Khipro area. Later they extended their areas towards Chhor, north of

Umerkot, and Gadro, and towards east, some areas of Jodhpur. The territory thus coming under their control was known as Kaerr and as such they came to be called as Kaerria Rathor. (Harijan-I:52)

Sumras in Sindh

The Sumras by far ruled Sindh for the longest period as compared to any other clan or dynasty. It is, however, not certain as to how long they exactly ruled. It is interesting to recount that different historians assign different duration to their hold over the affairs in these regions. The 'Tuhfat-ul-Kiram' mentions of Sumras though in passing yet assigns 505 years to their rule. It in fact does not portray them as sovereigns but shows them under the Sultans (Ghazanvi and Ghauri) of Delhi. The 'Tarikh-e-Masumi' gives a little more detail mentioning their rule to be starting from 1320. It is Abu al Fazl's 'Aaeen-e-Akbari' that is rather more precise on the point and mentions as many as 36 *sardars* of the dynasty. These *sardars* ruled over Sindh, according to him, for over 500 years. On the other hand 'Tarikh-e-Frishta' mentions of just 100 years when they ruled here. The 'Muntakhabat-ut-Tawarikh' says of 19 Sumra *sardars* who held reign from 1053 to 1400 i.e. 350 years. With little variation 'Tarikh-e-Tahiri' gives the period from 1300 to 1430. (Abbott)

It would be clear now as to how different historians think about the exact years and duration of the rule of Sumras. Their first stint of reign starts from 10th century when they controlled the Thar and some adjoining areas. At the time when Sodhas arrived at the scene, Sumras were reigning these areas. When Sodhas defeated Sumras and took away the control of Umerkot in 1226, the latter did not completely lose hold and continued to rule in the southern regions. At Thatta Summa leader Jam Unarr took control in 1351 but after just 4 years Umar Sumra once again conquered Umerkot causing a fatal blow to Sodha rule. However, in 1439 Rana Hamir Sodha finally defeated Hamir Sumra, ending forever the rule of the Sumras. (Harijan-I:67-68)

Legend of Umer Marui

Umar Sumra, the second, ruled the area what is now Chhachhro, Chilhar, region of *Dhat* up to Mithi, also annexing areas of Parkar at a later stage. He remained in full command from 1355 to 1390. His period was that of peace and prosperity. He himself is still known throughout the country because of the romantic epic of Thar wherein he is portrayed as the hero of the love-tale, 'Umar Marui'. In spite of its having controversies as to its setting in time frame as well as details of the story and its characters, it remains one of the most popular tales throughout the length and breadth of the country. The Sufi poet of sindh, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, has immortalized it through his forceful rendering in a classical work. The legendary 'Umar Marui' is favourite not only with the scholars for its artistic, literary and classical values but even the most rustics of Thar sing it with deep veneration. Richard F. Burton in his book, Sindh (Pp 107-113) has given it in a lucid way. The relevant portions of the same are quoted hereunder:

> The tale "of Umar, the Sumrah prince, and Marui, the Sangiani commences with a short account of one Palino, who ran away with certain Mihrada, the mother of Marui, from the house of Phula Lako her husband; and attributes that event to the will of fate.
>
> *"By the Lord's will Mihrada became the butt of jibing tongues,*
>
> *Yet she was no born or purchased slave;*
>
> *She fell in love with a Maru, and eloped with Palino,*
>
> *But her being driven to the Tharr was the work of the*
>
> *Omnipotent.*
>
> " The lady's condition prevented the celebration of her nuptials with Palino till the birth of Marui. The bard describes that event, and in the person of the Munajjim, or Astrologer, predicts the most remarkable occurrence

in her life.

"On the sixth day, and the sixth night, after the child's birth

He predicted in these words, ' your daughter's fate shall be such

That to you, O parents! Umar shall apply with joy.

To which speech the mother replies ---

" Let him do so, and he shall have Phul's daughter,

The granddaughter of Sahir, the child of Mihrada,

The protected by Palino -- the dweller in the Tharr

"The chronicle proceeds to relate that the young woman, whose destinies had thus been settled for her, grew up, became very beautiful, and excited several *belles passions*. Her first victim was one Phog, a shepherd in the service of Palino, who, becoming desperate with love, went to his master and told him that he could serve him no longer. Palino, unwilling to lose a good servant, and once understanding the cause of his disgust, promised him the hand of his stepdaughter. Phog was highly delighted, and returned to his daily occupations with much zest. The bard says,

"His mind was joyful at the prospect of his (future) connexion,
With the clod in his hand, and twist round his forearm, he spins a quantity of wool,
And in the gladness of his heart allows the cattle to graze where they please.

"After some time, seeing no prospect of success, the shepherd goes to his master and threatens to complain of his perfidy to the ruler of the land. The deceitful Palino replies,

" Umar the just King lives far off,

And he will not interfere with trade or marriages,
You will injure yourself by this conduct, O Phog."
Phog, however, in his wrath travels from the Tharr to Omerkot, a long journey and appears before the monarch, exclaiming,

" O King, brave as Dodo, aid thou the helpless hind!
After promising me a wife, they deceitfully change their minds.
Enough for me of Marui, now, she is present to thee, O Sumra!"

" Umar remarked that this was a peculiar way to punish a breach of promise, and in order to test Phog's ideas of beauty, he introduced him into his harem, after ordering the ladies to put in requisition all the arts of the toilette. The shepherd, however, declared, with abundant tears, that not one of the highborn beauties was to be compared to the maid of the desert. At last becoming poetical he exclaims,

" O Umar Sumra, even the charms of thy sister,
Though faintly resembling, are not to be compared to those of Marui;
Her nilufar-like nose, her cheek, rich as the light falling on ambergris,
The dark locks on her forehead, the braids, which fall below her waist
Must be seen to be appreciated, believe, O Umar Sumra".
Umar then resolved to accompany the shepherd, and the bard thus describes their progress,

"When the Sumro, that mighty prince, started on his journey,
Phog following him on foot, Umar riding upon his camel,
Both reached their destination at last, and beheld the outskirts of the beautiful Malir."

"The first objects they saw were two women standing at a well; they are poetically introduced as follows:-

"As Kungu in its casket, so was Marui by the side of Mihrada."

"Seeing the stranger, Mihrada exclaims --

"My love, one of Umar the Sumra's horsemen approaches,
God only knows, but I really believe it is the Sindhi Sumra himself."

" The stranger stopped his camel, and pretending thirst as a pretext for commencing the conversation, asked Mihrada to draw some water for him. The fair one, with little respect for his incognito, remarks --

" O, wayfarer, thou callest for water, tell the truth,
Art thou one of a bridal procession, or art thou Umar himself?"

"Umar replied, that he was neither the one nor the other, but was most undeniably thirsty. Upon which, says the bard,

" Then Marui immediately drew water as clear as milk,
And shrinking backwards poured out the stream;
The Hamir in delight offers up prayers for her happiness."

" After a protracted scene, Umar leaped from his camel, seized the young lady and carried her off to Omerkot, in spite of tears and struggles. There the beauty began to display her spirit by refusing to touch food or to speak a word either in address or reply. But, as the bard says, the former symptoms rapidly disappeared, and Umar determined to cure the silence of his refractory charmer.

Every day she was chained and fettered, and,when night came, was carried to the couch on which Umar

slept, a gold *katar,* or dagger, separating the pair. This lasted for some time, till at last the lady exclaims,

"This is not the way, O Sumra, in which men contract nuptial alliances;
Thou chainest those whom thou lovest - this is strange manner of showing affection.
Alas! alas! I am dying for one sight of the Tharr;
Ye holy Pirs of Panwar, O grant me to see my friends once more."

"Umar consoles her with these words:-

"Be not afflicted, my Marui, pour not forth these tears;
After grief comes joy, and after famine, quickly reappears plenty.
Break and burn thy fetters, thy bondage is now done."

"Having thus gained a minor point, Umar released his prisoner, and allowed her to live among the ladies of the palace. She waited for an opportunity, and sent a message to her cousin Maru, begging him to aid her in escaping from her prison. Maru accordingly mounted his camel, travelled to Omerkot by night, and alighted at the *Khankah,* or hermitage, of some Pir there. Leaving his beast with the holy man, he scaled the palace wall, and entered the chamber where Umar and Marui were sleeping. The latter awoke, and persuaded her relative not to murder the prince, but to content himself with substituting a silver for the gold dagger on the couch. Maru was loathed to spare the sleeper, but after some conversation with his cousin, and settling their plans, he retired to the hermitage in the disguise of a *Mujawir.* In the morning, Umar saw the dagger, and asked the lady what had happened; but she considered it advisable to be ignorant of the night's occurrences.

" Five or six days afterwards, Marui obtained permission to perform a pilgrimage to the Khankah, in

consequence of a vow made to visit the holy man. She promised also, that if this boon were granted, she would comply with all the prince's wishes. The Hamir, highly pleased, sent his own sister and female attendants to accompany the lady, and to see that her object was devotion. After visiting the tomb, and performing the usual religious rites, Marui pointed to her cousin, and asked the women,

"which of you will wander about with my brother the Fakir?"

"Umar's sister replies, in jest, --

"Having left (thy cousin) Maru at Malir, thou sayest, ' I have acquired a new brother here;'
Free, indeed, art thou; go thou with this, thy other brother."

" Marui hailed her words as an omen of good, and presently finding some pretext for escaping from her companions, mounted Maru's camel, and in company with him, hastened to revisit her beloved Malir.

" Apprised of the event, and persuaded by his friends and kinsmen, Umar at last gave up the idea of making Marui his wife. In order to inform her of his determination, he instantly rode over to the Malir, told her that she was his sister, and returned to Omerkot. Still the violence of his affection did not abate, and even though the lady came occasionally to see her "brother" during his sickness, the disease threatened to be a mortal one. The beginning of the end was, that Marui accidentally heard a false report of the Hamir's death as she was preparing to visit him; and such was her grief, that her soul incontinently quitted its tenement of clay..... Umar on his part, as in duty bound, no sooner heard of the fair one's decease, than with equal facility of exit, he also departed this transitory life. ....."

Malir, literally meaning green - or green-land - is the name of the place, which lies in the heart of Thar some 40km from Nagarparkar. The epic mentions it to be 50 miles (80km) from Umerkot which fact fits the spot where remains of habitation could also be traced. However, due to the nature of dwelling, thatched huts etc. in the shape of *chownras it* would be a long drawn idea to find remains of houses.

A village named Bhalwa now lies by the side of the Malir remains on the main thoroughfare from Mithi to Nagarparkar. About a couple of kilometres south-east of Bhalwa there are still remains of the Malir's well where Marui used to draw water and

where Sumra prince, Umar, saw her for the first time and kidnapped her to Umerkot. This well was in ruins but in the late 1960s Haji Mir Muhammad Bakhsh Talpur, then vice-chairman of the district council, arranged for its repairs and held, at a grand scale, Thar *Melo*, or the Thar Festival. Unfortunately the over-enthusiasm of the sincere scholar in the repairs has changed the original features. It is now enclosed with a wall in brick and cement and betrays a modern structure. There also are the remains of a stone *Koondi*, a sort of large bowl now broken. It is believed to have been used for Marui's animals to drink water from.

Romance of Mumal Rano

After Umar Sumra the second, Bhoongar the third took reigns of the area in 1390. He ruled in peace for ten years. He was succeeded by Hamir Sumro who ascended the 'throne' of the Thar country, which comprised the whole of *Dhat* area, in 1400. He ruled from Umerkot till 1439. The other popular folk tale of Thar is set during this period when we find the ruler, Hamir Sumro, as one of the characters of the story. Although there are variations in the narration, as is common with such legends, yet the version given by Burton is far more acceptable:

> "The story opens with stating that the Hamir Sumra, the Sindhi prince who reigned at the time, called together his friends and boon companions, Don Bhutani, Sinharo Rajani, with his brother-in-law, Rano Mendhro, and proposed a trip to the banks of the Kak river, near Omerkot, to call upon the Lais of the age, Mumal the Rathorni. The party started, and on the way met a man habited in Fakir's garb. The bard thus describes the adventure:-
>
> *" A Babu met them in the wilderness, one watch after sunrise, When speaking of the Kak, he wept tears of blood, (and cried) 'let no one go to Kak, lest he become what I am'".*
>
> The friends address him in the following words, -
>
> *"O, Babu, of the wild, what hast thou to complain of Kak?"*
>
> "The Fakir rejoins, -
>
> *"Men (if you go there), the very trees will lament your fate,*
> *The stones will cry aloud, and the waters shed tears for you;*
> *Magic veils, like the lightning's blaze, will obscure your sight.*
> *Mir affirms that no one can gaze at Mumal,*
> *Without bearing in his face wounds that never heal."*

"This somewhat startles the party, and the bard graphically depicts their proceedings:

"Then the Hamir stood gazing at Rano, and Rano at the Hamir"

"Rano addresses the mendicant in polite and flattering strains, -

"Babu of the wild, welcome art thou to day,
Sami! on thy neck the gold beads brightly shine;
With what colour are they dyed, that they appear so beautifully red?
The Bhonwr pays tribute to the blossom on thy turban,
Wise Jogi! declare to us the tidings of Kak."

"Upon this, as the bard says,-

"Then sobbing, and pointing out the way, he weeps tears of blood,
(Saying) 'O, wise one! I came with my suite from Ludrano;
I, the naked pauper, was then a noble, but Kak has ruined and beggard me."

"Rano thus resumes:-

"Art thou a beggar from Kashmir, or Kahu, the son of Jarrar?"

"The Fakir answers, -

"Mendhra! my suite was composed of five thousand warriors;
Sodha! each man was lord of his own village;
Each rode his steed with shield, dagger and sword:
That witch dispersed them by the might of her magic glance;
She ruined all, my friend! I now go forth alone, O Mendhra;
Shun thou the road of Kak, and avoid the pit into which I fell."

"The advice was, of course, disregarded by the friends, who instantly started, and journeyed on till they reached the waters of Kak. Seeing a crown of female slaves gathered round a well, they went up to them, and, as a preliminary step, enquired the name of the stream, the town, and other such particulars. The head of the party, a handmaid of Mumal's, by name Natir, feels somewhat indignant at seeing such ignorance displayed by the wayfarers, and thus replies to their queries:-

"Kak is crowded with the tents and pavilions of visitors;
Who are ye that are ignorant of Kak and its deeds,
And the fame of the Rathor women who inhabit it?
Here dwell Mumal and Sumal, Sehjan and Muradi.
They deck the assembly with secret purpose;
On their heads are pink veils, and on their bosoms saffron coloured bodices,
Their dresses are bright as lightning: they delight swinging from the lofty trees,
And in laving their fair limbs with rose-water from rich vases,
And pure Atr (ottar) over the heads of their visitors.
O, Mir Mendhra! such are the delights of Kak."

"The friends repaired to an Otak (the men's quarters in Sindh), and soon received a message from Mumal, who had been apprised of their arrival. The bearer approached with a low Salam, placed some roasted *chana* (grain) and raw silk at each traveller's feet, and retired. The latter, with the exception of Rano, all inadvertently ate the grain, and sent back the silk cleaned and spun. The hero of the tale, however, sent for Natir, twisted the silk into a rope for his horse, threw the *chana* to him, and told the handmaid to let her mistress know what he had done. Before she departed, the friends opened a little flirtation with the fair slave, Hamir saying, -

"Thou who pacest the inner rooms of the palace, art

thou queen or slave?
Thou murderest a lover each time thy glances are raised towards him."

"Natir replies, with becoming coquetry, -

" I am a slave, very different are my queens, be not enchanted by my glances,
On the banks of Kak I rove on foot."

"When Mumal heard what had happened, she sent back Natir with a present of Halwa (sweetmeats), and bread to Rano. The swain administered a little gentle chastisement to the bearer, and asked her how she and her mistress dared to send him a woman's dinner. Presently, the friends received an invitation to sup with Mumal, but to come singly, beginning with the bravest. The Hamir was permitted to start first, but on the road, he was startled by so many horrible forms of snakes and dragons, lions and ghools, that he returned home supperless. The courtiers followed, but with no better effect. Rano, when at last it came to his turn, took the natural precaution of securing a guide, and, for that purpose, chose the fair Natir. On the road she strove to escape, but the Sodha drew his dagger, and looked so fierce, that she desisted from any further attempt of the kind. Undaunted by the figures on the road, which he saw were put there merely to frighten him, the successful adventurer reached Mumal's abode, and was desired by her slaves to sit upon the *Khatolo* or couch. Rano suspected some trick, and striking the seat with the horn of his bow, burst through the unspun cotton which covered the frame, and saw a well under the place selected for him. Being then ushered into another apartment, his eyes were dazzled by the beauty and dress of the line of damsels that stood up to receive him. Puzzled by the similarity of their appearance, he nearly failed to discover Mumal, when a Bhonwr, or large black bee, opportunely buzzed round her head.

"He then makes the servants throw up a heap of wood, lights it, and precipitates himself into the flames. In recounting this tragical end, the bard remarks,-

"True lovers are they who ever behave truly to each other,
And whose hearts are crimsoned with the dye of affection.
The fires of such love as this open the way to the realms of futurity." (Burton:114-123)

When Mumal came to Umerkot after Rano in the garb of a merchant she caused to construct a *Marri* or 'palace' on a mound a little distance away from the town. The remains of the building are still found about 4 km from Umerkot, on Nabisar Road. The place even today is known as *Mumal ji Marri* or the palace of Mumal. In its vicinity are two other sites known as *Hamir Sumro jo Darro* or the mound of Hamir Sumro and *Rano jo Bhirr* or the mound of Rano. (Pakistan Archaeology No.5)

Rule of Sodhas in Second Spell

After a long rule of Sumras from 1355 to 1439, Rana Hamir of the Sodha clan wrested Umerkot, giving the final blow to the Sumras. The ruling Sodhas were called *Rano* or *Rana* here while at their earlier seat at Marwarr they were known as *raja rai*. The Amerkot Itihaas (Pp50-51) mentions of Darrabarash, Rano Darjanshal and Rano Kenhro before Rano Atardi became the ruler. He was followed by Rano Tharo and then Rano Hamir. The last mentioned Rano, or Rana, took control of Umerkot from Hamir Sumro in 1439, after which the Sumras never rose to power again.

Another tale, which has currency in the local population, is about Rana Hamir's attack on Pir Pithoro. It is said that there was certain Pir, a saint or a revered religious leader, living at a place known as Pithoro. He had large circle of *murids*, devotees or followers. Because of his piously acts the Pir was very popular

Emperor Humayum

with the masses and attracted large number of persons who joined the ranks of his *murids*. His expanding following worried the Rano as he started taking the Pir as his rival and pestered all the time lest the Pir would take away the rule of the area from him. The Rano, therefore, came out with a large force to attack the Pir. However, a miracle turned the table in favour of the Pir before whom the Rano could not but pay homage and beg for forgiveness. Ever after the Pir Pithoro was given ample contributions by the subjects of the Rano, in addition to the tributes he himself paid.

The other Ranas who came after Hamir were; 1) Dodho, 2) Wasio *alias* Wirsan, 3) Tejo alias Tej Singh, 4) Chanpo and 5) Gango. (Harijan-I:117-119). After Gango, Rana Parsad ascended the throne. It was during his period that the fugitive Mughal emperor Humayun crossed through Thar and came to Umerkot (Todd-III:1282). Gul-Badan Begum, sister of the Emperor Humayun gives graphic description of his journey into the haven of Umerkot and the birth of Emperor Akbar.

> While passing through Thar ...."After a day and night they reached a large tank. The horses and camels went into the water and drank so much that many died. There had not been many horses, but there were mules and camels. Beyond this place was found at every stage on the way to 'Umrkot' which is a beautiful place with many tanks." (Gul-Badan Begum:157).

Humayun reached Umerkot on August 22nd, 1542 (Jumada I.10th, 949 AH). (Gul-Badan Begum: Footnote, 157).

> "The rana gave the Emperor an honourable reception, and took him into the fort, and assigned him excellent quarters. He gave places outside to the amirs' people. Many things were very cheap indeed; four goats could be had for one *rupi*. The rana made many gifts of ki(n)ds and so on, and paid such fitting service that what tongue could set it forth?
>
> "Several days were spent in peace and comfort.

Empress Hamida Bano Begam

> "The treasury was empty. Tardi Beg Khan had a great deal of money, and the Emperor having asked him for considerable loan, he lent 80,000 *ashrafis* at the rate of two in ten. His Majesty portioned out this money to the army. He bestowed sword-belts and *cap-a-pie* dresses on the rana and his sons. Many people bought fresh horses here.
>
> "Mir Shah Husain had killed the rana's father. For this, amongst other reasons, the rana collected 2,000 or 3,000 good soldiers and set out with the Emperor for Bhakkar.
>
> "In 'Umrkot he left many people, and his family and relations, and also Khwaja Mu'azzam to have charge of the *harem*. Hamida-Banu Begum was with child. Three days after his Majesty's departure, and in the early morning of Sunday, the fourth day of the revered Rajab, 949H., there was born his imperial Majesty, the wold's refuge and conqueror, Jalalu-d-din Muhammad Akbar *Ghazi*. The moon was in Leo. It was of very good omen that the birth was in a fixed Sign, and the astrologers said a child so born would be fortunate and long-lived. The Emperor was some thirty miles away when Tardi Muhammad Khan took the news to him. He was highly delighted, and by way of reward and largesse (*nisar*) for the tidings he forgave all so ever of Tardi Muhammad Khan's past offences. He gave the child the name he had heard in his dream at Lahore, the Emperor Jalalu-d-din Muhammad Akbar." (Gul-Badan Begum:157-158).

Although there is no scientific evidence on ground yet the tradition says that the fort of Umerkot was then about a couple of kilometres north from its present location. The present fort, according to them, was constructed by Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora in 1846, after destroying the previous one. (Harijan-I:129). (Also see under Umerkot Fort in the last chapter.) A small domed commemorative building constructed in1898 by a certain Syed from a nearby village of Khejrari used to crown the

Emperor Akbar

place till a few years ago. Now it has given way and though the area stands protected under the Antiquities Act-1975, there is no sign or indication as to the importance of the spot.

Umerkot continued to remain in the control of Sodhas up to 1609 but they acted as sovereigns only up to the days of Rana Parsad. After him they ruled under the patronization of either Delhi or Sindh and declared their independence when the fore-mentioned two seats got weak. Whenever it was under Sindh, the king used to appoint governors of Umerkot. (Elliot:297).

It was a normal practice in Thar during the Ranas' rule that there was no limit on the use of cultivable land. As the area was vast, anybody could cultivate any length of land. But a certain portion of the produce he would set aside to be sent to the Ranas through the local *Patail* or the headman of the village. The Ranas, out of this tax collection, used to pay the share to Delhi or Sindh, as the case may be.

In 1590 Umerkot, along with other territories came under the reign of Emperor Akbar. In view of the help and assistance given by the Ranas to his father, Emperor Humayun, during his difficult days, and also taking into consideration that Umerkot was his birth place Emperor Akbar the Great declared a general remission from the paying of *dhal,* tribute or the crown's tax on produce of the land. (Harijan-I:133-134)

The practice remained in vogue till 1709 when the King of Delhi, Mughal Emperor Shah Alam granted the areas of Umerkot to Raja of Jodhpur, Ajit Singh. It was, however, wrested back by the Sodhas, in turn to lose to Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora. (Harijan-I:134).

During the days of Mirza Ghazi Beg, Shah Muhammad Arghun's son, Abul Qasim, attacked Umerkot in 1599 and took it from the Sodhas. (Beg:354)

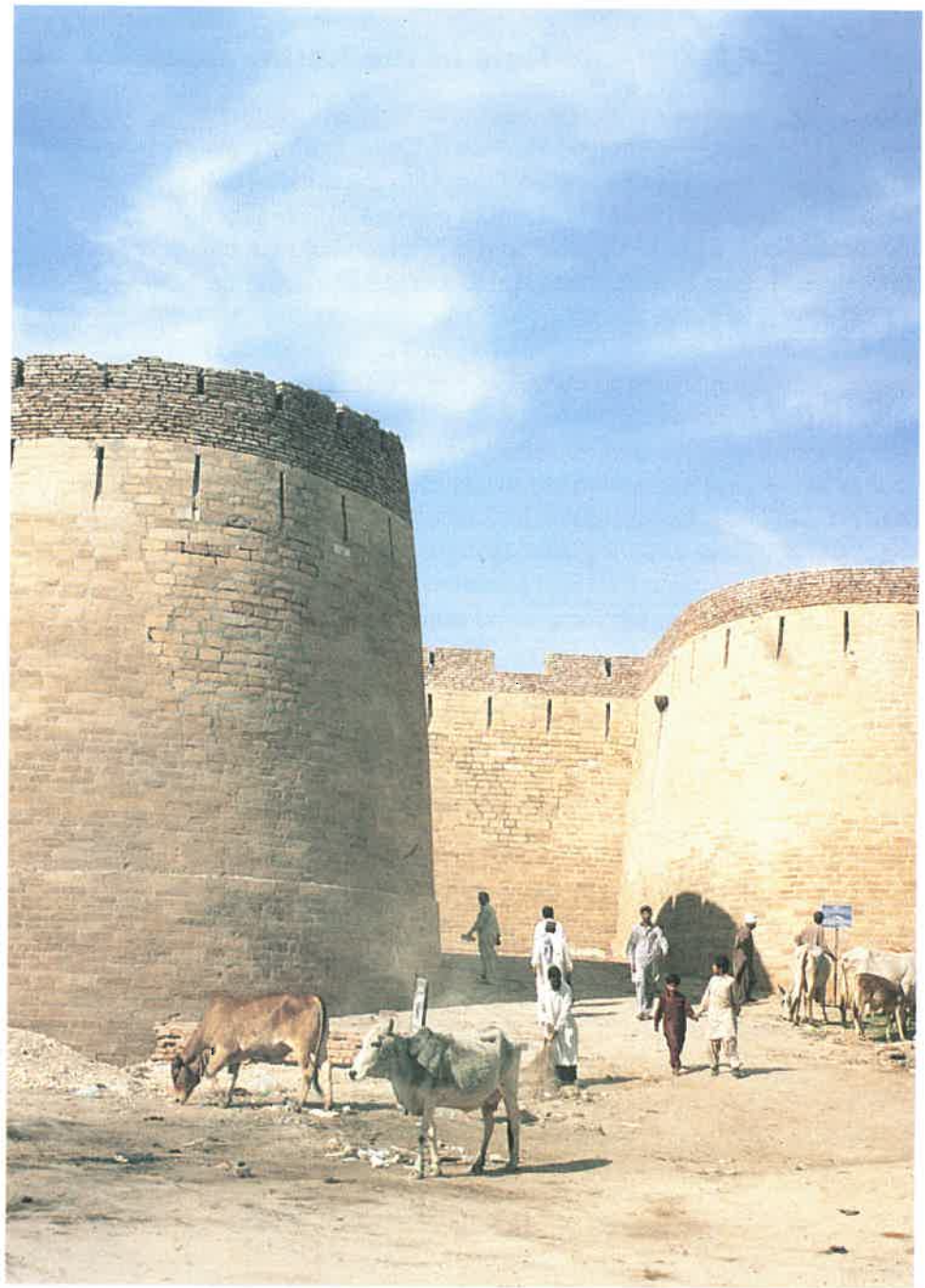
Rule of the Kalhoras

After Sumras, Sindh was ruled by Sammas, Tarkhans, Arghuns and other Nawabs appointed by Mughals in Delhi. During these times Thar mostly was ruled by Sodhas. After the army action of Nadir Shah, Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora (1736-1755) the ruler of Sindh defeated Sodhas and brought Umerkot under his control. He had then caused to build a new fort in Umerkot in 1746. However, after the return of Nadir Shah, Sodhas once again became independent till Mian Noor Muhammad once again put them under control with force in 1750. The Sodhas started to pay Kalhoras the *dhal*, tribute, and could never regain their power during his period. However, the followers of the Sodhas ran to Thar and continued to take Ranas as their rulers. They in this way created problems for Kalhoras who established say of the Ranas in Umerkot after fixing a certain amount of *dhal*. It is said that those who had scattered in Thar later set up the habitation quarters resulting in the establishment of towns like Chilhar, Mithi, Diplo, Islamkot etc. (Harijan-I:173).

Nadir Shah in Umerkot

In 1739, at the time of conquering of Delhi by Nadir Shah, the Iranian King, Sindh was under the control of Delhi. However, Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora resisted the sovereignty of Nadir Shah. It was because of this that Nadir Shah on his way back to Qandhar attacked and annexed Sindh to his kingdom. The Kalhora ruler along with his elder son, Mian Muradyab, ran from Thatta and took refuge in Umerkot. Nadir Shah then attacked Umerkot and brought it under his control. The Kalhora agreed to pay 10 million rupee cash and Rs.20,000 annually as *dhal*, tribute, to the king. Nadir Shah took two of the sons of Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora, Ghulam Shah and Itr Khan, along as guarantee against the treaty.

After the departure of Nadir Shah, the Ranas of Umerkot again



Umerkot

declared their independence in 1748. Mian Noor Muhammad gave them a final blow in 1750 after which they were never able to rise to sovereign power during Kalhora rule.

It would be worthwhile to recount the Ranas who succeeded Rana Parsad who was the ruler when Emperor Humayun visited Umerkot. He was followed by 1) Rana Chanra Sen, 2) Rana Bhojraj, 3) Rana Issardas who was 'dethroned' by Raja Rawalsel Singh of Jaisalmer, who made Rana Gangi's grandson

Rana Chandar Singh

Jai Singh to ascend the seat of Ranaship. Then came 5) Rana Kesar Singh, 6) Rana Kemo, 7) Rana Sangram Singh the second, 8) Rana Shivraj, 9) Rana Sabharr Singh, 10) Rana Mehraj the second, 11) Rana Bhabhut Singh, 12) Rana Arjun Singh and 12) the present Rana Chandar Singh who has a *jagir* in Umerkot (Harijan-I:3) and has remained Member of Parliament and minister in the federal and provincial governments of Pakistan and Sindh respectively.

Nadir Shah was murdered in 1748 and Mian Noor Muhammad's sons got the opportunity to free themselves and to come back to Sindh. The Mian also stopped paying the *dhal,* tribute, and as such Ahmad Shah Abdali attacked Sindh in 1755. The Mian ran away to Jaisalmer where he died the same year. His dead body was brought back and was buried in Muhammad Abad of *taluka* Moro.

After the death of Mian Noor Muhammad, his elder son Muhammad Muradyab ascended the throne. As he was an incompetent ruler, he was made to be replaced by Ghulam Shah, the other son of Mian Noor Muhammad, in 1757.

Mian Ghulam Shah ruled till 1772. During his period Sodhas remained peaceful, but he had to use force twice against the Rajas of Kutch. On his death his son Mian Sarfaraz Khan replaced him as ruler of Sindh. He in turn was followed by Mian Abdul Nabi Kalhora but Thar remained unaffected during the period of later Kalhora rulers.

Talpurs in Sindh

Mir Fateh Ali Khan Talpur overpowered Kalhoras and took its control of Sindh in their own hands in 1782. At this time Umerkot was being ruled by Maharaja of Jodhpur. In 1786 the Rathors killed Mir Ghulam Muhammad Khan when he was on a hunting trip to Thar. On this, Sohrab Khan, his brother, with the help of Mir Fateh Ali Khan attacked Umerkot. A treaty of peace was then signed by the Mirs and the Maharaja of Jodhpur. This

treaty remained effective till 1813 (Harijan-I:194) when the Sodhas stopped paying the money to the Mirs. Sensing the danger from them the Mir built a number of forts in the Thar. These were the Mithi Fort (1789), the Islamkot Fort (1795), followed by a Fort at Chilhar and the one at Singalla which was built in 1800. (Raikes:12).

> "With a view to consolidation of their power in the Desert, the Ameers of Sind, towards the close of the last century, built and garrisoned several forts in the Desert, at an enormous expense, after which they gradually introduced their revenue officers, levying a heavy tax on the produce of the land." (Raikes:13)

The Mir died in 1802 and was thus replaced as ruler by Mir Ghulam Ali Khan. In 1812 Mir Karam Ali Khan Talpur became the ruler of Sindh. In 1813 the peace treaty went to winds and the armies of Maharaja of Jodhpur and those of Mir Karam Ali Khan Talpur fought in Umerkot. The latter came out as victorious.

The Mir built the fort of Naukot in 1814 and administered the whole area to his benefit. He tried to enter into a treaty with Rai of Kutch against the British Company Bahadur. However, the leakage of the plan put the British on alert, which hastened to become friendly with the Rai. The Mir naturally got annoyed on this and was looking out for an opportunity to avenge this insult. Soon after, he got one and on the pretext of curbing the area of the banditry, on the request of the Rai, attacked and ransacked Kutch a number of times in 1816. (Harijan-I:197-198).

The Maharaja of Jodhpur, with the full understanding of the British sent an army in 1817 to attack Umerkot. This army returned from the way as they received news of unrest at home.(Solangi:70-71). Thereafter, the centre of Jodhpur became weak and never set on any adventure to conquer Umerkot.

After the death of Mir Karam Ali Khan, his younger brother Mir Murad Ali Khan became the ruler of Sindh in 1828. By then,

"the rulers of Sind gradually consolidated their power in the western portion of the Thurr, where they aupplanted the local chiefs, giving them, however, a small share of the revenue, probably because they were, like themselves, followers of Islam. Further east, that is, in the Mittee and Islamkote, and Singalla, the Ameer's officers levied two-fifths of the produce of the land, leaving the chiefs nothing to live on but a voluntary contribution of four annas (six pence) per field, which the force of old associations made the cultivators pay willingly to those whom they had looked up to as their chief. Further east again, that is in the Veerawow district and Parkur, the case was different; there were no forts to curb the predatory disposition of the inhabitants; the chiefs had retained more of their native independence, and were more powerful; the Khosas, moreover - the heads of which tribe were associated with the Takoor of Veerawow, and other landed proprietors - were renowned for their deeds of arms, and feared accordingly; and notwithstanding that, on the occasions of a force from Sind coming to Parkur, they all acknowledged more or less the supremacy of the Ameers, the moment it had gone, they pursued their predatory mode of life as before. Nor did they restrict themselves to foraying in foreign states; on the contrary, they carried their forays all through the Desert to Raomka Bazar and Wanga Bazar, situated in Sind proper, immediately west of the Thurr and Parkur districts. Another cause of the continued independence of the eastern districts, was the proximity of the Marwarr district of the "Neyur," which much resembles the Thur and was inhabited like it by independent tribes addicted to plundering, while it formed a safe place of refuge to all who feared molestation in the Thurr and Parkur.

> ".... The rulers of Sind, mindful of the love of freedom exhibited in this remote corner of their realm, did not attempt to introduce any revenue system for many years after it had been in force in the other portion of the Thurr; and when eventually (in A.D. 1830 and 1835) they ventured to introduce it in a modified form, it gave rise to much discontent; and the revenue officer from

Hydrabad, being over officious, and obnoxious to the chiefs, paid the penalty of his interference with their privileges with his life. This act of barbarism, and insult to the Ameer's authority, however, brought a terrible retribution on its authors. A large force was dispatched to Parkur, to restore the authority of the Court of Hydrabad, and punish those who had had the temerity to insult it." . . . . " plundered Nuggur, and devastated the whole district; after which they carried off as prisoners two of the Chiefs of Veerawow, the Rana's manager (the Rana of Parkur being himself a minor), and others of the inferior Thakoors. The captives were conveyed to Sind, and then consigned to captivity in the fort of Kooda, in the Desert, where they were tied up and beaten, and otherwise ill-treated, to make them more flexible in agreeing to a heavy fine". (Raikes:13-14).

"The Chief of Veerawow was fined Rs. 3,166-3-7 (Corees 12,000), while his brother died at Hydrabad in captivity. The Rana of Parkur was fined Rs. 2,638-8-4 (Corees 10,000). The Takoor of Barana, at which place the Ameer's officer was murdered, was fined Rs.10,000. The Chief of Pittahoore was fined 700 Rupees, and Soda Kemajee of Adygaum, 1,500 Corees. The captives were about three months in captivity". (Raikes, *footnotes:* 14).

"After this the Amirs of Sindh regularly received one-half of the customs duties, and about one-fifth of the produce of the land.

"At first its collection was uncertain, but gradually became more regular, as the power of the rulers increased, and that of the local chiefs correspondingly decreased". (Raikes:15).

The British had been granted trade rights and some facilities in Sindh, first by Kalhoras and then by Talpur Mirs during their

respective rules. With their organized effort the British had also consolidated their hold on the southern parts of Thar and Rajputana. They had, by now, become a force to reckon with. The internal strife of the Mirs encouraged the British who gave them a decisive blow on 17th February, 1843 at the place of Mina'ee near Hyderabad. Mir Nasir Khan, Mir Shahdad Khan, Mir Hasan Ali Khan, Mir Sobdar Khan and Mir Muhammad Khan were all arrested and sent to Calcutta. The last Mir ruler of Sindh, Mir Nasir Khan died there in 1845. Like most of the Sub-continent, Sindh including Thar was brought under the suzerainty of the British under a royal decree in 1843. After independence of the South Asia Subcontinent on 14th August, 1947, most of the areas of the Thar and Parkar became part of Pakistan.

Races and Tribes

Races and Tribes

Thar does not seem to have been so sparsely inhabited in the remote antiquity. As already discussed elsewhere, the lack of archaeological research in this part of the country is responsible for not yet giving a clear picture as to its ancient cultures. The presence of the beds of old, long dried, rivers do point out that the area would have sufficiently been prosperous and well inhabited. The presence of sites belonging to the early and mature Harappan period along the lost river of Hakra - or Ghaggar - in the adjoining Cholistan desert amply back up this hypothesis. The location of two of the most outstanding sites of Moenjodaro and Kalibangan on its western and eastern sides further support the idea of its being once a well-populated and well-off region.

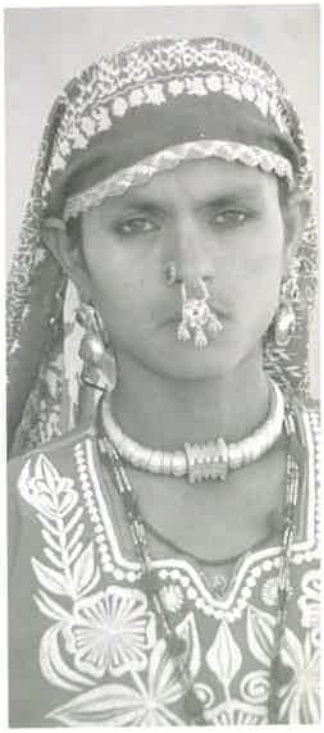
The great desert of Thar has always been inhabited by various races, tribes and clans, though it had been changing hands between them quite frequently. During the historic period, its naturally difficult accessibility also attracted groups of bandits, thieves and such other out-laws who eventually settled, or passed nomadic life in the desert.

The peoples that inhabit Thar - and Parkar area - are generally Muslim, Hindu or Achhoot - the untouchables. The followers of Jainism were also found in good numbers towards east and southern sides. Most of them, however, migrated to India crossing the nearby border with Rajasthan, during and after the 1971-war with India. Even after 29 years, a portion of the main bazaar in Nagarparkar gives a haunted look because of the locked and deserted shops belonging to this Jain community.

The Parkar area seems to have enjoyed better prosperity for

much longer period throughout the centuries. Appendix C in Raikes (Pp 84-85) tells of the prosperity and history of Parinagar once a most flourishing town. He says,

> ..."the city of Pareenuggur was ruled by Hansoo and Bhoodaee, sons of Purmar Durnee, who left Aboogud and established themselves there. Its population was 5,200 families of Banians, 900 of blacksmiths, besides 700 of Rajputs, 1,200 of craftsmen, and 1,300 of Lowanas. Hansoo had two sons, Govundda and Bheem, of whom the former succeeded him as Chief of Pareenuggur. Govundda had four sons, Vursing, Vethuldass, Bheem, and Chunden, the last of whom succeeded to the Gadee. Chunden, before his morning ablutions, gave crores (untold wealth) in charity every day, for a period of four and twenty years. He had two sons, Sire and Neer, who both became outlaws, and consequently the rule devolved upon Bheem, the second son of Hansoo. Bheem dug a large tank by the name of Thaeepo at his own expense, and sunk 140 wells in it. He ruled till his death, by which event the family of Hansoo became extinct.
>
> "The above-mentioned Bhoodaee peopled a city by the name of Bhoodasur, and dug a large tank bearing the same name; but as water did not remain in the tank, he killed his son Narundass, and buried him in it. After this, Dhurnedur's third son, Purmar, and Mapal's five sons, by name Rajsing, Rajasoor, Mundluk, Malar and Ramchund, ruled Pareenuggur in succession. Of them Rajasoor dug three tanks, one situated near Bhaeepo, and the other two near the village of Vadlaee. The last of the five chiefs was succeeded by Rajasoor's son Bhojasing, who was succeeded by his brother Bhojraj, who was succeeded by Purmar Mala's son Adesing, who was succeeded by Samdass, who was succeeded by Pattul, who was succeeded by Govindra's younger son Bheem, who was succeeded by his son Khengar, who was succeeded by his brother Deepoo, who was



> succeeded by (his nephew Khengar's son) Chooro, who was succeeded by his cousin (Deepo's son) Hurbhum, in whose reign a force belonging to the Emperor of Delhi arrived and destroyed the city of Pareenuggur, which was deserted by its inhabitants, and consequently laid waste".

The evidence collected so far bears testimony to the fact that Rajputs were one of the earliest habitants of Thar where they also ruled for quite sometime. Some other theories put Bhils as having settled in Thar after having migrated from Gujerat before many of the other races and clans had settled here. They were followed by Kolhis who had come from Kutch. The Bhils and Kolhis amply fed the irregular armies of the Rajputs. As they were not paid on any regular basis for this service they took to other professions like 'constructing' huts, digging wells etc. to earn their living. (Harijan-II: 119). As the country was not under any effective rule, the warrior-like Khosas, Baloch etc. also came to Thar and made it their home. Some other Muslim clans also came from Sindh proper and Larr region and settled in Thar along with their animal herds.

Jogi

The Mahaishwari (*Kerarr*) came from Marwarr for trade but settled in Thar. The people following different trades, locally called *Kammi* (working class) like *Koombhar* (potter), *Koori* (cloth-weaver), *Sonaro* (gold-smith/Hindu) and Muslim businessmen, Memon came and made Thar their home. They all led settled life in small hamlets or hutments where water could be made available and wild vegetation or cultivable land was in easy reach. In addition to these races and clans, nomads like *Jogi* (snake-charmer), *Sanyasi* (witch-doctor), *Barho* (potter), *Jandahorro* (miller), *Odh* (shepherd), *Kabootro* (acrobat), *Kanjar* (people who earned living through pranks of domesticated-monkey), *Karyo* (sword-maker) etc. also made their appearance at different venues. (Personal communication).

Amongst the Hindus who came to settle in Thar are Brahman, to lead the people in Hindu religion, *Mahaishwari, Sonara, Na'ee* (hair-cutter), *Charan, Koombhar, Malhi, Bhat, Darzi* (tailor), *Menghwarr, Bhangi* (sweeper) etc. Lohana and Sarsot Brahman are believed to have come from the Larr region during the Kalhora and Talpur eras. Similarly, amongst the Muslims, Khosa also settled here during the same, or a little earlier, period. (Harijan-II: 120)

Many clans of Smat, the Rajputs who embraced Islam, also live in Thar. These include Soomro, Rahamo, Nuhrio, Sipyo, Jarrejo, Miyanoon, Lanjo Higorjo, Lanjar, Lakho, Saund, Dars, Sammo, Halepoto, Potho, Janjhi, Wikyo, Bhatti, Noon, Joyo, Rajar, Maangrio, Mehr, Panhwar, Palli, Chauhan etc. (Personal communication) The Balochs, in addition to Khoso, include Rind, Chandio, Baglani etc. Among Muslims of the Thar the Syeds rank high in status though they may not be large in numbers.

The following casts of Hindus settled in Thar are taken as superior:-

1) *Banya: Banbhan* (Brahman), *Kerarr, Mahaishwari, Khatti (Khatri),* Sonaro and *Lohano*;

2) Rajput: Rano - who are mostly in the eastern side, and Sodho mostly found on the western side.

The untouchables, Achhoot, also known as Harijan are lower in order in Hindu society. They consist of Bhil, Menghwarr (*chamar* or hide and skin worker), Kolhi etc.

The main races, tribes, clans and castes of Thar region are the ones as given in the following lines:

Rajput

The Sanskrit word Rajput or Raja *Putra* literally means son of Raja or the ruler. This word for a caste, a family or a tribe does not occur anywhere in the early history of the area. From the Ramayan era up to the visit of the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Hsang (629-645) there is no mention of such a clan anywhere. (Buddhist Records-II:256) According to some other scholars the Rajputs' origins seem to date from a great break-up of South Asian Subcontinent's society in northern and north-western regions under the impact of Hephthalites (White Huns) and associated tribes from the mid-5th century onward. Following the break-up of Gupta Empire (late 6th century), invading groups were probably integrated within the existing society, with the present pattern of north-western society being the result. In the ancient history and chronicles the name Khatri, or *Kshatriya* (the second order of the Hindus), is found to have been used for Rajput. Even up to the year 1200 this word is not found in much use though in the opinion of many scholars it had come into use with the advent of the Muslims in the South Asia Subcontinent in the 8th century. (Hirachand-I:8)

As has been seen, the origin of Rajputs is not so very clear and is shrouded in the haze of history. However, according to the myths their great-grand forefather, Parmar, was created out of fire by Inder Devta, the god of fire, at Mount Abu. It is said that as

the newly created man had come out from fire saying "mar, mar" loudly, he came to be known as parmar. (Harijan-I:26)

The *Rashis* and *Munis* (Hindu ascetics) further say that afterwards Brahma created a young man from fire. He was holding a sword in one hand and Ved in the other. He came to be known as 'Chilonki' because it is believed that as Brahma had prepared the *putla* or human image on his hand, then had thrown it into fire, the man had born. It is said that the word got corrupted to 'Milonki' and later on to 'Solinki'.(Harijan-I:27)

It is said that afterwards god Shiva created a man from fire, who had a dark complexion. This man, though not brave, was well suited to act as guard at the door. This is exactly the reason why he came to be known as 'Prithvi Dwar'. In its changed form it came to be known as *Parrhiar*.

Later on the god Vishnu created a man from fire and made him like himself and with complexion of Krishna (black). He was very brave with bow tied to his body and arrow in one hand and sword in the other. Because of these attributes he came to be known by the name of 'Chitrang', which in its corrupted form became 'Chauhan'.

In this way the Rajputs were born from fire by the kindness of the gods. They are also known to be *agnikul* or the fire family hence *agni-vansi*. The place of fire at the Mount Abu where they were created is still held sacred by them and they prefer pilgrimage (*tirath*) to it.

The Rajputs having been born of fire had in the beginning only four castes: Parmar, Parrhiar, Solinki and Chauhan. They then consisted of six clans which now are known to have grown to thirty-six with many having further branches. The main divisions of Rajputs are as follows:-

1. Akhiawak or Surya.
2. Andoshom or Chandra-vansi.
3. Ghalot with 24 branches.

4. Yadav with 4 branches.
5. Tanor with 17 branches.
6. Rathor with 13 branches.
7. Kishwaha or Kechwaha.
8. Parmar with 35 branches.
9. Chauhan with 26 branches.
10. Solinki or Chalok with 16 branches.
11. Parrhiar with 12 branches.
12. Ghaorha with one branch.
13. Tank or Takhek.
14. Jot, Jheti or Jat.
15. Hun or Han.
16. Kathi.
17. Bila.
18. Jhala with two branches.
19. Jethwa or Kamri.
20. Gohl.
21. Saroya.
22. Salao.
23. Dabhi.
24. Gorr.
25. Doda.
26. Goherwal.
27. Bharrgujar with 3 branches.
28. Senghar with one branch.
29. Sekowal with one branch.
30. Ves with one branch.
31. Dahia.
32. Joya.
33. Mohl.
34. Nicomp.
35. Rajpai.
36. Dahia.

As would be noted from above, there are certain Rajput divisions, which do not have any branch. These are called '*eka*' in the local tradition.(Harijan-I:31/personal communication). It would be of interest to know that the above-mentioned 36 main

tribes/ clans of Rajputs are broadly put into the following four divisions:-

1. 10 clans: Surajvansi;
2. 10 clans: Chandarvansi;
3. 12 clans: Rughuvansi;
4. 4 clans: Aganvansi. (Personal communication).

Raikes says (p.6), "The dominant race, and many of the inferior tribes of the Desert also being Rajpoots, their matrimonial alliances have naturally been contracted more in Kutch, the nearest Rajput country where they could find suitable husbands for their daughters, and wives for their sons. The Soda ladies of the Desert are esteemed amongst the most beautiful women of the East, their virtues and beauty being the theme of many songs - the subject of many a story - and in former days the cause of many a fatal contest." No wonder then that even after independence they had strong linkage with the Rajput-dominant areas in India.

Syed

Among the Muslims settled in the Thar Syed are believed to be the descendents of Hazrat Muhammad *salla Allaho alaihe wassallam*. The very word, Syed, in Arabic stands for leader or a *sardar.* They are thus treated as Murshid or *Pir*, like a saint to followers, and command great respect.

Baloch

The Balochs are believed to be the descendents of Jalal Khan who had four sons: Rind, Lashar, Hoot and Korai, and one daughter named Jato. The different clans and tribes of Balochs came out of these five issues of the Khan. These clans and tribes are then further divided into different branches.

1) **Rind:** Domki, Jakhrani, Leghari, Khosa, Jamali, Bozdar, Chakrani etc.

2) **Lashar:** Gorani, Bhotani, Kalwani etc.

3) **Hoot:** Chandia and then Ghaibani, Ghurmani, Bharani, Kambrani, Sundrani etc.

4) **Korai:** Pitani, Badani, Dasti etc.

5) **Jatoi:** The issues belonging to *Mai* Jato came to be known as Jatoi. The different branches of this clan were called after the names of the sons of *Mai* Jato who was married to her cousin, Murad Khan. These branches are: Bila, Tarth, Shar, Kosh, Karosh and Zangija.

The different *qabilas*, tribes or clans of Balochs are further discussed in the following lines:-

Rind

The great-grand father of Rinds, Mir Chaakar Khan, also known as Chaakar-e-Azam, or Chaakar the Great, lived in Balochistan. He was a great warrior. A fort named after him still stands close to the Sibi or Sivi town. He was granted *jagirs* by the Mughals in Punjab where he lived rest of his life. He died at Satghara, near Okara, and was buried there. His last resting-place in the shape of a majestic tomb stands at the corner of the ancient fort of Satghara.

Khosa

The other most important branch of the Balochs is Khosa. They have been taken next to Rajput Sodhas in importance and exercised a great influence on the fortunes of Thar, as also the neighbouring Kutch.(Raikes:7)

> The Khosa who are Muslims are noted to have immigrated to Sindh with the Kalhoras and on the downfall of the dynasty in 1782, left Sindh proper, "when a portion of the tribe distributed itself about the Desert between Marwarr and the valley of the Indus. They are a fine, robust, martial race, inured to fatigue,

A Khosa elder

exposure, and scanty living; brave and enterprising when roused to action, but improvident and slothful when not excited, the Desert was just the place for their qualities to shine in.

... "For generations, they looked to the saddle and the sword as their livelihood; so long as their old masters, the Kalhoras, swayed the destinies of Sindh, and continued to pay them, they served them faithfully; but being now without employment or means of living, and having nothing to expect from the Talpoors, who had raised themselves to power on the fall of the Kalhoras, they betook themselves to the Desert, where without manual labour, to which they were unaccustomed, they gained a livelihood by associating themselves with the local Chiefs; and when the worst came to the worst, by helping themselves forcibly, in true oriental fashion, to a share of others' property. The sequel has shown the skill and enterprise with which they availed themselves of the advantages of their new field of action, and how they levied contributions or black mail to the gates of

Bhooj in one direction, to the walls of Radumpore in another, and to the vicinity of Ahmedabad in a third." (Raikes:7)

As they are known to be a brave and warrior stock they mostly used to have horses and also took to banditry in the past. During the British period they generally joined the government service.

They further have branches named Jumari, Chotani, Daryani, Sahriyani, Gagherani, Shadani, Mathewal etc. Most of their population is concentrated in *talukas* Nagarparkar and Chhachhro. They are also found settled in Umerkot.

Chandia

Most of Chandias are found settled in Kanthia, Mohrano and Nagarparkar areas. However, they take the family of Nawab Chamay Khan Chandia who lived in Larkana district, as their cheifs. In this family, Sultan Ahmad Khan Chandio followed his father as *sardar* or leader of this branch of Balochs.

Khoja

They belong to the Lohana tribe. After embracing Islam they joined Ismaili Shias and as such they are followers of Aga Khan. They are generally traders and deal in hides and skins etc. They are mostly concentrated in Umerkot.

Serai

Some of the branches of Balochs speak Seraiki, the language of the north, spoken in the adjoining areas of southern Punjab. They are known as Serai.

Sumra

They are mostly believed to be the descendents of Parmar Rajput. At a later stage they embraced Islam. However, there is certain literature that refers to Sumras as having their descent from Arabs. Here it is said that the 'Sumra' tribe of the Arabs migrated to Sindh during the Caliphate of Mamoon Abbasi. Though Sumras are also some times referred to as having connection with the city of Samra which was founded by Mu'tasim Abbasi in 836 yet other scholars like Allama Syed Suleman Nadvi, term it as just a coincidence of phonetics or 'playing with words'.(Nadvi-I:20) In the Thar although the Kaerr area is heavily populated by them, they are also found scattered in other regions as well.

Memon

It is said that when Hazrat Yousafuddin Qadri came from Baghdad and settled in Thatta in 15th century, Lohanas embraced Islam at his hand and became his followers, or *murid*. From Larr they came to the Thar where they are mostly found in the areas of Diplo and Nagarparkar. They are generally traders but also take to government service, especially those from Diplo are educated and have risen to high positions.

Samma

The origin of Samma tribe is also described differently by various scholars. Some think that Samma came from Hindu Rajputs while others take them to be the descendents of Sam, the son of Hazrat Nooh (Noah). He in turn had four sons whose off-shoots made for various branches like Parrhiar, Koraja, Bhatti, Odher, Lakher, Kakipota, Hingorja, Halepota, Hala, Dahar, Kahia, Palli, Abra, Rakan, Rahuma etc. They are also included in the Smat castes.

Nahria

These are scattered all over the Thar though Wangi and Kaerr

have a large number of them. These are also called Arbab.

Rahuma

They make one of the branches of Sammas. They live all over Thar with larger concentration in *taluka* Diplo and Kaerr region. They are also called Arbab.

Unarr

Originally they are from Nasarpur. They ran from their home and settled in Thar after the Khan Zaman forces attacked their area. They are found only in Achha area of the Thar.

In addition to Rajputs, there are other Hindu tribes and clans. Most of these Hindus came to Thar predominantly from Marwarr. Some of others migrated also from areas of Larr and Sindh. Their main tribes and clans are as follows:-

Brahman

The religious or spiritual leaders of Hindus, Brahmans, the highest caste in Hindus, have many branches. Those found in the Thar are:

1) **Sharmali Brahman:** As they hailed from their original habitat of Shrimal Nagar they are thus called. From Gujerat they first migrated to Marwarr and from there came to Thar to settle here. They consist of eighty-four branches but in Thar are found only Ojha, Tarvidi, Doi and Prohet. They are mostly settled in Parkar, Chilhar, Chhachhro, Mithi and Chhor areas. They are the *Gur Brahman* or the religious guru or teacher of Sodha Rajputs whose rites and rituals at the times of death or marriage are conducted by them. On death, they are cremated.

2) **Pushkarna Brahman:** They are also called Pokharna Brahman, or the Brahmans who cultivate land. They hailed from Pushkar. Out of their eighty-

four branches in Thar are found Acharj, Joshi, Vias, Mirrhaho, Mando, Mapara, Vaso etc. They are settled mostly in larger villages and towns. They cremate their dead.

3)**Sarsot Brahman:** These are the religious leaders, *guru*, of Lohanas and conduct the rites and rituals at the time of birth of a child, marriage and death in this tribe. They migrated from Marwarr to Thar and are found, though not in large numbers, in Mithi, Diplo and Islamkot. They eat meat and cremate their dead.

4)**Bhejak:** They came from Jaisalmer, first to settle in Umerkot but later on scattered all over Thar. They are also called Shakardeepi and Sheval. They are the *pujaris* in the *mandar* or Hindu temple. They also cremate their dead.

5)**Raj-gur:** These Brahmans are the main sect of Hindu religious *guru* who conduct the rituals and rites of birth, marriage and death of Thakurs. They mostly live in villages.

6)**Mahaishwari:** These are also called Kerarr. They migrated from Marwarr to Thar where they mainly live in larger towns, though a very small number may also be found in villages. Their main occupation is trading. They burn their dead bodies in last rites.

Lohana

They are believed to be the descendents of Loh the son of Shri Ramchandar. They came to Sindh from Lahore where still is found the Loh *Mandar*, Temple of Loh, in the old Fort. From Sindh they migrated to Thar. They are traders and moneylenders. They also deal in the trade of meat. They inhabit the areas of Mithi, Islamkot and Parkar.

Sotahrr

They are scattered all over Thar. They manufacture wooden bedsteads, doorframes etc. They also work on making new wells for which they have special expertise in the given particular soil of the Thar.

Rabhari

They are mostly inhabitants of Parkar area. They usually shepherd and graze sheep.

Charan

They originally hailed from Marwarr but in Thar they mostly live in the villages of Kaerr area. They keep and 'sing' or relate geneological record of Rajputs who look at them with great esteem. They worship different deities, *devis*, and eat meat.

Jat

They are Khatri-vans. Their main branches are Kaloria, Monda, Shora, Jat etc. They inhabit the villages in the north of Chhachhro in Kaerr area. They till land and also herd animals.

Pithoro Pota Pir

They are originally Sodha Rajputs. They are called Pithoro Pota Pir because of their having links with Pir Pithoro. They live in part of Parkar and *taluka* Diplo.

Malhi

They are originally Khatri-vans and hailed from Marwarr. They cultivate and till land. Their main branches, like Rajputs, are

Chohan, Tanwar, Parrihiar, Solanki, Rathor etc. They live in larger villages of Thar and also take to the profession of drawing water from wells.

Sonara

They are also known as *Sone Mahajan* as they deal in making jewellery from gold and silver and also act as moneylenders. They are found throughout Thar's larger villages.

Khattri

They live in larger towns and do the business of dyeing cloth. They also take meat.

Darzi

They originally came from Marwarr and in Thar are mostly found in Umerkot. Their occupation is to sew and stitch cloths. They are not vegetarian.

Sami

They are also known as *bhawa*. They have hailed to the Thar from Marwarr. They have branches like Giri, Puri, Nath etc. Their profession is to undertake the last rites of the dead body on cremation.

Na'ee

They are natives of Marwarr and came to Thar where they mostly live in towns though they are also found in some villages. Their profession is hair cutting.

Mochee

They are the ones who make shoes juties from leather. They also

do the shoe repairing work. As Meghwarr mostly deal in hides and skins, mochees are usually from this caste.

Vartaiya

They are also known as *Chhanchhariya*. Originally from Marwarr, they live in towns of Thar. They worship in Hindu temples.

Kariyagar

They are the people who do the last rites - *kariya karam*, arranging for cremation of dead body. They have also come from Marwarr and live in towns of Thar.

Lohar

They are the blacksmith people. They do not lead a settled life. They work in Thar during the winter season while they go to

Nara region of Sindh during summer. They originally hailed from Marwarr.

Koombhar

They make clay pots. They also originally came from Marwarr.

Bajir

They are the household servants of the Thakur landlords. Their women-folk also work in Thakur's house. They are also known as *gola* or *goli*, the latter are also given as part of dowry on the wedding of a Thakur's daughter.

Jain

In addition to Muslims and Hindus the followers of Jainism, called Jain, also live in Thar and Parkar. Oswarh, amongst them, had come from Kutch and Marwarr and lived mostly in southeastern part of Thar and Nagarparkar.

Jainism is a religion and philosophy, along with Hinduism and Buddhism. It was founded in about 6th century B.C. by Vardhama, who is known as Mahavira ("Great Hero") - the 24th of the Tirthankaras ("Ford-maker"), Jina ("conquerors" ; whence the name Jainism), the great religious figures on whose example the religion is centred - in protest against the orthodox Vedic (early Hindu) ritualistic cult of the period, its earliest proponents may have belonged to a sect that rebelled against the idea and practice of taking life prevalent in the Vedic animal sacrifice. It does not espouse belief in a creator god, and has as its ethical core the doctrine of *ahimsa,* or non-injury to all living creatures, and its religious ideal the perfection of man's nature mainly to be achieved through monastic and ascetic life.

The Jainism preaches universal tolerance, and its attitude toward other forms of religions is that of no-criticism. It is not competitive and has never cared for the spread of its faith. Among its followers are traders and merchants. (Britannica)

Fundamental to Jainism is the doctrine of two eternal, coexisting, independent categories known as *jiva* (animate, living soul: the enjoyer) and *ajiva* (inanimate, non-living object: the enjoyed). (Encarta)

The spread, and prosperity, of its followers in Thar and Parkar is

proved by the presence of monumental Jain temples at places like Gorri, Viravah, Bodhesar, Nagarparkar etc. These temples in fact stand out for their architecture and carving in stone. The Jain temples generally contained metal images of various types and metal plaques depicting auspicious symbols.

Achhoot

In Hindu society any member of a wide range of low-caste Hindu groups and any person outside the cast-system is bracketed as *Achhoot* or untouchable. In contemporary era they have been renamed Harijan (children of god Hari Vishnu) only to give them a sense of emancipation from the centuries-old dogma of being a low creed of the lowliest.

Traditionally, the groups characterized as untouchables were those whose occupation and habits of life involved polluting activities, of which the most important were (1) taking life for living, the category, for example, included fishermen; (2) killing or disposing of dead cattle or working with their hides for living; (3) pursuing occupations that brought the incumbent into contact with emissions of human body, and included such groups as sweepers and washer men; and (4) eating the flesh of (dead) cattle or of domestic pigs and chickens.(Britannica)

The tribes and castes of untouchables or Harijan that inhabit Thar are as follows:-

Meghwarr

They hailed from Marwarr from where those who migrated to Thar live all over in towns and villages. A trip to the area would reveal that they are found even in small hamlets. At many places they have set up their own villages. Their main profession is dyeing hides and skins and making leather shoes. They also prepare cloth from wool and cotton. Some of them have taken to the occupation of cultivation and grazing animal. Their main

branches, like Rajputs, are Rathor, Chohan, Parmar, Bhatti, Solinki etc. Some of them have had education and are in the service of the government or other organizations. Amongst the Achhoot they have a higher social standard and status.

Bhil

It is said that this ethnic group was in fact the premier group who came to Thar from Marwarr. Many of them are tribal, and they have been known for rugged independence, sometimes associated with banditry. Most Bhils worship local deities in

varied pantheon only slightly touching the practices of higher Hinduism. Their dialects are akin to Gujerati. (Britannica)

The Bhil are found almost everywhere in Thar where at places they have also set up their own villages. Quite a few branches of Bhil are like those of Rajput. They till and cultivate land while also work as day labourer. Some of them also deal in hides and skins and animal bones. Many of them temporarily migrate to Sindh's settled areas in summer and come back to Thar with the onset of winter.

Kolhi

They are said to hail from Gujerat. They migrated from there first to Kutch thence they came to Thar and Parkar where at the latter area they are found in large numbers. Although identified as cultivators and labourers, many Kolhi survive only by gathering firewood and hiring out as labourers, subsisting on berries etc. when the food is scarce.

The Kolhi are organized into several theoretically exogamous

clans and are largely hinduized but retain some of their former animism. (Britannica) Many of their branches have names like those of Rajput's. One of these branches, known as Thakurera Kolhi, takes themselves as superior to others. (Harijan-II)

Jattia

Migrating also from Marwarr, most of Jattia settled in Umerkot. They follow the profession of dyeing hides and skins and manufacturing of shoes from leather.

Kalal

They also migrated from Marwarr and settled in Umerkot. They deal in hides and skins and also make *birri* from the *birri*-leaves.

Bhangi

Originally from Marwarr, Bhangi, or scavenger, are now settled in towns. They follow the menial profession of cleaning toilets, human refuse and such other low jobs.

Gur'ra

They are the *guru* of Acchhoots. They conduct the rites and rituals of Harijan's birth, marriage, death etc. Stitching cloth is their main profession. Except Menghwarr, they do not eat from the house of other Achhoot. They bury their dead.

Bhat

They have also come to Thar from Marwarr. They keep the

geneological record (*shajra*) of Achhoots for which they get annual payment. (Harijan-II:131)

In addition to these Sansi, Jogi etc., who are mostly nomads, come to Thar for the purpose of 'begging'.

Flora

Flora

Unlike the general impression of a desert being barren and without any vegetation, Thar can boast of a number of trees, plants and shrubs that come out of the sandy surfaces and from the plain land between the dunes. Most of the wild plants, though, grow during rainy season and wither away after it. The rest that survive tend to become large bushy shrubs or trees of considerable height. At places these trees and other plants stand apart from each other while there are also areas where they really go to make an 'oasis'. Especially the groups of trees on the top of large *bhits* give a very pleasing effect when looked at from a distance.

In most of the parts of Thar wild grass grows almost everywhere after rainfall. The animals throng on it and become healthier to give more milk and fetch higher price. However, soon after the rainy season the grass also withers away. The continued drought results in the absence of green grass for longer periods, which forces the Thari to temporarily migrate to 'greener pastures' of Sindh proper, though at a cost of many a cattle which perish on way for want of fodder and water.

The main trees of Thar are of two types, classified on the basis of their size; the large trees and smaller trees and plants.

Large Trees

These are the trees, some of which grow as wild vegetation during rainy season. If they survive the early attack of drought, grazing animals or destructive human action, they grow into

large trees. Such trees include *roherro, kanakah, kombhat* etc. Some of these trees are also tended in houses, villages and hamlets where they have greater survival and maturity rate. Some of the trees of this category become so large as to have their height up to some seven metres. Among such trees are *nim, amin bher, seranghoo, Sindhi babar, valayati babar, sirin*, etc. Some of the trees of this group are as below:-

Kando

(prosopic spicegera)

It is found in abundance all over Thar except Kaerr where it is in scarcity. It grows in sand and fertile land equally well. It is also found at the top of the *darra* or smaller sand dunes and in the plains in-between *bhits*. The *kando* is found with sharp-prickles, known as *katera*, and also without thorns, which are called *lasorh*. There are certain others small branches of which are so delicate that they easily breakaway when their leaves are

plucked for animal feed. This type is known as *bharhkina kanda*. However, the opposite of it are also found and are called *cheerha kanda.*

The *kando* starts drying up before the onset of monsoons and takes on new leaves with the coming of this season. The *kanda*-leaves when young are of yellowish colour and not used as feed for animals. On maturity, when they turn green, they are plucked to feed goats and camels. During famines when fodder is in scarcity these leaves also serve cows and other animals. The spring season also sees coming to it a type of fruit, which is cooked as vegetable, while on its getting thicker, it is fed to goats and camels. When ripe, this fruit is also eaten raw by human beings.

The *kanda* wood is quite strong and is used to erect joists and pillars. However, it is not thought useful to serve as beam of a building as it is prone to attack of white ants. The trunk and branches of *kando* are also used as firewood. The wood from very old *kando* trees becomes stronger. As such some household items, shoemakers' implements etc. are also made from it. The *kando* in some cases is said to last over a hundred years. Such old trees grow to become very large and as such serve to give cover from sun to people and their beasts.

Jharr and khab'arh

(salvadora oleoides)

The *jharr* or bushes in Thar are in abundance. They grow at smaller *bhits* and other sandy areas. They normally do not catch up much height but spread around and take the shape of heavy bushy trees. The *jharr* does not have a large trunk, which is also not visible because the branches and leaves cover much of the area around.

The larger bushy trees of *jharr* may rise up to about two metres with proportionally thicker trunk. Such *jharrs* are in plenty in Kanthia Thar. Its leaves are favourite feed of camel and goat.

The *khab'arr* is also like *jharr*. It throngs in saltish areas of Mohrano Thar. Its basic difference with *jharr* is that it has a berry-like fruit, which is sour in taste, while that of *jharr* is sweet. This fruit of *khab'arr* is not taken by human beings while camels cherish it a great deal. The fruit of *jharr* is reddish as well as yellow. It is not only eaten by the locals but is also sent to the market for sale. A portion of its produce is also dried, and then eaten by men and their beast during off-season.

The wood of *khab'arr* is taken to be strong and resistant against white ants hence used in buildings as beams, main-support joists in *chownras* etc. It is also used to manufacture legs of the bedstead, wheels for wells to support the load, doors and windows for *chownras* etc. The thin branches that come out from it during rainy season are plucked to make cages for pet birds like partridges. The *khab'arr* wood is also useful in curing locally a particular malady of camel.

Babar

(Acacia nilotica cupersigorms)

It is known to be a tree of the Sindh area. It flourishes in a relatively hard land. It is, therefore, found in plenty in the Nagarparkar region, as its earth is suitable for it. It is also found in areas between *bhits* in *talukas* Diplo, Chhachhro, Mithi etc.

The branches of *babar* carry white prickles or thorns, which are on the average 3cm in length. These are called by the name of '*soor*' by Tharis. The *babar* tree has fluffy small flowers of yellow colour. From these flowers grow the pod which are known as '*phalrra*'. When ripe the pods have a stone in each of the four or five 'compartments'.

The branches and the pods of *babar* tree are a sort of favourite food for the camel and goat. It is believed in Thar that the cattle get healthy and fat with this 'diet'.

The branches of the *babar* tree are pruned and it flourishes soon

with new branches. It grows into large tree and gum is extracted from its trunk by giving it small cuts. Its skin is used in dyeing leather. The wood of *babar* is also useful as chairs, tables, cupboards, swinging cradles, legs of bedsteads etc. are made from it.

Valayati Babar

(Acacia nilotica cupersigoms)

This tree is much smaller in height when compared to (Sindhi) *babar*. It rises from the ground like large bush with thin but long branches. It has dark green leaves, which are small in size. The *valayati babar* is said to have been introduced during the British *raj* in sandy areas with scanty water. Now it is not only cultivated but also grows out of earth on its own and requiring no care at all, develops considerably. In fact its seeds when ripe scatter

over a large area and grow with the slightest rain or moisture.

Its branches carry strong and sharp thorns, which are small in size. Its fruit is in the shape of pod, which is green in the beginning but becomes yellow when ripe. It bears this fruit of pod throughout the year and is not restricted to any season. This is eaten by donkeys and goats. Its wood, which could be got from older trees when their trunk gets little thicker, is useful in making legs of bed-stead etc.

The *valayati babar* can be found almost everywhere in Thar especially Chhachhro, Umerkot, Chilhar, Mithi, Islamkot etc. as also Nagarparkar.

Nim

(azadirachta indica)

The nim is found all over Thar. It is, however, so to say, domesticated tree and 'cultivated' only in houses, hamlets,

villages, towns etc. where it can be looked after with care. Being delicate in nature when young, it is not found in areas where it cannot be tended and regularly watered and guarded against the excesses of men or animals.

During spring white-coloured pollen appears on it. The pollen is locally called *'nimbujhar'* and is used as indigenous medicine especially to control fever. The pollen turns to berry-like fruit with time. When ripe this fruit is taken by birds in addition to humans especially children who suck its sap and throw away the stone found inside it.

From the *nim*-berries oil is extracted in a local mill. The berries and the oil which is in bottles, is sold in shops especially in Nagarparkar from where it is taken to the interior where it is used as medicine for a number of ailments. When these berries are crushed and mixed with linseed oil, the women of Thar massage it to their head to get rid of lice. Such a paste is also thought by them to be very nourishing for the healthier growth and shine of their hair.

The branches of the *Nim* tree are also used as 'tooth-brush'. Especially the Vishnu-people keep them at home and clean their teeth with it every morning. Brahman and Banya keep quite a stock of dry *Nim* branches at home. At the time of use a cut and dried branch is kept in water for some time to make it little soft.

The people of Thar grow *Nim* trees in their houses, near the wells and such other places where they keep their cattle. The shade of *nim* tree in a sunny day is very refreshing and Thari and his animals rest under it during the scorching heat.

The *Nim*-wood is taken to be strong. Its trunk gets quite thick and is thus used to make doorframes and leaves, windows, cupboards etc.

Roherro

(Tecoma undulata)

This tree is amongst the large trees and may develop as big as

Kandi. It is found in abundance in eastern side of *taluka* Chhachhro and the areas north east of Nagarparkar. It is also found in areas of Mohrano Thar, Diplo and Mithi. It, however, does not flourish on the sands of the large *bhits* and sandy mounds. At some places clusters of *Roherro* trees make a pleasing site. Its dead wood is used for making fire.

During spring season it gets covered with beautiful flowers of red, yellow and golden colours. These flowers do not emit any smell but are only pleasing to look at. They develop into a fruit that is equally useless for the Thari.

The wood of *Roherro* is strong and as such very useful and expensive. The trunk of it grows large and is sawed to make furniture, doorframes and leaves, windows etc. It is also used as building timber. It is a favourite feed with camel.

Koombhat

(Acacia senegal)

Its stem and trunk are smaller in height than those of *Kandi*. It usually grows on the leeward slopes and tops of *bhits*. The hard land between *bhits* is not suitable for it. It bears leaves that are smaller in size like *Kandi* while its branches carry sharp thorns. During monsoon it wears a nice look with small fresh blossoms which are white and yellow. The blossoms grow into pods, which have seeds in them. When raw a pod is taken as vegetable and people eat it also. It is also taken by cattle. The fresh blossoms and the pods of *Koombhat* are also cherished by camel.

The wood of *Koombhat* is thought to be strong. This is why it is used for prop up pillar of *chownra*, beams of buildings etc. However, it is prone to attack of white ants from inside. The wood from small branches is also used as 'tooth-brush'. People get these branches dried and keep them at home for use to clean teeth.

The dry and dead branches and other parts are used as firewood. Such firewood is transported by camels to towns and cities for sale in the market. The gum is also extracted from its trunk, which is sold by poor, for making a type of sweet meat.

This tree is found in abundance in Mohrano area, southeast of Chhachhro *taluka* and Kantho area i.e. north of Nagarparkar. It scarcely grows in Wangi, Watt, Samroti and Kaerr areas of Thar.

Seranghoo

It is also bush-like tree. Its branches when broken and sown in ground also take roots. Its growth is thus easy, and also fast. It is found in plenty in Nagarparkar, Chhachhro and Chilhar where people put its branches in ground to demarcate the limits of their houses, and soon they come to life. These trees then serve as the enclosing walls. Its leaves resemble those of *Kando*. It provides shade during monsoons.

The *Seranghoo* has flowers of white colour, which turn into pods, which are similar to those of *Koombhat*. The wood is of weak type and is of no use to men or to their beast. It is not even used as firewood as it emits lot of smoke.

Sirin

(Albizzia lebbek)

Although a very large tree, it is also not originally from Thar but has been brought from Sindh proper. It is also not very common and is found mostly in towns. As its branch, when sown in the ground, grows into a new tree, Tharis also 'cultivate' it at their wells for shade. Its leaves, though thick, resemble those of *Kando*.

There are also other trees like *Papar, Gedoorhi, Aman-ber* etc., which are alien to Thar and have come from Sindh proper. They are also not found everywhere but are restricted to towns and large villages.

Barr

It is a very well known large tree. Its trunk gets very thick with age. In fact it survives to over hundred years. When old, small brownish naked branches come off from it and fall towards the ground where they become new roots. It has leaves like an *Ak* tree that is found in Thar at most of the places. The leaves are used by some Hindus as plates to eat from. There is a sort of milk that oozes out from its trunk and branches when given a cut. This milk-like substance is used in preparing many a local medicine. The tree gets very thick and provides heavy shade during summer season. It is not found at many places but in towns like Nagarparkar, Umerkot etc.

Smaller Trees

In addition to the trees as mentioned above there are other trees and plants which grow in Thar. These plants usually do not have a single stem or trunk like other trees, instead many branches rise right from the ground to considerable height. Some of them do have a single trunk but so many branches grow from them that this portion does not remain visible to the eye. Most of them are wild plants and thrive on the land in-between the sand dunes and on small mounds during the rains. Some of them may rise to a height of about four metres. The most common and important amongst them are given below: -

Ak

(Calotropis procera and gigantea)

It is perhaps the most common and quite useful plant of Thar. It is usually not found on the top of large *bhits* or on their slopes but flourishes well on small dunes and by their sides where land is soft and most suitable for its natural growth. It soon develops into a very large bush-like plant with numerous branches vying to stand taller from one another. Its leaves seem large as compared to its height. During winter most of *Ak* plants wither away but rains, especially monsoon season put life into it and in a very short time they again grow into large plants.

Its leaves are locally used as cure for many an ailment. When broken, a fresh *Ak* branch produces milk-like white substance which, though not good in taste, is used to prepare a number of indigenous medicines. This milk is collected in large quantity by Menghwarr and used in treatment of leather to make it suitable for making shoes and other goods.

The *Ak* plant has flowers, which are called *phalia* by Thari. It is also used in preparing quite a few medicines. From flowers grow a green pod-like fruit which when ripe produces from inside very thin, soft and delicate cotton-like material joined together

by a small black seed or stone. This cotton-like material is known as *akwaro*. The *Ak*-cotton, so to say, is used in pillows etc., which are very soft and comfortable. The *akwaro* from *Ak* plant is also used to make soft ropes that are used to draw water from wells. These ropes when dyed in different colours look nice and are used to knit seats of beds as also swinging-cradles.

The wood of the *Ak* plant is not strong though it is light in weight. This is why its use in preparing *chownra* or thatched roofs is preferred. It is also used in preparing items of fire-works. It is also used as firewood though not with preference as it burns out quickly and does not thus produce enough heat.

The *Ak* is eaten by goats, and it is believed that it increases their produce of milk. Other animals of Thar do not take *Ak*.

Phog

This plant normally grows throughout Thar on small dunes or

darra, mounds. It is seldom found on large *bhits* or the hard land in-between them. So it is scarcely available in Nagarparkar or Mithi's hard flat land. This plant also does not grow from a single stem but instead has many branches. It does not carry any leaves but thorn-like small sprouts come out of its branches. These are called *la'soon*. It withers out during the cold season of winter when the said *las'oon* also dry up completely. After the winter when the branches and *la'soon* become shoots it is taken as announcement for the approaching spring. It again becomes fresh and green and thick with growth.

The fresh *la'soon* get blossoms which look like small flowers and are locally known as *phogaisy*. It is also used as vegetable and cooked for meals. The vegetarians, Vishnu, put it with cumin seed and mustard and mix in *lassi* - a sort of churned yoghurt. It is called *ra'eta* which is taken with rice or the local bread of wheat. Most of people in Thar put a little flour of *bajra* - a kind of grain - and *phogaisy* in *lassi* and cook it. The dish is known as *raberrio* or *khatio*, which is very favourite with Tharis. People also let this fruit dry to keep it for the off-season use, especially for preparing *khatio*.

The *Phog* tree does not have any thorns like those of *babar* on its branches. It is, therefore, easy to cut it for use as firewood. During off-season plenty of dry branches of this plant are available in the wilderness from where people transport them by camels or donkeys to towns where they are sold. The children and ladies of small villages gather the dry branches of *Phog* to heat their hearths. Because of its good value as heating agent the blacksmith of Thar burns it to prepare 'coal' to burn in his small factory.

Kerarr

(Capparus aphylla)

This plant not only grows on the soft ground - sandy dunes - but also is found in-between *bhits* on relatively hard ground. It

especially thrives in Mohrano and Samroti regions and the areas lying west of Chhachhro town. It is in scarcity in Kaerr and Kantho areas.

It has very many branches; as from each branch grow a number of shoots which also become branches of this plant. The small leaves on these branches soon wither down and leave plenty of tiny prickles. As it needs plenty of water it flourishes well in *tra'ees* or near the water ponds and wells.

During summer season pods grow over it, which are taken as vegetable by Thari. It develops into green fruit that is plucked also to use as vegetable, while if kept in oil it makes tasty pickle. The fruit is locally known as *keeria*. On ripening it turns into reddish and is not only eaten by people but also by goats, and is transported to towns to put on sale by poor people.

Its wood is strong that turns black and is much useful as it resists the attack of white ants etc. It is also used in making *chownra* and frames of doors and windows of cottages or huts, as also many other things.

Bhererhi

(Zizyphus numularia)

It is a wild tree and is found almost all over Thar. It does not grow on soft land or *bhits* but flourishes on the hard land of a valley between sand-hills. Some of them shoot off from a single stem but soon give out branches that touch the ground. In other cases a group of two, three or more branches grow out right from the ground. Some of the branches grow larger while others remain small. Each of the leaves has a couple of prickles, one of them sharper and longer than the other. The leaves are locally used as medicine while camel and goats take them as fodder.

In November white coloured blossoms grow on it. They turn into green-coloured berry-like fruit known as *andhir*. Some of them grow a little in size and become yellow. Such 'berries' are

sour in taste. On ripening their colour becomes red and they turn very sweet. These *ber,* or berries, are smaller in size as compared to those found in Sindh proper. Women and children go out and collect this fruit. In case the berries are limited in number they pluck them with hand. However, in the event of a rich harvest the branches of the tree are struck with a thick wooden stick or staff, or simply these branches are shaken violently with hand. In either of the ways the fruit drops to the ground and the ripe ones are picked up by the gatherers. The produce is not only consumed locally but also taken to the town market for sale. They also dry these *ber* and feed them to the animals especially goat.

Though the wood of *ber* is not thick in size yet it is very strong and used in preparing a number of household things like legs of bedstead etc. Its branches are also used in making fence of a house.

Thoohar

(Euphorbia caudicifolia)

Thoohar or cactus is another plant, which is quite common in most of the regions of Thar. It flourishes in the soft sandy areas of *bhits,* on their downward slopes and on the top of small dunes. It seldom grows in hard soil. In Thar it is mostly found in regions of Mohrano, west of Chhachhro, northwest of Mithi *taluka* etc. It is rarely found in areas south of Islamkot and east of Chhachhro *taluka*. It is also not found in Kaerr region, though in a localized way it grows in the vicinity of Karoonjhar hills of Nagarparkar.

It grows out of a single stem but gets so many branches that soon it goes to look as if it has many shoots coming from the ground. The branches are like flabby staff, known as *danda* from which oozes out white milk-like substance when broken. This milk-like substance is used locally in preparing many a medicine. The branches contain innumerable small but sharp thorns. Usually towards the topside these branches have small reddish flowers

which are eaten by goats. The *thoohar* has very small, flabby leaves.

In case the staff-like branch of *thoohar* is fixed in ground in rainy season, it soon starts growing into a new plant. The T*hoohar* has a unique poperty of staying fresh even when there are no rains for many years while other plants wither away or simply turn dead. In such times of famine even human beings are obliged to leave their abode in Thar.

When a *thoohar* plant gets old some of its branches dry out. The plant or its such branches are of no value except that the latter are burned by passers-by to ward off cold during severe winter season. The dry wood of *thoohar* burns in a jiffy and is not suitable even to use as firewood.

Morarri

This is a plant like that of *mehndi*, which grows in soft ground at the top of *bhits*. It does not have a single trunk but a number of

its branches come out of the ground at the same time. The thorns on the branches are not sharp, while the leaves are of very small size. It withers away during summer season but again grows green with any amount of rain, and along with shoots come out small berry-like fruit which is eaten by camels and goats alike.

The wood of *morarri* being soft is taken as useless. It is not even used as firewood because of certain superstition prevalent in Thar.

Gang'bheti

In Thar this plant grows only here and there at the top and on the slopes of *bhits* as also on the upper side of smaller mounds and sand dunes. However, it is found in plenty in Karoonjhar area of Nagarparkar.

It does not have a single trunk but consists of a number of branches coming out of the ground. It does not rise even up to a height of one metre. During summer it loses its leaves while with the rainy season it wears a green look with plenty of small leaves. From them appear small white flowers, which turn into small green-coloured fruit resembling wild Jamaica liquorice seed. Although it does not have much taste in it yet the Thari children collect it from ground and relish eating it. When the plant is green it is the feed of camels, goats and sheep.

It would though not grow large in size, it is a useful plant for many a purpose. Its dry branches are used to prepare fences or hedges of the houses.

Gugeran

It grows on top and sides of *bhits* and on the sandy soft ground. It is found almost all over Thar especially *taluka* Diplo, Kantha Thar and the region of Karoonjhar.

It may rise up to two metres. Its trunk and branches are not straight but crooked. The branches bear white-coloured thorns that are not very sharp. Its trunk and branches are very juicy. During rainy season if a branch of *gugeran* is cut and fixed in the ground it soon grows into another plant. It flourishes in monsoons and provides shade from sun. When given a cut at its trunk or any of the branches, mucus-like substance oozes out, which is collected by Bhils and Kolhis and sold in the town market.

The wood of *guger* being crooked, flabby and short in length is not of much use except that it can serve as firewood. It is, however, of much value in preparing medicines for many diseases especially the pain in ribs etc.

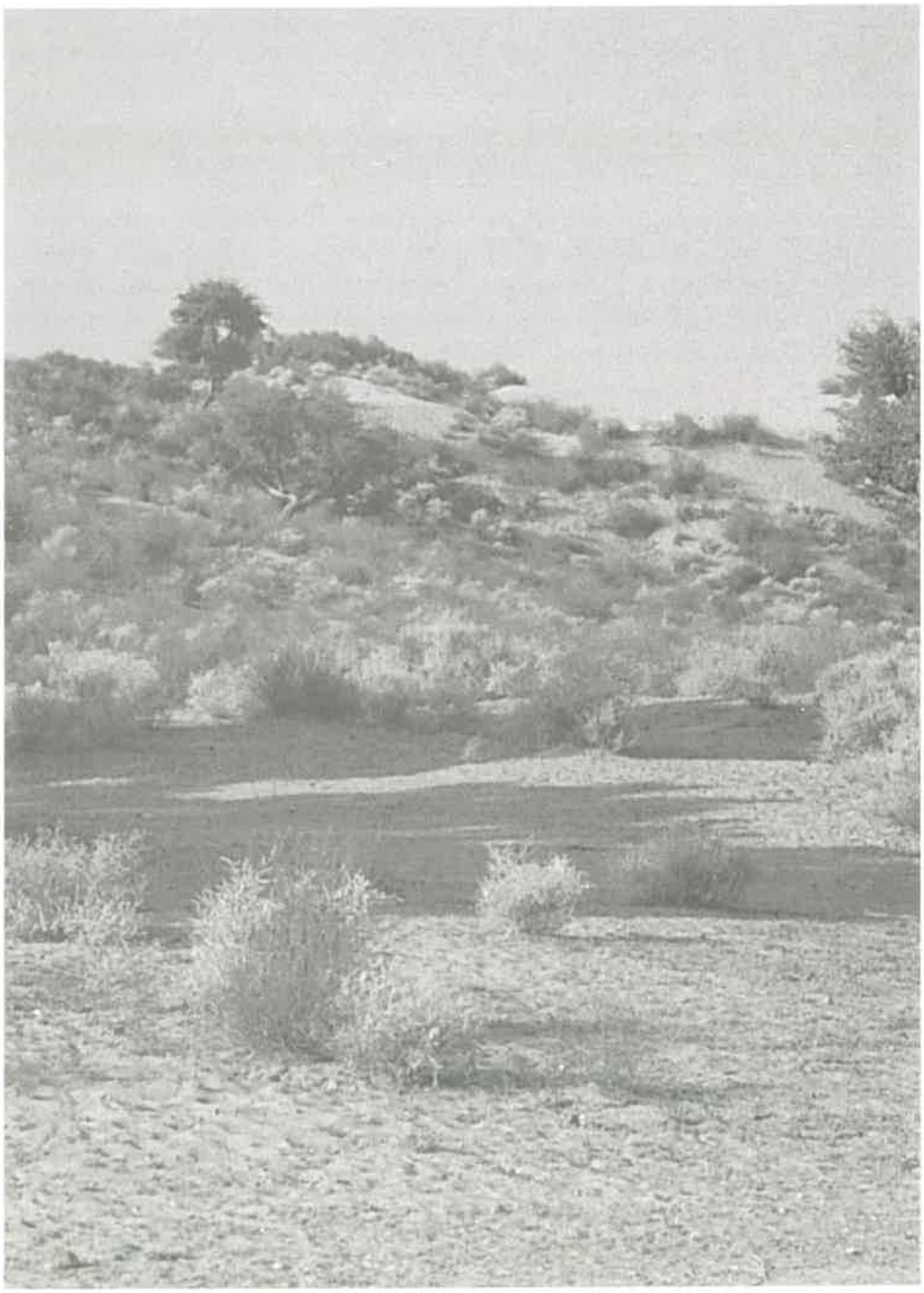
Bushes and Shrubs

There are numerous types of bushes and shrubs throughout the length and breadth of Thar. Almost all of them serve as fodder to camel, goat, sheep, donkey etc. However, only a few of them are taken by the cattle like cow, buffalo, horse etc. During famines even the latter-mentioned group of animals may eat out whatever is available to survive the hard times when their main feed, grass, withers away and is non-existent due to long spells of drought.

The bushes may be divided into two main categories viz. the wild bushes and the domesticated and cultivated bushes.

Wild Bushes and Shrubs

Some of the wild bushes and shrubs are of large size while others are small in size. The tuft of these, however, remains upright. During winter and hot season when they wither away, their lower portion remains green and alive. With the coming of rains the whole of them becomes green while many new bushes also



grow from ground. Some of the bushes and shrubs are as below:-

Jehl

It flourishes in the hard ground of valleys in-between *bhits*. It does not grow in the soft sand of *bhits* or smaller sand dunes. It usually develops to a height that is always less than a metre. It sheds its leaves during hot season, when it stands to look like a cluster of dry branches. When it becomes green and wears leaves during rainy season it provides shade to men and their beast.

Bhuh

(Aerua tomentosa)

This is a very common plant in Thar. It grows everywhere and so quickly that it looks as if it has been cultivated. It comes out from one trunk and gets to a heavy bush. It not only grows in its own clusters but is found with and by the side of trees like *berheri, khabharr, phog* etc. During spring white, round flowers grow on it. Its wood is used to burn fire. When green, it is taken by goat, camel etc. but not by horse, cow, donkey etc. except, though, during long drought periods when grass becomes dry and unavailable.

Khep

(Leptadenia spartium)

This plant grows only in soft land of sand dunes and *bhits* but not in the valleys of *bhits* where soil is hard. It does not grow from one single stem but spreads on ground in the shape of a bush from a number of branches. It may grow to a height of little

over a metre. It gets a four-five cm long pod-like fruit, which is relished by camel and goat.

The wood of *khep* is cut and dried and used to make shades for *chownra.* Its use in a special way helps keep dry the inside of a *chownra* during rains. Some people make ropes out of *khep*, which are used in swing-cradles.

Another kind of *khep* produces milk-like substance when a branch is broken. This type of the plant is locally known as *kheer khep*. The said milk is used as medicine to cure many an ailment.

Senh

This plant does not grow on *bhits* but in the valleys between two of them. It is common almost all over Thar. It comes out of a single stem but the branches are so many that they make a thick round umbrella touching down to the earth. Its roots do not go deep in ground, as such if its branches are pulled sometimes the whole plant comes out. When green, it is relished by camel and goat.

The *Senh* plant produces small flowers, which are taken to be of no use. Its wood, however, after treatment is used in preparing shade of *chownra* etc.

The *senh* in jungle becomes black on withering and drying. It is then not taken by cows. But during long spells of droughts when there is no grass to eat they take this blackened *senh*. But when it rains and these cows take water from the pool, some of them die. The people of Thar attach their death to the eating of the dried *senh*.

The dried senh is used to prepare ropes, which are of multiple use. It is collected and stored in houses where women-folk uses it to light the fire in hearths.

Pat Kunwar

This bushy plant of aloe is also found in Sindh proper where it is

known by the name of *Kunwar booti*. Its leaves are thick, long and knife-like, which are full of pulpy juice. It is very commonly found in Diplo *taluka* and Samroti area. The *bhits*, top of the dunes and their sides are so full of *pat Kunwar* that it looks like having been sown on a plan and cultivated extensively. It produces red but small flowers. Its branch or the long leaf is put in ground and watered. It blossoms and then needs no further care to become full-grown plant.

The *pat Kunwar*, especially its leaves, is used in medicine against many an ailment this is why people also cultivate it even in their houses almost all over Thar.

Muret

This plant which grows in soft ground of *bhits* and dunes stands like a tuft which remains withered during hot season. With the coming of showers, however, its straw-like branches or blossoms come out of it. Out of these grow thin pods which are taken as meal by Thari during periods of famines. As far as it remains green, cows and buffaloes eat from it. It is noted that camel does not take it in any shape or in any season. The dried *Muret* is fed to cow and buffalo when there is dearth of grass during long periods of drought.

Its wood, after treatment, is also used on top of *chownra*. People also collect it and transport on camel to town where it is sold though at nominal price.

Ghamun

It seldom grows independently but is seen coming around or with other trees and plants like *Kerarr, jhar, phog* etc. It develops fast and has straws like cane, with knots. On these knots grow leaves. The cane-like straws or branches are quite long, sometimes going over two metres in length.

When green and raw *Ghamun* is taken by cow, buffalo, goat, sheep and donkey. They, however, do not eat it when it gets ripened.

It is also used in making of *chownra*, hut etc.

Lana and Luni

This type of plant flourishes in areas affected by salt-petre and in the vicinity of salty lakelets, *dhand*. As such it is not very common and is restricted to the salt-affected areas of Mithi and Diplo *talukas* and near the border of the Rann of Kutch in Nagarparkar region.

In addition to the above plants there are other small bushes, which come out of earth and become green during rainy season but completely dry out during winter season. These are sort of seasonal shrubs having very short life. These serve as fodder for camel, goat and sheep while only some of them are also taken by cow and buffalo. These small bushes are large in number but some of them are as follows:-

Jher Keli Khet

It grows in soft land of *bhits* and small dunes and is seldom found on hard ground of valleys in-between *bhits*. Its stalk is of turmeric colour while leaves are green. The flowers are of round shape.

Giramano

It also grows from soft sandy soil of *bhits* and dunes. It remains short in height and seldom goes over 10-15cm. It has small round flowers. This bush is taken as fodder by camel, goat, sheep etc.

Bhangiri

This bush has leaves along with stalk of flower. Its flower has

small seed, each found enveloped separately and having sharp thorn-like edge. The green, thin gruel is taken by camel, goat sheep etc.

Kherol

This bush flourishes in the hard land of valley between *bhits*. It spreads itself on ground. Like *AK*, milk-like substance oozes out from its stalk when broken. However, this milk is of no use. Because of its this property of storing milk inside, it is called *dodheli*. It is taken by camel, goat, sheep etc.

Abat Kundherhi

This bush is not found on the soft sandy surface of *bhits* and dunes. It flourishes in hard soil of valleys between *bhits*. Its height remains less than a metre. It has its branches with prickles coming out of the single stem. It looks very green and is taken by sheep, goat, camel etc.

Vesooi

It can be seen in both hard and soft soil of valleys of *bhits* and on *bhits* themselves. It seldom grows over a height of half a metre. Its leaves are like golden maize but remain small in dimensions. The stalk has rows of green leaves on its both sides. There grows reddish flowers on them. These flowers, with time, turn into green pods, which have seeds in them. The flowers when raw are eaten by goat and sheep but not by camel. However, on getting ripe and turning into pods camel also relish on it.

Jogherho

It is a shrub which comes out of earth under or near the tree of *jhar*, *phog*, *kank'ha* etc. and resembles mushrooms. It is of

jhar, phog, kank'ha etc. and resembles mushrooms. It is of reddish yellow colour with entirely yellow flowers. It is usually not found in groups but a lone bushy plant stands here and there. It is taken only by goat. It is useful in preparing medicines for many an ailment.

Jothi

This plant grows on the slopes of *bhits*. It gets thick at the bottom near the ground, and a few stalks, which may rise to about half a metre out of it. This plant has a number of names like *Marui jo pathar, Sassui jo pathar* or *danar-khotori* but in Thar it is mostly known as *jothi*.

It is a sweet-smelling shrub. It is a plant, which is used as cleanser of milk churning, and other household utensils. With its sweet-smelling leaves, the cleansed utensils have a nice aroma coming out of them.

Kantai

This bushy plant grows both in soft soil and hard ground though it is found more in the latter. Its leaves are small and spread on the surface of the ground. Small yellow blossoms come out of the plant and develop into small flowers. It also has sharp but very small thorns, which continue to stay even after the plant withers away.

This plant serves as fodder for camel, sheep, goat, cow etc. It is also cut and taken to the animal yards to feed them.

Satorho

It is a very common plant in the whole of Thar. It grows anywhere but especially at the places of cow-pen. It is usually of

two types. One has relatively large leaves of green colour with bases in the white, the other is with small leaves and red colour over the lower portion of the leaves. It has shallow roots, which come out easily if the plant is pulled with force. It remains spread on the ground. It is eaten by cow, buffalo, sheep, goat etc.

Haran Chaprhi

It grows at the height of *bhits* in soft soil and seldom goes over half a metre. It has leaves and pods in which are found seeds, each sealed in a different compartment. It is the favourite feed of deer hence the name *haran* - deer. It is also eaten by cow, buffalo, donkey etc.

Hado Akherarh

It mostly grows in soft soil of Thar and rises up to a height of about 30cm. Its leaves are relatively long and like a beak of a bird. It also has small pods, which have small black seeds in it. As crow likes to eat this seed hence the name, after crow or *hado* as it is called in Thar.

Sonel

It grows in hard soil and has a maximum height of about 30cm. It has small branches coming out of a little above its base. There are yellow flowers in it, that smell sweetly. Camel, goat, sheep etc. eat it.

Lam Luni

This plant grows in hard soil of valleys between *bhits* and spreads mostly along the surface of the ground. The stalk of its flower is of reddish colour. The leaves of *lam luni* are small. It

gets yellowish-coloured small flowers, which are tasty and eaten by children of Thar. It is taken as fodder by camel, sheep, goat etc.

Reng'ni

It also flourishes only in hard soil of *bhits'* valleys and does not grow over 30cm in height. Its leaves are very small with small and soft thorns. The flowers which grow in green colour turn into a berry-like fruit of yellow colour, which contains in it small, black seed. It is useful as medicine for horse and human being. It is taken by camel and goat.

Munderi

It also grows in hard soil. Its branches come off right from the root and spread on the surface of the ground. It has small leaves. It also has small pods, which become hard when dry. The green plant is taken by goat, sheep etc. It is useful in preparing many a medicine.

Malir Maindi

This plant grows from the hard soil. The stalk of its flowers is straight as also are the leaves. The flower, which is of white colour, has a small seed in it. It turns its colour to that of *henna* when kept after soaking hence the name *maindi.*

Wild Vegetables

In addition to these bushy plants there are others plants which are also available in Thar. Many of these wild plants are used as vegetables and cooked at home by Thari. These plants appear

only during rains and dry out soon after. Some of them are as follows:-

Marirho

This plant flourishes in sandy soil, along with or near trees like *jhari, karhin, phogan* etc. Its leaves resemble the rose flower but are somewhat smaller in size. It does rise above a height of about 30cm. The boughs and branches of *marirho* are of reddish colour. When ripe, it gets tufts with small seeds. The Thari people cook it as vegetable. They also pluck it when green, and dry it in the shade to use it during off-season of winter or summer. It is also taken by camel, goat, sheep etc.

Lu'lar

This plant grows in hard soil of the valleys between *bhits*. Its leaves are larger than those of *marirho*. It grows during rains and has white boughs. It is also cooked as vegetable while the plant serves as fodder for camel, goat, cow, sheep etc.

Bhagero

This plant grows almost everywhere but is seen better flourishing in soft and sandy soil. It spreads on the surface of the ground and does not grow over a height of about half a metre. It has five lines in its leaves. Its boughs are of white colour. The white-coloured flower gets to green pod-like fruit and is eaten after soaking in water. The plant is also eaten by camel, sheep, goat, donkey etc.

Pipoon

This plant grows along *morarhi, phog, b'herarhi* etc. after rains.

It turns to green pods. It rises to a height of half a metre. On the top is a flower that has seed in it. It dries up during severe seasons of summer and winter but flourishes as soon as there are rains. Its fruit is sour but people not only eat it raw but also cook it as vegetable. Its fruit is collected and sold in town market.

Mama Moori

This plant grows on plain land of Thar. Its stalk and leaves get pulpy. In raw form its taste is saltish and children relish eating it. It is cooked as vegetable. It is also eaten by camel, goat, sheep, cow, donkey etc.

Khumbiyoon

Khumbi or mushroom grows from the soil after 3 - 4 days of rains. It is like an umbrella with upper portion like an egg. It is of white colour. It is used in cooking very tasty dishes. However, after three - four days of growing up, or twelve hours after its plucking from ground, it turns black and is not suitable for eating.

There is also *khumba* of the same kind but having round upper portion which is full of muddy substance. After ripening it is called *khumbajo atto*. This *atto* is kept in store and used in treatment of certain ailments.

Domesticated and Cultivated Vegetable Plants

There are certain other plants, which do not grow wild in open desert areas but are cultivated at homes or near the wells where they could be looked after well especially during their early life. These plants are mostly delicate to tend, green in colour and

sweet-smell emitting and useful in curing many a disease. Some of them are also taken as sacred from religious point of view hence cared for even more attentively. The most common and more important among these plants are as given below:-

Tulsi

It is delicate and agreeable plant with sweet basil. It is one of the most favourite plants people cultivate at home. It needs extra-ordinary care during its initial days. It remains green for over four five years. It rises to a height of about one metre while its ears grow to about 10cm, from which grow small-sized flowers having sweet aroma and smell. Its flowers and leaves are used as medicine to cure many ailments. It is also used to add flavour and aroma in a teacup.

As this plant is sacred with the Hindu community, it is particularly well looked after by them. As a ritual, women pour water on *tulsi* as first thing in the morning.

Hiran

It is another of the delicate plants which people grow in their houses or near their wells as it needs extra tending and lots of water. Once it gets its roots it stays for three-four years after which it withers away. Its leaves are of large size and used to cure certain pain of the body. Its branches carry flowers, which develop seeds in them. The seed is used to extract oil from it, which is useful in preparing medicines.

Hiran is cultivated at large scale in Parkar area.

Saru'o

It is another favourite plant of people. They cultivate it in their

houses and near wells. It rises to a height of about one metre and emits sweet smell. It stays green for three-four years. Its leaves are like those of golden maize but smaller, greener and aromatic. Its flowers are thick and have small seeds that turn black when ripe. Its leaves are plucked and kept in the house for their aromatic property. These are also used to cure many an ailment.

Creepers

Another kind of plants in Thar are the creepers which grow in the wild after rains, and also cultivated for use as vegetable. These can conveniently be divided into three types:-

1) Wild Creepers;
2) Cultivated Creepers;
3) Creepers having bulbs in ground.

Some of the creepers of each type are briefly described below:-

Wild Creepers

There are some creepers, which grow naturally in almost all the areas of Thar, after rains. Some of them thickly surround the trees. These creepers are useful fodder for camel, goat etc. They do not bear fruit in the true sense of the word but whatever blossoms out from them becomes the food of birds and cattle:-

Tuh

Tuh or colocynth is a creeper that spreads out on the plain ground and measures up to around four metres in length. It grows in soft to little hard soil. Its leaves resemble those of the creeper of watermelon, though smaller in size. Its fruit is of spotted green colour but when ripe it turns to yellow. It is sour in taste but is eaten by camel and goat. Even when plucked from

the creeper *tuh* does not rot and as such is also kept to feed animals during off-season. It is useful in preparing medicine to cure many an ailment.

Golarho

It flourishes during monsoon rains and soon spreads around trees like *koombhat, kerarh, kando, phot, jarh* etc. Its leaves get green at the edges. They develop white flowers, which have small fruit of green colour. On ripening this fruit is eaten by birds. It, along with the green creeper, is also taken by camel, goat etc.

Mogara

It grows in soft soil and does not rise in height over 30cm but spreads and extends all over on ground. Its leaves are green and it has small yellow flowers. They develop into pods, which conceal in them small black seeds. This creeper is eaten by camel, horse, cow, donkey, sheep, goat etc.

Bugh'herha wal

This creeper flourishes well in soft soil and generally grows in the vicinity of plants like *senh, murt, khap, buh* etc and rises and spreads over them. At other places it spreads on the plain ground. It has small green leaves and also small seed resembling gram hence the name *bug'herha*. It is collected and eaten by Thari children. The creeper is relished by camel and goat while sheep, horse, donkey etc also take it.

Asoondro

This creeper grows from near the trunks of *jhar, kando* etc and

rises to cover them with its green leaves during rainy season. Its own trunk gets thick and though wither in hot summer and cold winters, it again comes to life during monsoon.

Lo'ro

This creeper though flourishes in rains, remains green throughout the year. It is found along other plants like *kanda, jhar, thoohar* etc. Its leaves are like thin straws, which are of no useful service. It is, however, eaten by camel and goat.

Bina Bhahrhi

This plant does not grow from the soil by taking its roots but flourishes on other trees like *pothi, marirh, kanti* etc. as a parasite. It is like threads with yellow colour and thrives on the plant it clings to. With time it dries up the plant but itself still stays fresh. A few threads of this creeper simply thrown on some tree or plant cling to it and spread rapidly resulting in the drying up of that tree or plant. It is, thus, fatal for the trees and plants and is not of any use to human beings though camel and goat eat it along with the tree or plant it spreads on.

Ankro

This creeper flourishes well in whole of Thar. It also spreads on other trees and plants but is not from a parasite family. Its leaves are small and somewhat elongated. Its flowers are of spotted green colour which turn to deep yellow when ripe. This creeper is taken by camel, goat, sheep etc.

Kutial

It is also like *ankro* but its leaves are small in size. It has a berry-like flower, which is of greenish colour but of no use. *Kutial* is taken by goat, camel etc.

In addition to these creepers there are numerous such others which are found in Thar. Some of them are useful in curing diseases while, along with them, others serve as fodder for the cattle. During long spells of drought most of these creepers do not grow or turn green, which fact affects adversely on the fodder situation for cattle in Thar.

Cultivated Variety of Creepers:

The second variety of creepers consists of those, which are cultivated by Thari for its usefulness. This type is cultivated at home and at 'farms', *bhani* or the cultivated area although some of them also grow in the wild. Some of these are taken for cooking as vegetables when they are raw and on flowering but are eaten as fruit on ripening. The more important of the creepers belonging to this type are as below:-

Hindana

Hindana or watermelon is not only cultivated in the 'farms' but found in the wild where it spreads out on the ground. It is best suited to slightly sandy soil where it develops much in size and becomes tastier. It is cooked as vegetable when raw but on ripening serves as fruit, which is quite large in size. Its pulp, which is red in colour, is most enjoyable when fully ripe. It is thought to be tastier when it fully develops its red colour and the vice versa when it is whitish or greenish red. When ripe, it becomes deep green on the outside. Each of the *hindana* creeper may have as many as twenty pieces. It is transported to towns where it is sold for money.

The people keep the seeds of sweet watermelons and sow them on the onset of rains. The seeds are also taken as dry fruit.

Gidriyun

It is a sort of muskmelon, which is cultivated in the 'farms' in Thar. Its fruit is neither cooked nor eaten when not fully

developed or ripe. On ripening it is relished raw but not cooked as vegetable. It is also transported to towns where it is sold. It is also dried and used as vegetable to be cooked in winters which is its off-season.

Meha

The creeper of *meha*, a sort of cucumber, grows in the wild but is also cultivated in the 'farms'. The green creeper gets flowers that soon get developed as fruit and are cooked as vegetable.

The *meha* found in Thar is of two types: i) It is about the size of an apple with dark green colour. It is cooked as vegetable when not fully developed, but it ripens fast. On ripening it gets black seeds in it. These seeds are extracted and thrown away while cooking it as vegetable. ii) It is of white colour and relatively bigger than the first one. It is pulpier and takes a little longer to ripe. In its fresh state it is also cooked as vegetable while when dried it can be kept for whole year to cook during off-season.

Chib'harh

The creeper of *chib'harh* is found in the wild while also cultivated in the 'farms'. When not fully ripe it is sour in taste and is not cooked as such but mixed with other vegetables to make them tastier. It is eaten raw when ripe. It is also taken by goat. The fruit of *chib'harh* is also dried and used for cooking as vegetable throughout the year.

Matira

It is cultivated in 'farms' and is smaller than *gidriyun* but bigger than *chib'harh* in size. It is of no use until ripe. It is also dried and taken raw or cooked as vegetable.

In addition to the above, some other creepers which provide

vegetables like *gidra, karela, turi, kadu* etc. are also cultivated in *ban'hi* or 'farm'. *Thom* and *basar*, garlic and onion, are also cultivated especially in the plains of Parkar where they give heavy yield and are marketed in towns - even exported to Sindh proper.

Creepers having Bulbs in Ground

There are certain creepers in Thar, which grow under or along trees and have bulbs in the ground and stalks with leaves on the outside. These creepers normally climb over the large trees. Some of these creepers are as follows:-

Kankorhi

This creeper is generally found developing with the support of trees and plants like *kerarh, jhar, ber'herh, thoohar* etc. Its bulb is in the ground and it climbs over to the tree. As it goes higher the bulb also grows bigger. In case the bulb is taken away and cultivated elsewhere, it starts growing if tended and watered regularly. The leaves of this creeper are eaten by camel and goat. It is also useful in certain ailments.

Kondir

Its bulb, like that of potato, develops in the ground. Above the ground are the stalks with leaves. It also grows with trees like *phog, kerharh* etc. and climbs over to them. The *kondir* and its leaves are eaten by Thari especially children. It is also taken by camel, goat, sheep etc.

Phar Sair

It is also like *kondir* and develops with trees like *phog, kerharh* etc. Its bulb and leaves are eaten by people and cattle alike.

Suiyu

It is another creeper with bulb in the ground that grows like *kondir, pharh sair* etc. Its leaves, however, have a bit conical shape.

Grass

If there is one single kind of vegetation Thari heavily bank upon, it is grass. The whole lot of cattle mostly depends on it for its survival and better provision of milk etc. It is a wild plant and its growth depends on rains. With the first rains the seeds of numerous types of grass already in the sandy and even hard land start blossoming and in days time the whole of *bhits,* valleys between *bhits,* smaller sand dunes, etc. are covered with green sheet with its growth. However, in case there are no further rains the green of grass soon turns into gray after it dries up. Further rains help further development of this vegetation, which then stays green for months together. It also withers during cold winters and hot summers when there is shortage of water to the extent that its availability even from wells becomes difficult. To brave such a calamity to some extent, Thari also cut and make bales of grass during its high season. This grass gets dry and is used as fodder for animals during the periods of scarcity of green grass.

The rains in Thar are not regular and long spells of drought are quite common. During such times of famine animals are fed on different trees and plants which source also dries up soon. The Thari are then obliged to migrate along with their cattle temporarily to Nara area of Sindh proper. They return to their places in Thar as soon as the conditions start becoming normal with the onset of rainy season. At such times even the people of settled areas entrust the Thari with their cattle to graze in Thar against certain amount for services rendered. The Thari are known to be very fair in their dealing and tend this cattle with equal care.

There are numerous types of grass in Thar. The most important of them are as follows:-

Muret

It flourishes in the soft sandy soil of *bhits*, sand dunes and their sides. In the hard soil of valleys between *bhits* it also grows but here it is not dense and is also in small quantity. With long and thin leaves it may grow to over half a metre.

It is of green colour turning whitish on withering. It has clustering straw-like growth, each one having an ear at the top with seeds inside and very thin prickles on the outside. Its seeds are edible and the poor of Thar eat them raw.

It is one of the most important of the grass types of Thar. It is used as fodder for buffalo, cow, horse, donkey etc. When it goes dry, it is kept in bales for feeding the cattle in the days of drought and during off-season.

Senhi

Like *muret* it also flourishes in clusters and has straw-like stalks. *Senhi* is whitish in colour and remains such even after drying. It is another type of the grasses, which is very valuable as it is relished by horse. It is also collected in bales on drying and sold in town-markets.

La'mb or lanp

This is a type of grass, which flourishes in plain areas, especially those of Parkar region. Its stalk is thin and due to 'overgrowth' it gives a feeble and weak look. This grass has length ranging from 30cm to 40cm and forms thick clusters.

It is particularly thought to be very useful for cow and buffalo as it helps increase their milk yield. It is also taken by horse and donkey.

Dabh

It is a type of grass, which grows in the hard soil of the valleys between *bhits*. It has its roots quite deep in the ground and as such it is difficult to remove it altogether even on withering. Even during spells of drought when it dries up, its roots stay alive and start flourishing on the next rains. It has long straw-like leaves and knots at the thin but long stems. The knots on contact with soil take roots and thus multiply its growth. It is why it is harmful for other vegetation, which is cultivated by farmers. In the farm Thari, therefore, make all efforts to destroy it especially during summer season when it stands dry and flourishing no more.

It not only serves the cattle like buffalo, cow, donkey etc. as their feed but also is useful for Thari in many ways. In bales it is sold in the town-market to earn or augment livelihood. When fully developed it is cut to use for preparing thin ropes to knit cradle-seats etc.

Gandher

It is a type of grass that grows in the soil of valleys between *bhits*. It is not suited to soft soil and sandy ground of *bhits* and dunes. Its stems are long and like threads and having deep contact with soil grow fast, taking fresh roots. It thus multiplies in very little space of time.

It is green in colour with thin long leaves, but turn to yellowish when dry up. It is eaten by buffalo, cow, donkey etc. Like *dhab* it is harmful for the cultivated varieties of vegetation and thus Thari farmer is always at the look out to destroy it from his 'farm'. As he finds it difficult to get rid of this grass, he burns it during hot summer when it stays withered. To completely annihilate its roots he then digs them out and destroys them. However, even all this exercise is not in anyway a guarantee that *gandher* will not grow again at that place.

Koori

This type of grass grows in soft soil of and dunes. It develops to a length of about 30cm. It has soft, long and a bit wide leaves, which are green. From its stem shoot out thin straw-like branches on which develop ears with small seeds. This grass is the food for horse, donkey, cow, buffalo etc. People also cut it and keep the dry *Koori* in bales for off-season use or use during famines.

Venj'hal

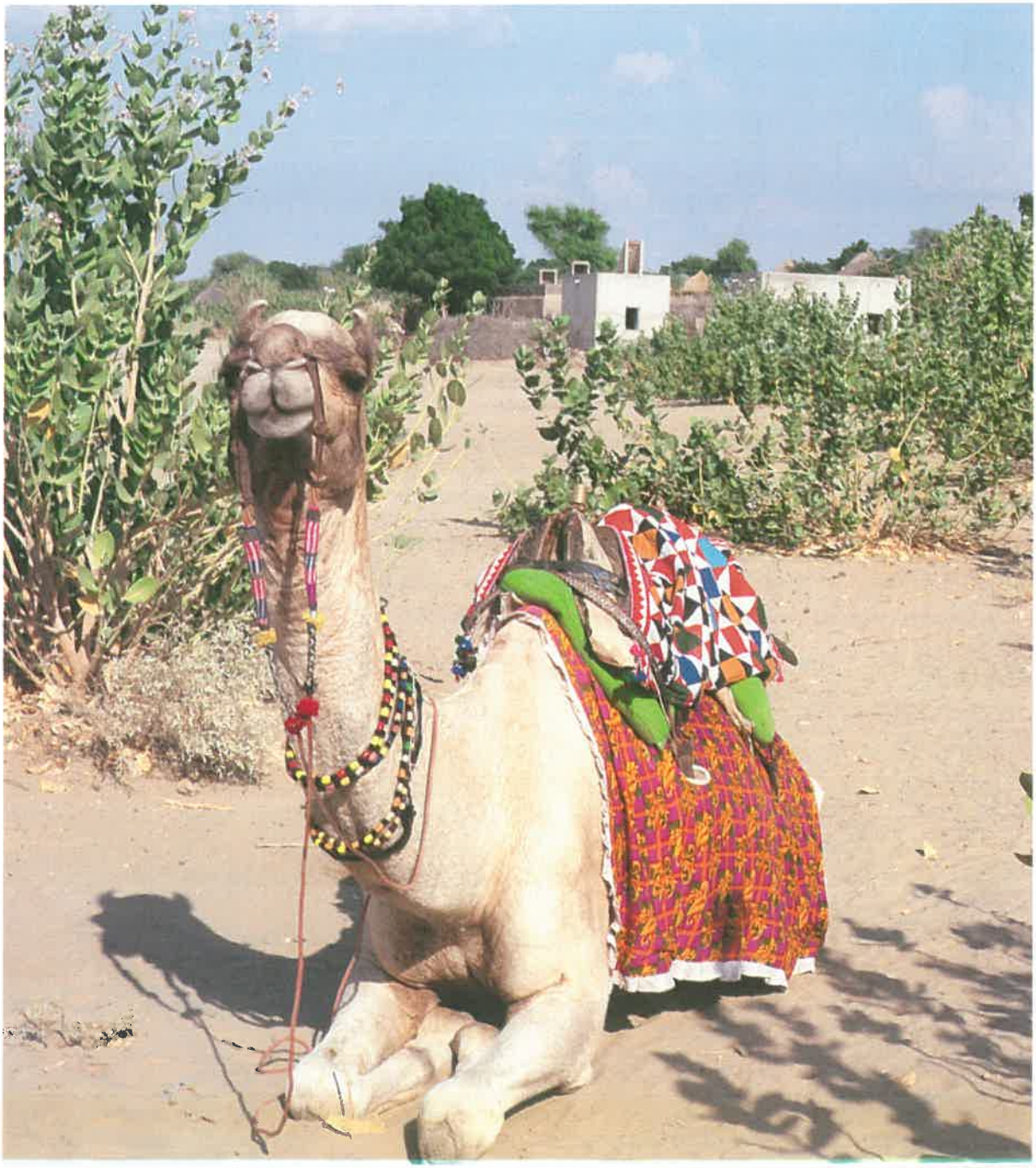
The thread-like branches of this type of grass also take roots when in contact with soil and as such it multiplies in short time. It takes relatively deeper roots and it becomes very difficult to destroy it and reclaim the land for cultivation. This grass remains green for much longer time when compared to other types of grass. It is taken only by camel.

Karangh'a

It is a type of grass, which needs plenty of water to grow and flourish. It is seldom found in sandy soil but develops in clayey type of hard soil. It takes a length of over a metre. On the top of the stems and straw grow ears which have sharp thorns, and seeds inside. These seeds are edible and taken by Thari as a dish. This grass is used as fodder for cow, buffalo, horse, donkey etc.

Apart from these types of grass there are also other kinds which are found in Thar. Among these varieties are included *sa'un, b'haro, birinjh, kewai* etc.

Fauna

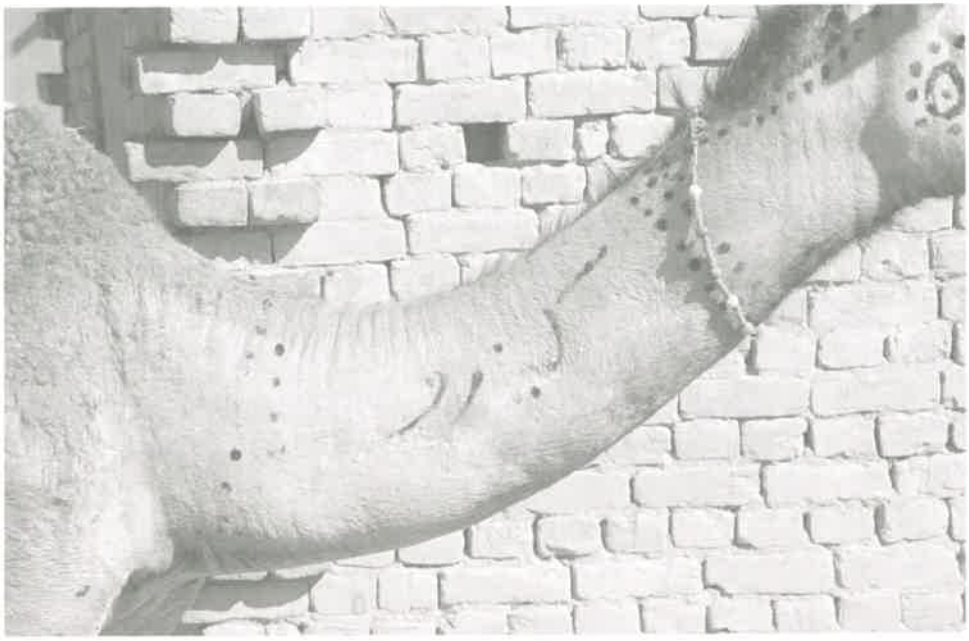


Fauna

The peculiar type of soil and a particular type of climate in Thar help grow only particular type of flora. The fauna is also of particular type that can survive and flourish under climate and on the flora available in the region. Except for clusters of bushes etc. there are no dense forests in the whole of Thar. It is, therefore, easily conceivable that no big-game is found here.

There are mainly two types of animals found in Thar. One type is that which is domesticated and the other, which lives in the wilderness. The domesticated animals include those which are reared and kept at homes, village pens etc. for their usefulness in providing food products e.g. milk, *lassi* (churned milk), yoghurt, butter, *ghee* (purified butter), meat, hides, skins etc. This type also includes such animals which serve Thari as means of transport for self, goods and merchandise and those which provide support in his efforts to keep the life going smoothly. In the following paragraphs a brief description of domesticated and wild animals is given to have an over-all picture of the faunal life of this great Desert.

The domesticated animals are known as *dhan*, the food products like milk, butter etc. as *dheno*, the owner of them as *dhanedi* and the herdsman or shepherd as *dhanar*. The *dhanedi*, owner of cattle, is also called *bhaagwan* - lucky - as owning of these animals is of great honour, luck and prosperity in Thar. It is very common that the owners of large herds themselves tend and graze their cattle. In some cases other persons are hired for this duty. The domestic cattle especially the milking one, is given preference over all the other belongings of the desert people as most of their life depends on it. They think that when they have the milk at home, *lassi* available to them,



Camel bearing signs

Thari bulls

ghee readily in access they can have no fear of starvation, and can have bread and thus do not wish for more to live a 'comfortable' life. In case they also own beast of burden they are no less than lords of their respective areas.

Dhagiyun

The *dhagiyun* or cows are generally found in large numbers in Thar. They are usually the mainstay for living, or for generating income, for ordinary and rich Thari alike. They are particularly well suited to conditions of Thar. They graze at the wild vegetation in the wilderness during most of the time of the year. During droughts when vegetation in the desert withers and dries up, they are fed on stored dried grass etc. The longer spell of drought brings hard times for the owner and forces him to move along with his cattle, to settled areas of Sindh proper. During such famines he even sells his household to meet the demands of cattle. Even with so much care many of them perish on their way to safe 'havens'.

The herds of cows remain in the wilderness grazing on grass or

other desert vegetation. They usually come twice back to the owner for milking. They, on their own, return to the jungle for grazing again. The ox is used in ploughing etc. of the *ban'hi*, farmland, for cultivation.

Mein'hoon

Amongst the milk-giving animals *meinhoon* or buffaloes are not found as large in number in Thar as cow is. It is because buffalo requires more water and fodder to flourish naturally, and the requirements are hard to fulfil for most of the time in Thar. It, however, has a higher yield of milk hence more *ghee, lassi*, butter etc. which helps easily to entertain guests and preparing the favourite dish of *khatio* quite often and also barter these products to have other household things in return. The he-buffalo serves in ploughing etc. in *ban'hi*, farmland, in Thar.

Bakriyun

The *bakriyun* or goats are also kept in herds. Being much less expensive and needing little care even the poor also tend them for milk and other milk products. In addition to milk its skin is also very useful for making many a leather thing. The poor or widow owners themselves look after them in the pastures while others engage herdsmen on payment on cash or in kind.

Goats have two seasons of breeding when they are crossed. One of these seasons is in the beginning of winter and the other during summer before the monsoon. It, therefore, makes it possible to have one or the other continuing to give milk throughout the year.

The herds of goats are kept in the open at night during summer season but remain in pens near the house or the village, during winter. Many of these herds remain in the wilderness, or jungle so to say, during nights and return to the owner in the morning for milking.

The young-ones of goats are fed on mothers' milk but they start grazing on soft vegetation in three-four weeks. Normally they are not sent with the herds when they are too young.

Ridoon

The *Ridoon* or sheep are another domesticated animal, which is much useful for the owner. It not only provides milk, that too in sufficient quantity, but its wool is also of great value. It is used to knit *katha, loyun* etc. to wear for warding off cold of the winter. The sheep are either white or black and some times white with black spots. The wool of black sheep is especially of more value. They are fed on a variety of vegetation and thus are not affected much by spells of droughts.

The sheep are not found much in number in Thar proper, where they are tended along with goats in the same herd. In Parkar area, however, they are large in number especially herded by people of *rab'hari* clan.

The persons who own large number of goat and sheep normally herd these themselves but also hire herdsmen for the purpose. However, those having just one or two animals make arrangements for their grazing along with larger herds.

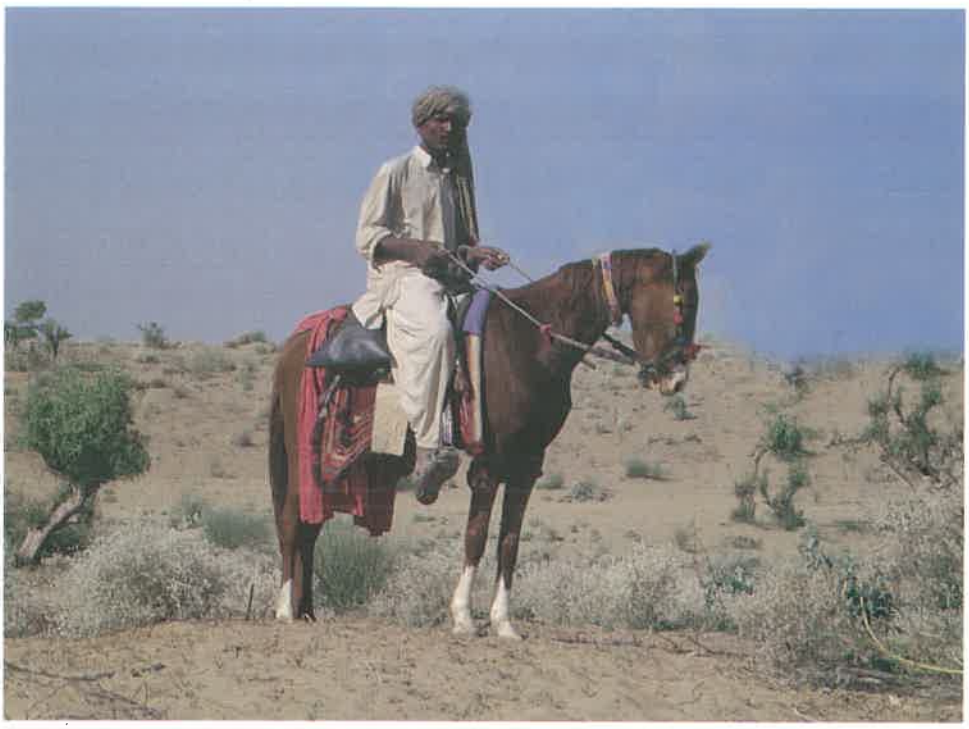
Utth

The *Utth* or camel is the most important of the animals of Thar. With its flat feet and ability to go without water for longer periods it is most suited to the soil and climatic conditions of Thar. It is also known as *sukey jo b'herho* or the ship of the desert. It serves as beast of burden and transports not only the merchandise or household but also acts as the most reliable means of communication. It is kept in houses like a family member and decorated beautifully with ornaments, gaudy cloth covers under saddle etc. Even the poor of Thar would keep a camel or two to earn his livelihood. It is also used in drawing water from the deep wells as also carry rubber containers of water from one place to the other.

Camel also provides milk that is used at home for drinking purposes. It is not churned to get butter or *ghee*. Some Thari depend only on its milk for months together and do not take any bread etc.

Ghorra

The *Ghorra* or horse is not found in large numbers in Thar mainly because it is expensive on rearing, tending and keeping, needs grass, fodder and gram-beans which, most of the Thari being very poor, cannot afford. It is normally found either with some well to do Thari or beggars who earn their living by moving places. The robbers, though seldom found in Thar these days, used to keep horses for greater mobility in their operations.



Gadh

The *Gadh* or donkey is another important beast of burden. It is common for Thari to keep a donkey, as it is low on 'maintenance' expenditure. It serves to transport goods from one place to other, merchandise from jungle or small village to town, help in drawing water from deep wells, carrying water-containers etc. Throughout the day it serves Thari while in the evening he frees it to go to the jungle and feed itself on trees, bushes, grass etc. to take back to work again in the morning.

Although it is good means of transportation yet Thari feels it below his dignity to ride it. However, it is of special meaning for *Koombhar* or potter. He not only rides it but also transports clay to manufacture pots and then the finished goods are taken on it to the market or to sell in other villages.

Kuta

The *Kuta* or dog is another animal, which is found in large numbers in and around the house and in the pens for safety and security of herds. Others roam about in search of food, which they get in morsels from houses, or from the bodies of dead animals in the wilderness.

Some of the dogs behave in a wild manner and attack goats and sheep by jumping into their pens or while they are out grazing in the jungle. Such dogs are hardly tolerated by Thari. They are either killed by gunfire or heavy wooden piece or iron is tied to their necks to restrict their movement.

Hiran

Amongst the wild animals *Hiran* or deer used to be the most favourite for hunting in the Thar. However, its population has been on the decrease since the 1965-war between India and Pakistan. It is perhaps because of the fact that Thar now has more visitors who hunt them most remorselessly with the result that it is hardly found anywhere except towards Parkar area and the belt along the Indian border.

Saho

Although *Saho* or rabbit, which is a small wild mammal, is not so common, it is the favourite game-thing for *Bhils* and *Kolhis*.

There are also some other wild animals like jackal, hare etc., which are also not very common. They are also the game-animals for *Bhils* and *Kolhis*.

Domestic Animals: General

The domesticated animals, as already mentioned, are usually kept at home if they are just few in number, the larger herds are

kept in pens called *wathan* which are generally located by the side of house or the village. The women-folk milk the animals at both the places, one by one. The men only do this service when the herd is very large and it is not possible to milk all the animals by women alone. Some milk is left unmilked, which is fed to the young progeny called *gaba*. As a *gaba* may not confine itself to the timings of milking or may even otherwise eat such things as may not be good for its health, a *b'hotharhi* is put on its mouth which enables it to breath freely but restrict it from the undesired acts of eating foul or sucking the milk of the mother beyond the fixed time.

The people having larger number of animals have their own he-animals to cross when the she-animal is at heat. Others with just one or two animals get the services from those in larger herds, gratis or on small payment. Some veterinary hospitals also provide this service. The Thari, however, do not leave all the he-animals capable for the service as they are castrated in the belief that they will have thus more power to plough, draw water, transport men or material etc. The castration normally used to be done by a village *na'ee,* hair-cutter or hair-dresser, but now at quite a few places veterinarian would do it on the scientific lines.

During monsoons a type of small flies, locally called *makh,* multiplies in Thar. It does not harm human beings but annoys greatly the animals. To ward off this fly from their cattle Thari make bonfires to produce sufficient quantity of smoke to cover with the wind the whole area where the herds are kept.

As animals are kept in large numbers in Thar and they some times mix with other herds or in the process of grazing get lost or are stolen. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to have some definite signs to identify them correctly and easily. For the purpose Thari put some mark on each of them, denoting that the animal belongs to a particular tribe, clan, village or area. To fix these marks, an iron piece is heated red-hot and put on the neck, side, cheek or pelvis of an animal, where it burns the particular area. After four-five days the burnt skin peels off leaving a permanent black mark on the body. If the cattle is lost

or stolen, it is bound to come to some well or water-point where it is spotted, identified and returned to the owner through village *patail*, union council official or police.

These markings are made on the body of cow, buffalo, camel, horse etc. but not goat or sheep which are identified by their colour or particular natural signs.

The markings on cattle are either round, triangular or rectangular with peculiar signs which are easily identified by *mald'har* or owner of the cattle. In addition to these markings, some tribes or *mald'har* may also have other identification signs. In some cases a hole is made in the ear of an animal, known as *Jher,* or a very small portion of ear is clipped. It is called *khado.* The type and style of horns, ears etc. and colour of the body together with natural spots of an animal are also helpful identification marks.

Some of the Thari are also experts in finding the lost or stolen animals by following their footprints left on the sandy soil. The art is known as *pag'hi* or *peri.*

Birds

The birds of Thar can conveniently be divided into two categories:-

1) Domesticated birds;
2) Wild birds.

The first type of them lives in the houses or villages or in their vicinity and surroundings. They are normally familiar and friendly with Thari. The second type consists of those birds, which are found in jungle or the wilderness and do not tend to be familiar with people.

Domesticated Birds

Mor

The *Mor* or peacock is perhaps the most beautiful bird. It is quite heavy and has long feathers - on male peacock - with

enchanting colours and designs. It sheds these feathers on the onset of winter and would have grown fresh ones afterwards. It enjoys and celebrates monsoon rain when with feathers spread like a large fan, it dances in ecstasy.

It lives in the vicinity of houses and the villages and hamlets. Its female lays eggs in bushes not far from these villages. Some people rear young *Mor* at home.

The *Mor* is taken as a bitter enemy of snakes and kills them immediately at sight. The castaway feathers become pieces of decoration while small and large hand-held fans are made and decorated with them. The fans for rulers and kings, *morchhal*, used to be made with these feathers. These feathers have now created a market in the big cities and as such they are sold per piece by Thari to the migratory Pathan merchant.

Kukarh

The *Kukarh* or cock, chicken, is another common bird found in houses in Thar. A hen lays eggs, which form an important food item for the Thari and his guests. The cock has a prominent red-coloured crown at the top of its head whereas its hen only has red-spot in its place. It is attacked by cats so Thari make arrangements for its passing the night in peace on a specially made cross, a couple of long staffs with cross staffs on the top. In winter, however, it is kept in crudely made earthen or thatched-cages.

Parihar

A *Parihar*, also known as *kabooter* - a pigeon - is another bird, which lives in inhabited places even though it might not have been reared by any particular person. If it is a kept bird then the owner usually has a long-staff fixed in the ground, on top of which is a *chhatri* -umbrella - made by fixing thick straws cross-wise. It passes its nights on this *chhatri*. It has long flights but return to its owner or its particular place at fixed times to have its feed of seeds.

Jherkiyun

The *Jherkiyun,* or the common sparrows, live also in inhabited places. They make their nest with straw and tiny tree-branches at odd places in a house or on trees. There in the nest they lay eggs and rear their young ones till they come of age and are able to fly on their own.

Kan'h

The *Kan'h* or crow is another bird common to Thar's towns, villages, hamlets and even scattered houses. It is black in colour and is taken to be a clever bird, which even though sort of

domesticated does not get familiar with human beings. It even snatches away any edible from the hands of a small child. It makes its nest on trees not easily accessible to humans.

Birds of the Wild

Titar

The *Titar* or partridge is a stout-bodied game bird. It lives in jungle and prepares its nest in the *bhits*, where it lays eggs and rears the young ones. The sound it emits attracts other *titars* and as such hunters usually use a pet partridge to bring them out of their hideouts for easy target.

In addition to the pet-*Titar* trick for hunting, large parties of hunters engage beaters to collect and bring out *Titar* for easy aim. The beaters, beating drums and canisters come from the opposite direction in a shoulder-to-shoulder line. When the partridges, disturbed and alarmed with the sounds, try to fly away they come towards the hunters with guns, who fire at them and sometimes collect the prize in hundreds. Such organized hunting, coupled with the professionals who catch the game with help of a net, the *Titar* population that once was very high in Thar, has decreased immensely. It is now hardly found in the vicinity of large towns.

The other birds in the wild include *g'hijh* or vulture that eats the meat of dead animals, and *seranh* or kite which is like *g'ihijh* but smaller in size. They all live on the tops of high trees and surveil the ground from the sky while flying all day. As soon as a dead animal is spotted they land there to have a 'feast' of the meat which is in abundance during long droughts and famines. Still others are *baaz* or hawk which is treated as the king of birds, and *shikro* or falcon. Both of these birds are used for hunting other birds also. Amongst the smaller birds are *lili, talor, hurhio, sutarhio, bulbul* etc.

Reptiles, Vermins and Insects

The topography, the land, the climate and the flora of Thar help flourish and survive a number of reptiles, Vermins and insects. Especially the venomous snakes have a very large variety making their homes in the sandy dunes, *bhits* and the valleys in-between. They in fact are so numerous and so common that even the houses, huts, *chownras* etc. are not free from their frequent presence. This type of dangerous animal does not have feet. During winter season they do not come out from their holes because they cannot stand cold weather. When it is summer, they stay back during the hot days but as it cools in the evening and night, they come out. It is then not uncommon to encounter them on the sand, in the grass, on the paths in the houses etc. These include *vasing nang* (snake/cobra), *koombhario nang*, *gorehrho nang*, *lundi* etc.

The other type of venomous species is the one that has feet to walk with. It includes *vichhoon* (scorpion), *sauperion*, *hanh khanh* etc. Although all of these are poisonous yet the last mentioned is thought to be the most dangerous type and, as the name suggests, does not leave any time with the victim to get any aid or treatment for survival. *Hanh khanh* is small in size and measures hardly a few centimetres.

Among the winged insects are two types of wasps called *dembhoo* - one yellowish the other yellow and black in colour - *maakhi* or honey-bee, *machhar* or mosquito, *makhi* or common fly, *kut or sand fly* etc. Mosquito is not so common in Thar. It is found only on water ponds during rainy season. *Kut* that is an insect like mosquito, however, is very common throughout the sandy region. It is very small in size, not harmful but irritating for men and cattle. *Makarr* or locust swarms the area only occasionally when it eats away anything green, be it wild or cultivated, hence very much feared.

The insects with feet include *makorri* (ant), *makorra* (large black ant) *j'hahu* or hedgehog etc.

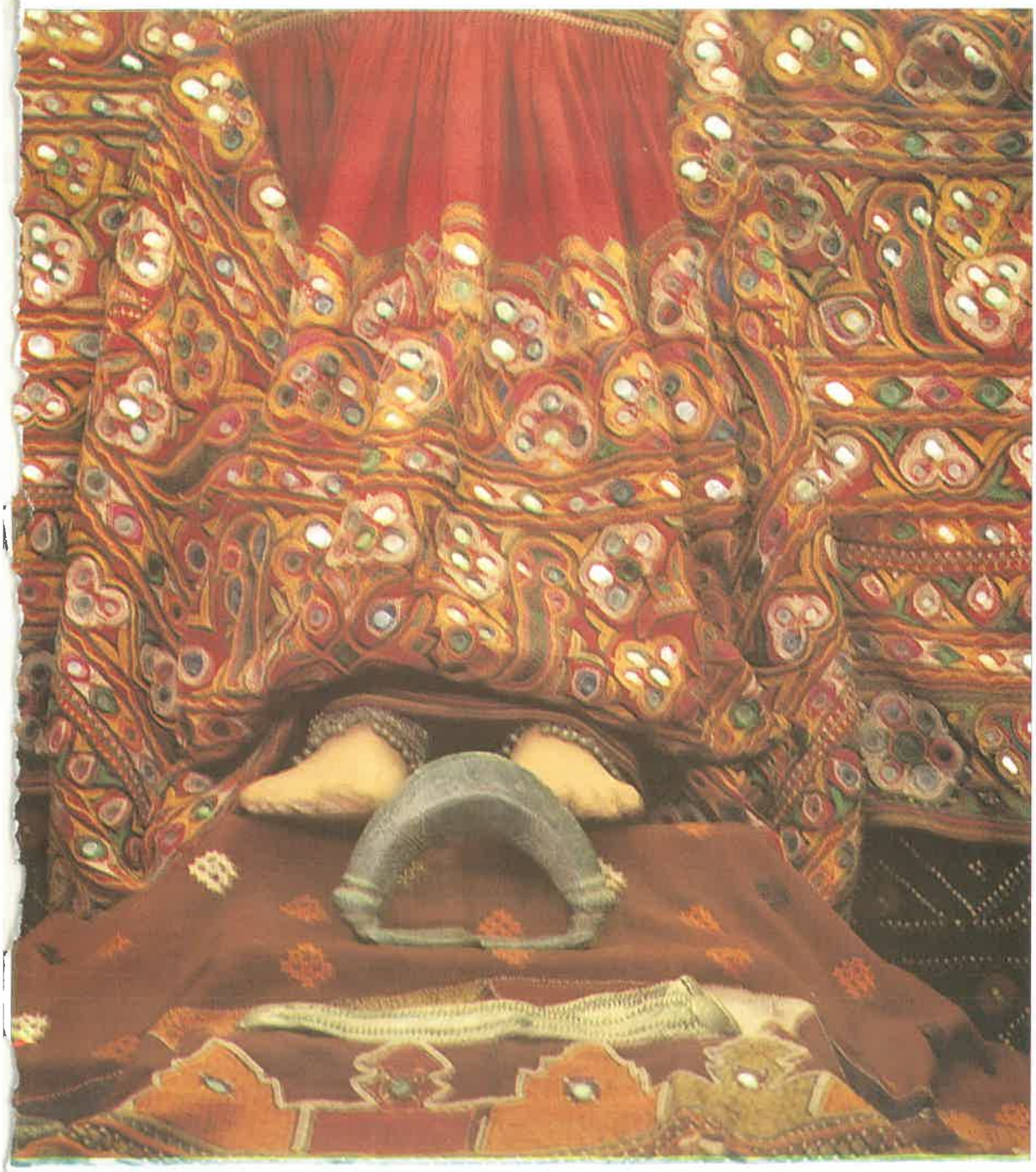
The cases of venomous bites by reptiles and insects are frequent in Thar. The snakebite, especially, is very common. The timely medical aid is almost next to impossible in all such emergencies. The victims are only exposed to traditional treatment or are at the mercy of the witch doctors. The *jogis* are famous for treating these bites by either sucking out the venom from the body of the victim or getting it extracted with the help of *man'h*, a special type of bead, by putting it on the spot of biting.

As soon as one is bitten, the affected limb is tied with cloth or some such other material near the place of bite to stop the poison from spreading in the body. The spot of biting is also burnt with red hot iron while the victim is required to eat lots of onion and drink sufficient quantity of milk. The victim is also made to vomit and not allowed to go to sleep.

Thari believe that snake does not come to the place where there are kept peacock-feathers, onion or garlic. They not only have these feathers kept in their houses but tie numerous pieces of onion and garlic to their *khatt*, bedstead to ward off or scare out snake.

The *jogis* catch snakes from the jungle or the wilderness. They play some tunes on a typical *been,* a musical instrument, and overpower them when they start dancing in ecstasy. These kept-snakes are then displayed in public by *jogis* to earn their living.

Cultural Traits



Cultural Traits

Thar, the land of shiny, hot sand spread out with hostile conditions for tens of kilometres at a stretch. The water is scarce, and salty where found. However, the whole area of 'death' is populated, even though very sparsely and that too in pockets. Except for just a few towns worth the name, people live in small villages and hamlets. The pattern of their life is dictated by the Mother Nature and the religion they follow. Their customs, rites, rituals, taboos etc. all stem from these two predominant factors. It is these factors which shape their style of life, their way of dressing, their manner of thinking, their conducting of social life and even their earning the livelihood. They thus have their peculiar dress patterns, living habits etc.

Dress

The dress of a particular area is influenced by the climate, physiography of the land, general financial condition and requirements, if any, imposed by a particular religion. The whole area of Thar is basically a poor region where, due to its very own conditions and lack of means of communication, literacy rate is at the lowest. The people, therefore, are simple in their living, in their dress and even in their food. There is not much difference in the dress and living of very poor and those comparatively well-off Thari. The Muslims put on almost similar dress while different 'castes' of Hindus quite often wear differently. The third major community, Achhoot, are also not much dissimilar in the matter of dress. There is also not much diversity from the usual dress during summer and winter.

The Muslim men-folk of the settled clans put on suthan - a baggy

type of trousers - kamees or a shirt, a patko or scarf on the shoulders. As a shirt, they also wear pehran that is usually of muslin cloth and open on right or left side of the breast. They also like to wear fancy waistcoat over it, which is usually of velvet or embroidered silk. Its sleeves are wide and lengthier than needed, and a lot cuffy. The poor among them use sadri - a sleeveless jacket, and goed or quilted old cloth-pieces. Their preferred colour is black or khaki the Baloch, though, are noticed to like blue-coloured suthan and goed. They wear the Sindhi type of juti - shoes. The 'educated' or those having greater exposure to large cities or towns also put on the boots.

The Kerarr and Brahman amongst the Hindus wear dhoti, a long and loose loincloth, angrakho - a special type of shirt, and patko or scarf. With more exposure to the outside world they have also started wearing shirt in place of angrakho. Those with Marwarri influence wear, in place of shirt a pleated-frock usually of white colour. The Rajputs, especially the upper class, mainly wear puthia, a white long coat that has its opening on the right

side of the breast. Other Hindu castes tie a chadar - a cloth sheet, in place of dhoti. The Kerarr and Brahman prefer red colour in patko while others like Menghwarr, Thakur etc. like to put on white patko. The fore-mentioned Hindus wear a juti - shoes, of special type, which are known as *moju* and are made from the leather procured from the hide of camel or cow. The leather obtained from cow is taken to be comparatively expensive and long lasting.

The *patko,* as is seen, is worn by all men-folk. It is a multi-purpose cloth sheet. It may be used to cover the body to ward off cold, put on the head to provide shade against sun, spread on earth to sit on, or tied round body while sitting.

The women of Thar wear bright and bold colours. They prefer bright yellows, oranges, and reds on their dresses. Greens and blues are also popular. They wear *linghro* or *ghagro* in place of *suthan* of the men-folk. The *ghagro* is very heavy 'single' trouser type dress, which is made of cloth dyed and printed locally by

the dyers, called khatri. It is tied at the waist with the help of a bright and usually multi-coloured string called *aga'th*, under the influence of Sindhi language.

The women wear *gajj* in place of shirt or frock. It has a very well embroidered front portion while at the back it has only a few laces in place of a cotton sheet leaving the hind torso bare. It also hardly covers the abdomen in the front. So to make amends of its shortcoming, the lower portion is provided with cloth-sheet stitched to the *gajj*. This lower portion is called kannjri and usually is in bright red print.

Women wear *chuni, poti* or *odher* at the head. All these are in the form of cloth sheet that serves as headgear and is used to cover the modesty as well as back portion of the body left bare by *gajj*. The *poti* or *odher* is also printed in very bright and gaudy colours.

The women wear *juti,* a sort of slippers, which have leather sole without hindquarter. Its tiny vamp hardly covers the toes. It is brightly decorated with large tufts of floss, silk and various foils, wings or green beetles and white seed.

The embroidery work or *bhart,* on almost all the ladies' dresses is an indigenous art practied exclusively by women-folk in their leisure hours.

Although bright and gaudy in colour and design these are taken as simple cloths which are used in everyday life. On special occasions like religious festivals or marriage ceremonies Thari men and women like to wear specially prepared and embroidered dresses along with jewellery and ornaments.

Most of the women still prepare thread from cotton at home and get them woven into cloth, which is then dyed by *khatti* or *Khattri.* This cloth is known as gharicho or homemade.

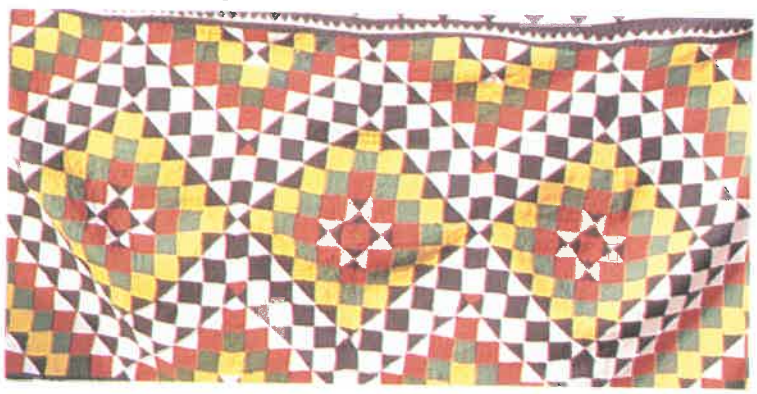
In addition to the earlier-mentioned apparel-items there is other material which is used both by men and women. These include:-

a) Ajrak:It is a shawl made of printed calico-cloth. Like the rest of Sindh it is very commonly used in Thar. The gaudy colours and printing designs sometimes differ with the change of its origin.

b) Katho or loee: It is light blanket woven with sheep wool. It is used in winters to cover oneself against the cold of the season. It also has very simple designs on it.

c) Jeerohi: It is small carpet made of goat hair but when admixed with sheep wool, camel hair and cotton yarn the resultant rug-cum-carpet called farasi is all the more beautiful in design and finish, and a little expensive too.

d) Ralli: It is a type of quilt which is used as bedspread. It is made at home with the small pieces of old cloth. The cloth is dyed in different colours and cut into pieces which are stitched together to make various designs and patterns. The rallies not only present pleasing geometrical motifs but also depict designs following the local foliage. In most of the cases patterns which look as if they have no other meaning than giving a pleasant designs do show the representation of different trees, plants, sea-waves, animals etc. An old Thari will immediately identify the place of origin of a Ralli by looking at its patterns and other depiction on it.

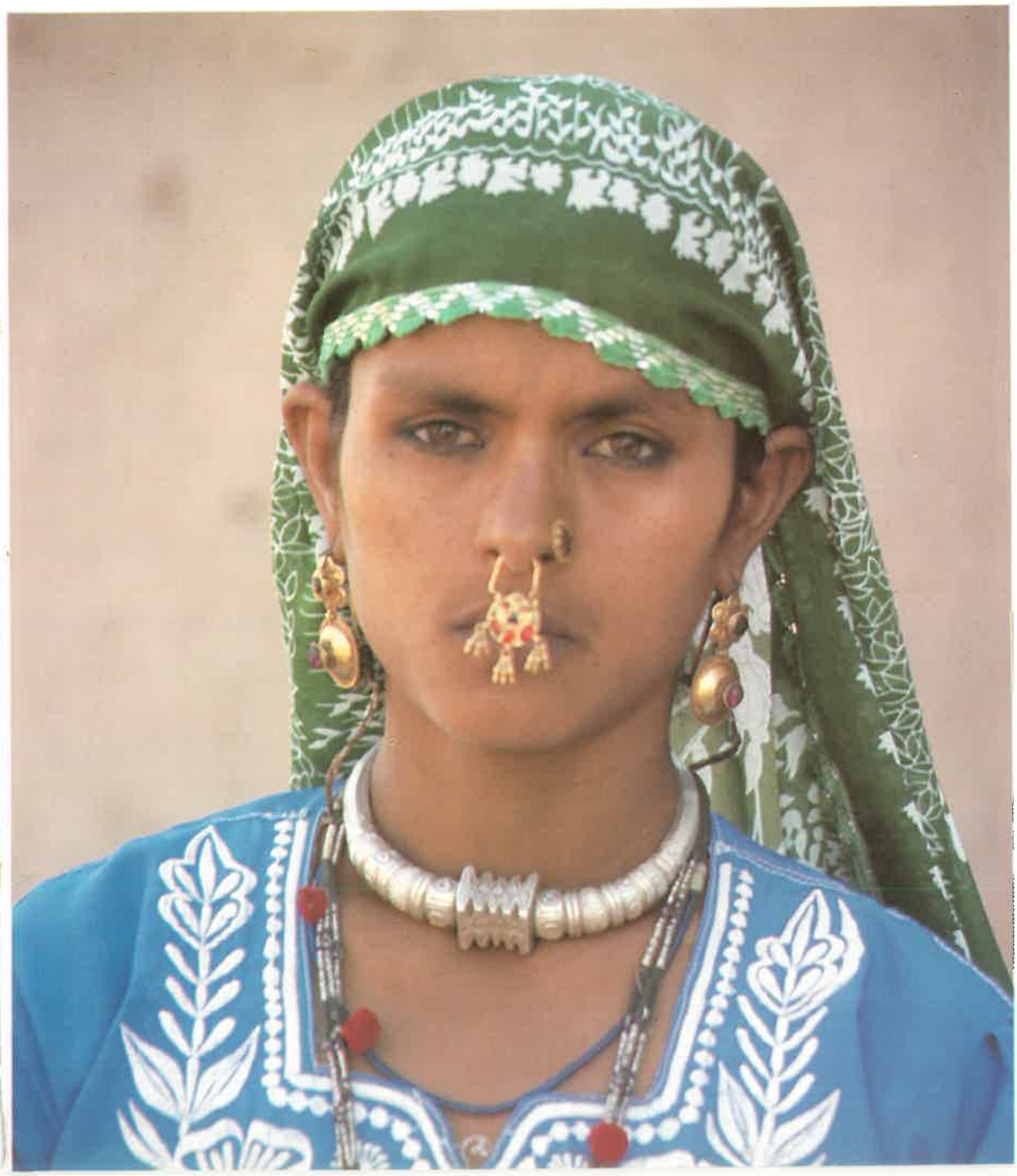


Ralli

Ralli

Jeerohi

Ornaments



Ornaments

The ornaments are as indispensable as dress to the women of Thar. Those of the common and low stock use imitation ornaments or ornaments made of less expensive material. The women of rich or well-to-do families prefer gold or silver to adorn themselves.

The bangles are the commonest form of ornaments worn by Thari women. No woman in the whole of the region would go without them. The common women wear rubber bangles or those of imitation ivory, right from wrist to shoulders. Those who can afford put a silver bangle called kangan round the wrist and the same rubber or imitation metal bangles in the rest of the arm. Some of them may also wear gold and silver bangles. Although very annoying, irritating or even trouble-giving, especially during summer months, no woman would part with them so long as she is unmarried or stays as happily married one.

The married Hindu women put on a *vaindo* made of gold in the nose while their Muslim counterparts use a *Nath* instead. The *Nath* is also used by women of Lohanas. These are usually heavier than those worn by others. Bulo or nose-ring, usually made of silver and in exceptional cases of gold, is also worn by all women. The *Bulo* is worn in different ways but the most common fashion is to leave it suspended from the middle cartilage of the nose.

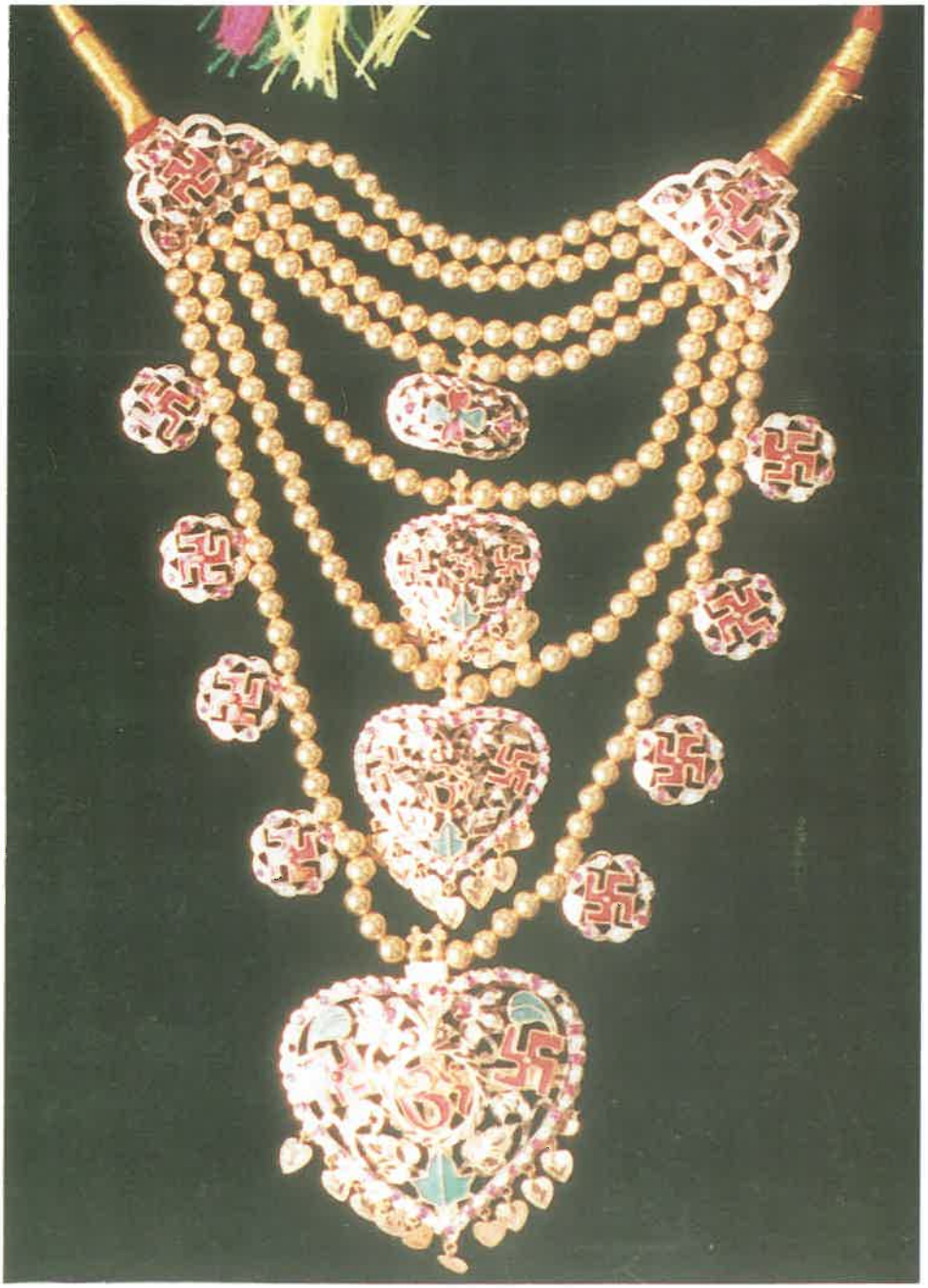
All these ornaments adorning nose are usually heavy and weighty and as such supported by a plait of hair let down over the forehead. Except for *Bulo* when light in weight, these ornaments are not worn in normal conditions of the home, but only on special occasions and religious festivals. When these are not worn, a small needle-type of ornament is kept in the nose so that the hole made there in does not close again.

The Muslim women adorn the ears with *kurrkoon, waala* or *panrra,* usually made of gold or silver, while those of Brahman, Mahaishwary Sonara and Thakur families wear *paparria*

instead. To support the weighty ear ornaments they are provided with *wagiyun* which are chains put over the ear. In Thar this support is known as *saroon*.

The Hindu ladies wear round the ankles circular *karriyun* which are made of silver. The *karriyun* of Muslim ladies are rather squarish and flattened. They also wear *pazeb* and *noora*. The Lohana women follow the Muslim ladies in adorning their feet.

The Muslim, and sometimes Achhoot, women wear *mangliyun* round their wrists. In the fingers are worn *wenthiyun* or *mundiyun - chhalla,* which are normally made from gold or silver. Many of these women put on quite a number of this ornament. The fingers of the feet are also adorned with silver *chhallas.*



In addition to women some men also put on some ornaments. Earlier Brahman, Mahaishwari, Thakur, Sotehrr and some other men used to wear silver *karrey* round the ankles but now only Thakur and Sotehrr continue with this custom. The Lohana or Achhoot men wear a gold or silver *chhalo* in the ear, which is called *oginio.* The young boys of Brahman, Mahaishwari, Thakur, Sonara and Lohana put a gold *loung* in the lobe of the ear.

Another ornament, *hansli,* is worn round the neck by Thari women. It is a sort of a bar, made of silver, turned circular with different designs and left unjointed at the ends.

Household Objects

The household objects which are found in every home include *dillo* or large typical pitcher with its stand called *gharronchi;* tasli or bowl type dish made of *kanja; tabaq* or the common dish; *bangi* or *dangi* - a sort of large pitcher with somewhat open mouth, to churn milk; peater or large dish to mix flour of different kinds to prepare *rabbri* or *khatio*.

The inhabitants of Thar usually sit or sleep on the floor. As such not many furniture pieces are found in their houses. Songa or indigenous form of chair and ordinary cots, called khatt, are usually the only items the average house possesses. Some well-to-do families now have a few of the items of modern furniture.

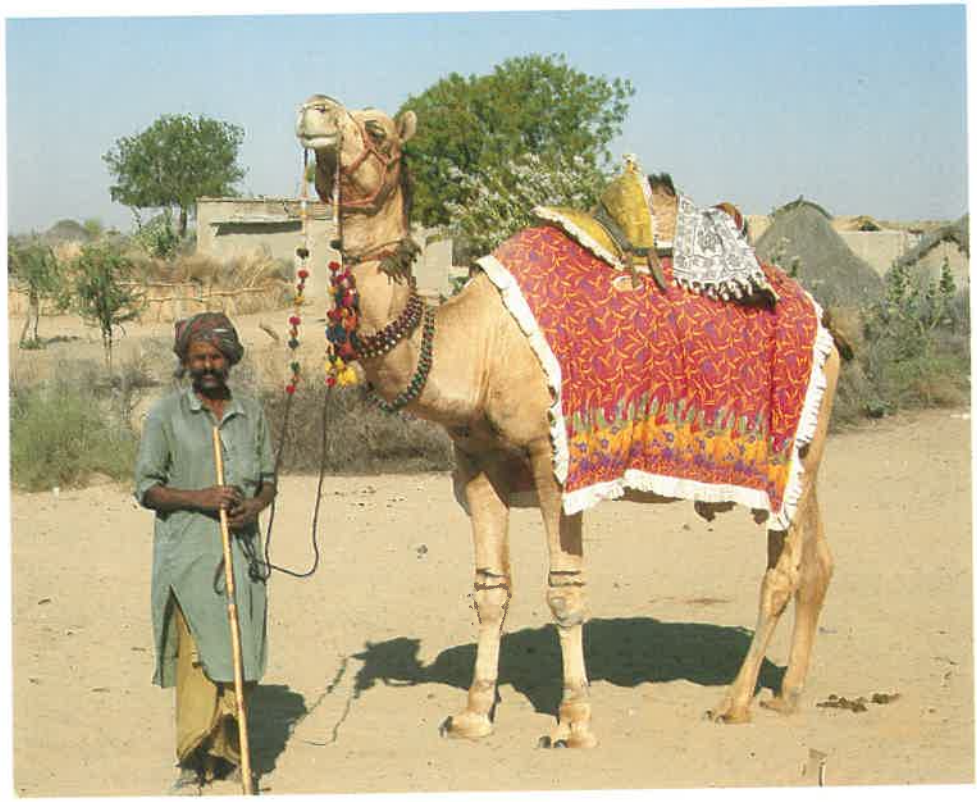
They also use *farasi* to cover the floor and *ralli* as bedspread, or to cover the floor to sit on. The ralli also serves as a covering sheet or light blanket against the coolness of the night.

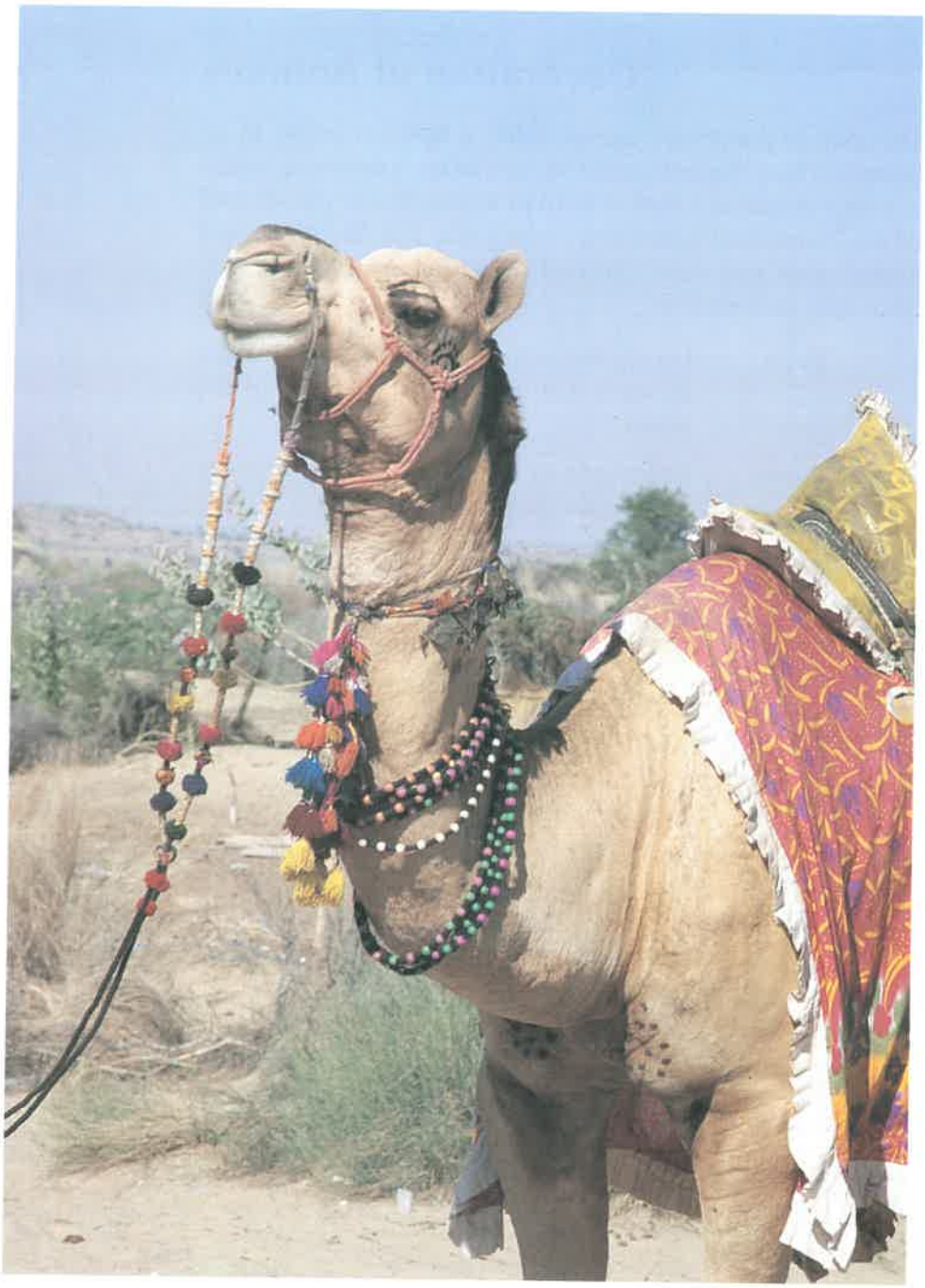
Decoration of Animals

The 'ship of the desert', camel, is like a family member to an average Thari. It is indispensable animal for it serves as means of communication, beast of burden, a machine to plough and till land, and draw water from deep wells. It is, therefore, well looked after and even adorned with ornaments and 'dress'. Such material includes:-

Jhull: Locally knit with goat's hair it is special type of sheet that is put over the back of the camel.

Plann: It is made of wood and is put over the jhull to carry luggage etc.





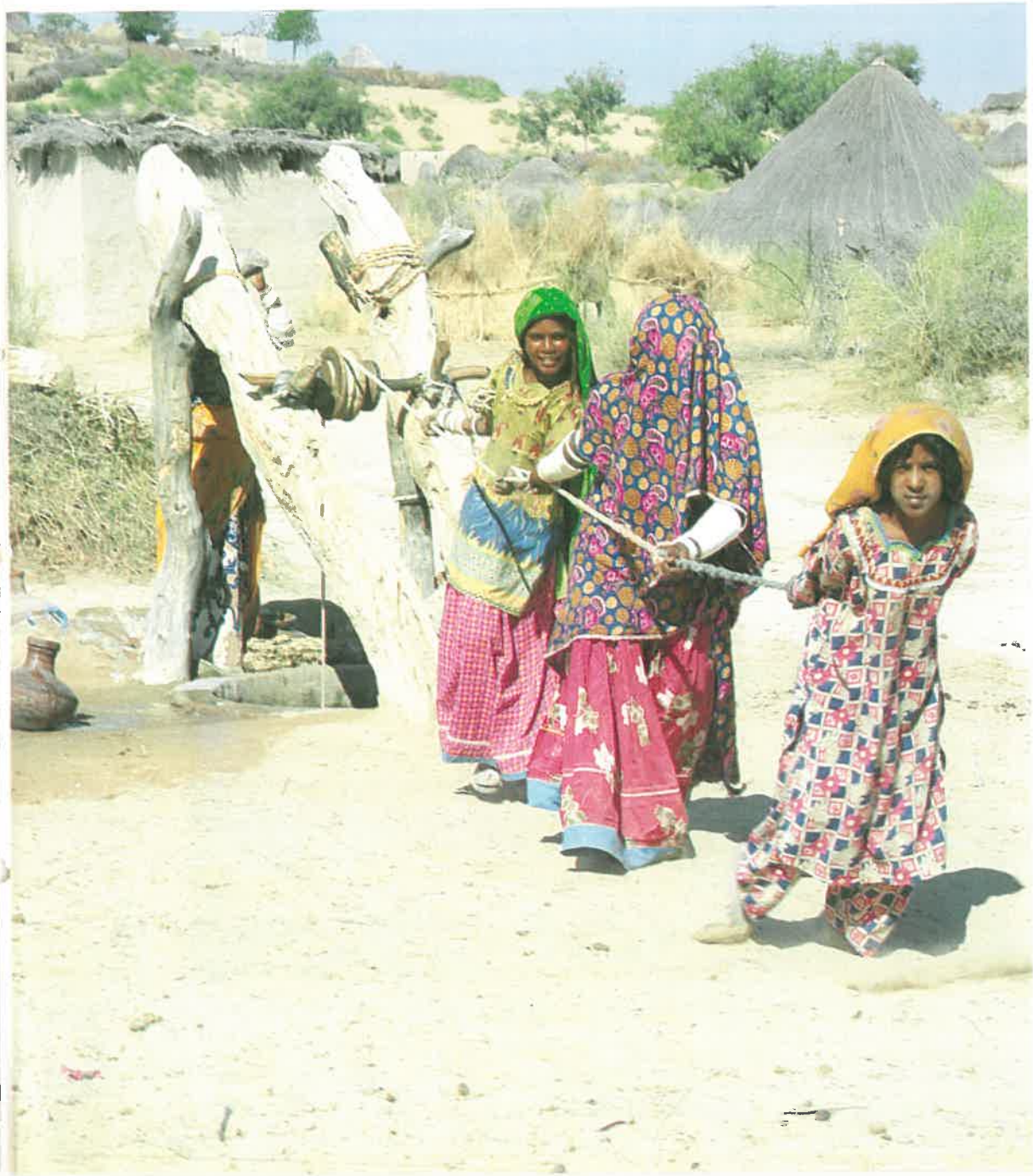
Making of Gorband

Mohar: It is a sort of thin rope, or a string, made of goat's hair and tied round the mouth, and through the nose of the camel to control its steering.

Gorband: It is a camel's necklace, which is decorated with multi-coloured tufts.

The Thari also adorn other animals like horse, donkey etc. These ornaments and dress items usually contain the same objects as for the camel except that in place of Mohar, they put on waz to control and guide these animals, and a Plann is restricted to donkey only.

General Life



General Life

The Thari perforce are simple in their living habits. They are so averse to hygienic life that they even bathe only once in a blue moon. The diseases are not many but it is not because they take care of their health. It is only due to their sturdy way of life, which makes them immune or resistant to many an ailment. They have to exert and physically do all the chores at home or in the jungle or *ban'hi*. Their food is directly nature's gift - milk, butter, *ghee* and the cereal flour from their own hand-mill at home. They walk a lot over the sandy tracks, which might as well help them keep fit.

Their women are as sturdy as men themselves. They also help

A village

Drawing water from well

Carrying water

Preparing thread from cotton

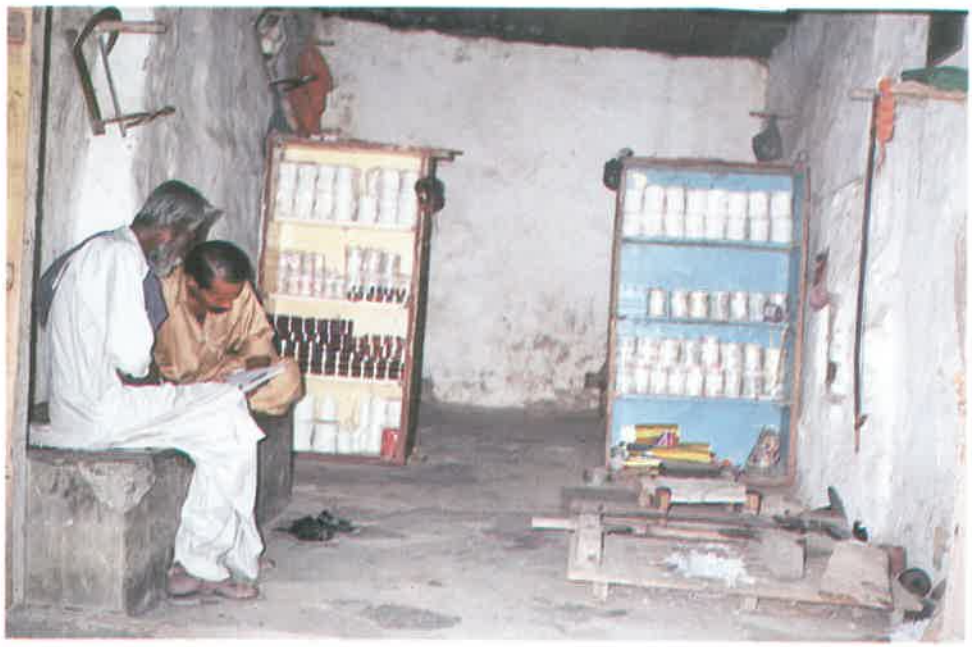
their men in doing daily jobs necessary to run the house, and their society at large. Additionally, they milk the animals at home and fetch water from the village wells that quite often are not at all close-by. The women normally do not observe *purdah* - or *hejab* - but while facing the strangers cover their whole face with a side of their *chuni, odher* or *poti* as a veil. This is called *ghoonghat*.

The Thari are generally poor people. The theft or decoity is seldom heard of. It is easy to recognize and return cattle when it is stolen or lost. The Muslim, Hindu, Jain or Achhoot live together in villages, though confined to their *parrah* - enclave -

Brick laying

Musicians

A sweet meat shop in Mithi



A bangle shop in Nagarparkar

Preparing mithai in Islamkot

and participate in each others' ceremonies. They all well look after a guest, whether a passer-by or coming to that particular village. The *patail* or headman of the village runs an *autak*, men's quarter, where, without any difference, guests can be entertained. In somewhat larger villages a better-off Thari might also have his own *autak*.

Omen and Superstition

The Thari, basically illiterate and rustic, strongly believe in omens, superstitions and auguries, *son'h.* Before starting any new venture or embarking on a journey they will seek guidance from them. They would prefer to postpone or altogether abandon any such project about which there is a negative answer in these omens. These are usually well patterns coming down from generation to generation, or prophecies made by Pundit after making out his calculations to find out an auspicious moment to solemnize a mandatory act like betrothal, marriage etc.

Certain days are thought to be lucky and others unlucky. Especially some days of the week are favourable for journey to a

particular direction. It is said that if a journey is performed to north on Friday and Saturday, to west on Thursday and Sunday, to south on Tuesday and Wednesday or to east on Monday, it will bring disaster to the person concerned. To undertake a journey to these particular directions a Thari will choose other days of the week, which are thought to be 'fortunate'.

There is a small white bird called *mal'hari* found on the *bhits* of Thar. It is said that if one goes out to perform some work and finds the bird on his right side, it is an omen that he will be successful in his mission. However, if the bird is encountered sitting on the dry branch of a tree, there will be some difficulty in achieving the goal. But if it is seen sitting on the left side it announces the total failure in the object and a Thari would abandon journey and immediately come back. Similarly, while going out, if the braying of an ass comes from the left side it is taken as good omen while that from the right would suggest foregoing the journey as it will bring failure.

While going out on an assignment if one faces a woman or women with empty pitchers, it is not taken as a good omen whereas women with water-filled pitchers forecast to the achieving of the purpose. The young or married women with filled pitchers are very welcome omen while old or widows, especially with empty pitchers are the total opposite of the former.

The calling of a partridge must be interpreted with discrimination or no business could proceed where partridges are vociferous. It is said that in the forenoon it is lucky on the left side and unlucky on the right, but in the afternoon these conditions are reversed.

There are thus numerous other things, birds, animals or happenings which are taken as omens and usually followed and adhered to in all sincerity.

Another sort of augury is sought to know if it is possible to recover the lost or stolen property, or to foresee about those

gone on long journey whether they would return safely. This is done by *hore,* or *faal* as it is termed in Sindhi. A long line is drawn at the sand and cut vertically with numerous small lines at a few centimetres distance. These smaller lines are cancelled at odd numbers. If all the odds are cancelled and there is no remainder it is taken to be a good augury otherwise not.

There are also other ways of knowing about an augury, which are popular with Thari. They believe in their being right in all earnest and follow them blindly.

Customs, Rites and Rituals

There are different customs, rites and rituals in different tribes and clans as also in followers of different faiths and religions. With the enlarged exposure to outside world these customs of Thari are undergoing drastic changes. But the difficult terrain and sparse population help most of them to stick to their old ways of life. They have their different customs, rites and rituals for the occasions of birth of a child, betrothal, marriage, and death. Although different castes and clans have different customs, they have little variation with those of the Mal'his, which are given below for having an idea about them.

Birth of a Child

The Mal'hi clan have their own way of celebrating the birth of a child. If it is a boy, a member of the family climbs and at the rooftop strikes on a bronze plate, announcing therewith the happy occasion so that all the village may come to know of it. In case a girl is born then no such announcement is made. Immediately after the birth the village Pundit is informed to record the date and time and to recommend a name with the help of his horoscope. After nine days of the birth of the child the Pundit is called for. He suggests three or four names to choose from. The family selects one name out of them and starts calling

the baby by that name. After this a feast of simple food is thrown for the relatives, friends and neighbours who had gathered there to celebrate the occasion. They also give gifts to the child.

Mangni

They do not go for marriages with the blood relations but look for matches in other families of the same clan. They prefer the sort of 'exchange' marriages meaning thereby that a brother and a sister would be married with a sister and a brother of the other family. When such pairs are settled, the custom of *mangni,* or betrothal, follows. The parents of one boy with a couple of other relatives visit the house of the would-be bride with a gold ring, a pair of dress, *chanpal* -shoes, coconut and date-fruit tied to the thread given by the Pundit. The family of the girl takes these presents and entertains the guests with milk. The boy's family put on the ring on the finger of the girl. Then the hosts present the guests *nariyal*, coconut, and sweetmeats which mean that the knot of the new relationship is tied tight. The other family repeats the same customs to perform the *mangni* of their son in their turn.

Shadi

The performance of actual marriage precedes a few customs like *teyl*, literally oil, *sehra,* or the garlands to be put at the face, *maindi* or henna, and *barat*, the marriage-procession.

The first day of marriage celebrations is reserved for the ceremony of *teyl*, or massage with oil. It is performed in the houses of both the bride and the groom. The relatives and neighbours are intimated about the undertaking of the custom of *teyl.* The women gather in the respective house and mengenhar beats the drum. The boy is made to sit and a turban is tied at his head. Then the ladies massage his face, hands and feet with a paste prepared from flour, oil and turmeric. The

women present on the occasion are then given *gurr*, lump of raw sugar, which announces the culmination of the ceremonies.

After the customary 'oil-massaging' or *teyl*, different rites are performed during the next four days. The clan and village are informed about the '*geet, sehra rasm*'. *Sehra*, the songs of joy on marriage are sung when garlands cover the face. The boy is made to sit in the middle with all the guests around when mengenhar sing songs in the accompaniment of a drum's beat. The guests give money to the mengenhar after giving it a circle over the head of the boy who sits there wearing a turban, garlands, and a dagger round his waist.

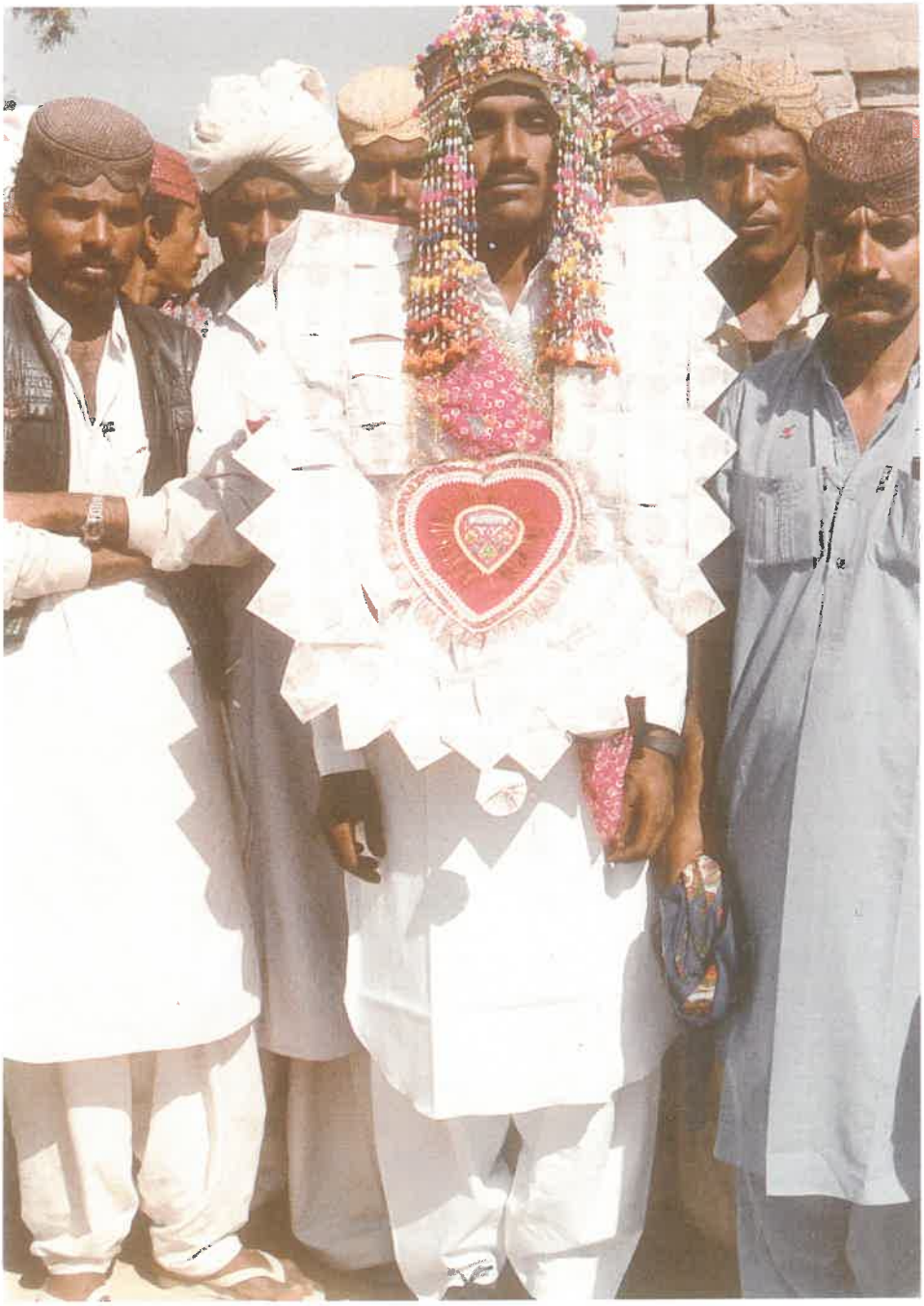
Maindi or Mehndi

After four days of singing songs the customary *mehndi rasm*, or the ceremony of henna, is performed when the relatives and friends give him or her money that is called *naindh*.

Barat

When all the fore-mentioned ceremonies are completed the actual marriage ceremony starts. The bridegroom, after taking bath, puts on new garments, garlands and *pugrri* or turban and sits in a transport which used to be a bullock-cart at places while mostly the purpose was served by a decorated camel. The *kotari* or the best man is always by the side of the groom, with his necessities and to guide him. The *barat*, marriage procession, includes in it the family of the groom, his neighbours, friends etc. and after have a round of the village or town reach the bride's house. There they are entertained to refreshments.

The groom is then taken into the house where there the relatives of the bride are sitting with Pundit. The Pundit alights fire and throws into it pieces of coconut and *ghee,* the purified butter. This is known as *agni maata*. Before the *agni maata* are spread



A Bridegroom with baraatis

A Bride

A Bridegroom

two 'chairs' in each of which sits the bride and the groom. The Pundit ties with a handkerchief one hand each of the two and starts reciting *vedas*. During his recitation the bride and the groom, tied as they are together, walk in circle around *agni maata* for four times. At the end of the last circle they touch the feet of their parents who pray for them. With it end the ceremonies and they are pronounced and socially accepted as man and wife.

The *baraties* on return course take the bride with them, who is seen off with cries of her near relatives. She is given *jahez*, dowry, which includes ornaments and jewellery, dresses, household and furniture objects etc.

When the procession reaches back, once again both bride and groom touch the feet of the parents and go to *mandar*, temple, for *prarthna* - pray - before the goddess for their happy married life.

Ceremonies at Death

When a senior member of Mal'hi clan dies a certain person take upon himself to go to each house of the relatives, friends and neighbours to inform them about the happening. People thus gather in the house of the family where the man had died. The dead body is put in straight posture and is covered with a white cloth sheet. After that a wooden ladder is prepared and the corpse is given bath and left laid, kept in white cloth covers, over the ladder. Indigenous scents are applied to the dead body for sweet smells. Then the relatives and friends carry that ladder along with the copse to the *shamshan ghat* chanting " Ram *nam sach hai*" and "Ram *nam sang hai*" denoting that God will live forever, rest of everything in the world is to perish one day or the other.

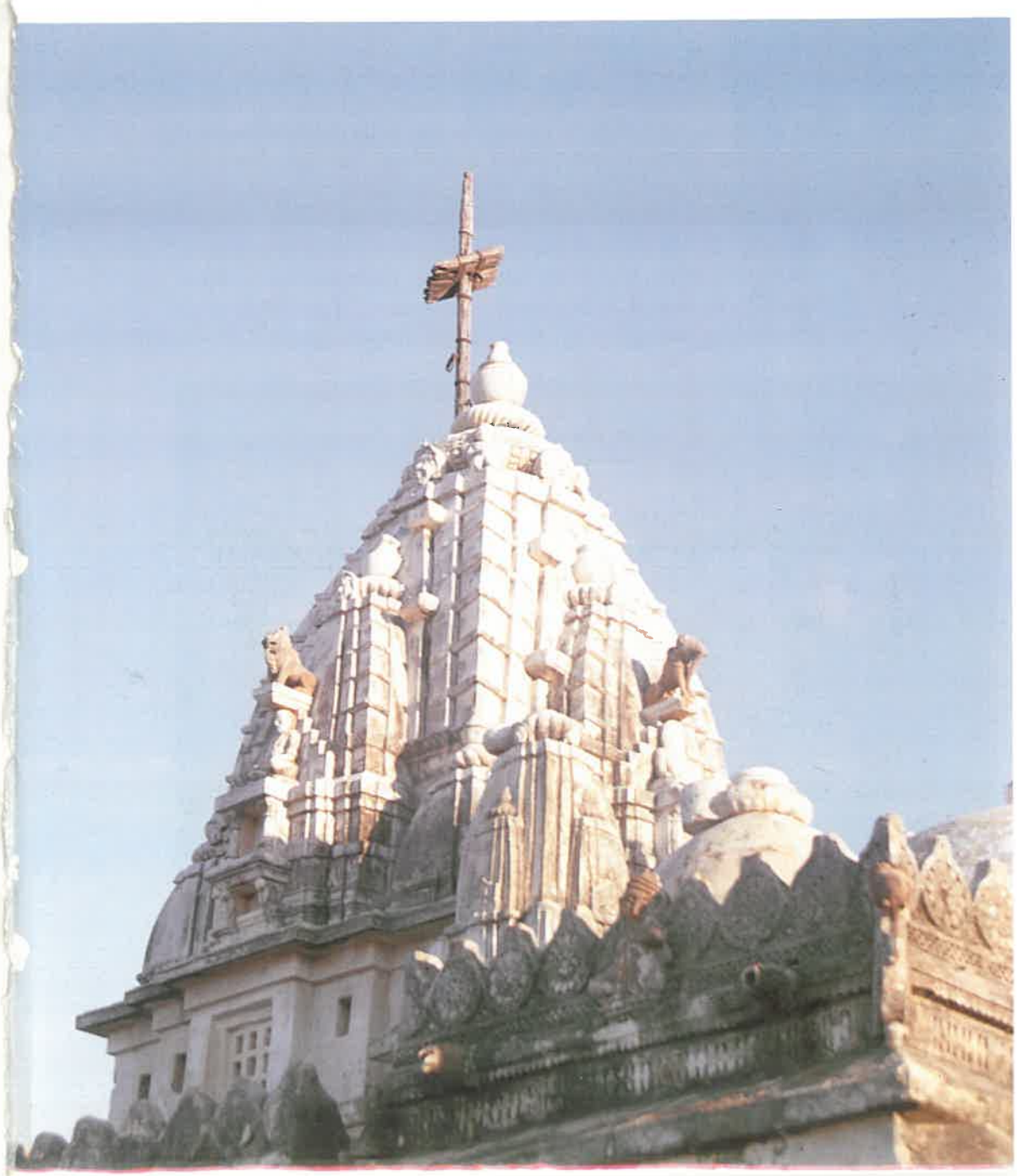
In the *shamshan ghat*, dry wood is collected and piled up at a place. The corpse is laid over this pile. The man's son, brother and father put *ghee* over him and alight the fire with coconut,

nariyal. When the fire completely burns the corpse and cools down, the remains of the dead man are collected in a bag to be thrown into the Ganges in India.

The formal mourning sittings continue for twelve days at the house of the deceased. After this period *khairat*, alms are distributed and the ceremonies come to an end.

The other Hindu clans and casts who burn their dead also follow these ceremonies with little variations. However, in Bhils the boys and girls up to the age of twelve are not cremated but buried in the earth.

Built Heritage



Built Heritage

Thar, even if it is known as 'land of death' is not that devoid of architectural treasures which make the proud built heritage of the area. It also clearly points towards its having been a flourishing region at some points of history. The now lost river Hakra and several other dry courses of water sources (*nadi*) must have supported a much larger population even in remote antiquity. As has been mentioned elsewhere, it might have been a scene of cultural activity during the chalcolithic, or even palaeolithic, period even though no remains of any kind have yet been discovered in the whole of the Pakistani desert.

Closer view of entrance, Temple in Nagarparker

Temple in Nagarparkar

The built heritage still standing above ground in Thar and the Parkar region consists of either religious or military architecture. The embellishment on the buildings of the former type does suggest a perfection in this art but hardly throws any light on the life of the people of a particular era. Some remains of towns or ports towards its southern side may, however, back-up the theory of its having been better populated and enjoying greater prosperity in those times.

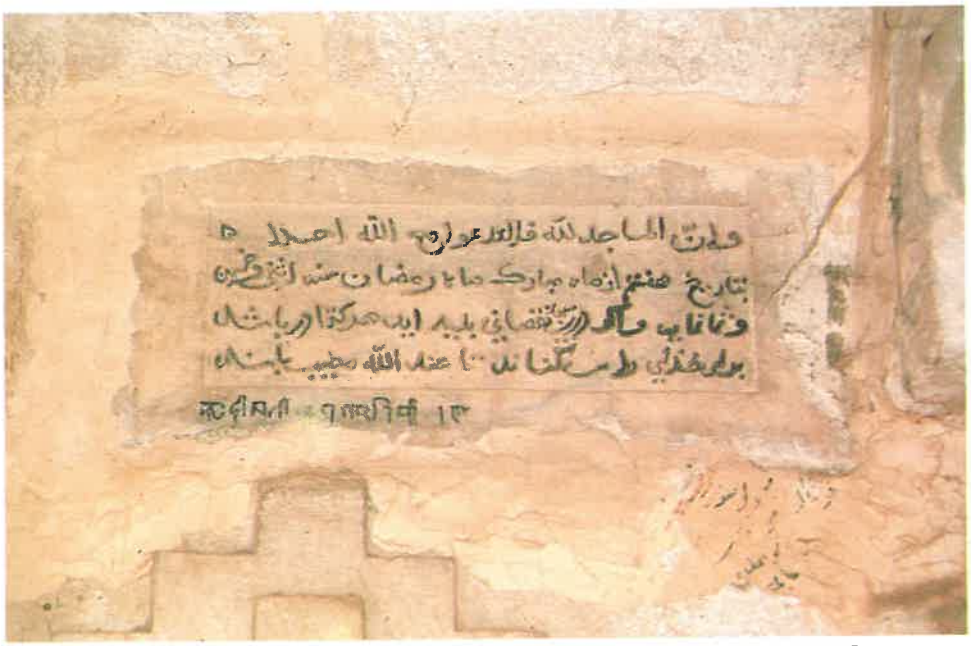
a) Religious Architecture

The religious architecture of Thar, and Parkar region, is represented by a mosque and some Jain temples situated at different places, scattered mostly over the southern Thar. Some of these gems of history are as under:-

1.Bodhesar Mosque

A little over 6 km northwest of Nagarparkar town lies a beautiful, small but shining white, mosque. It stands by the side of the

General view



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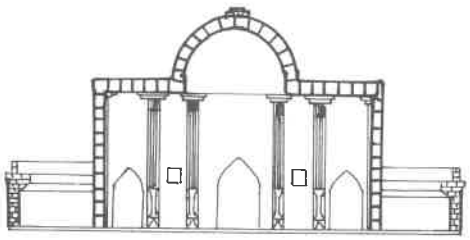
BODHESAR MOSQUE AT NAGARPARKAR



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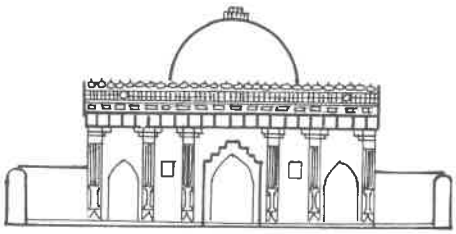

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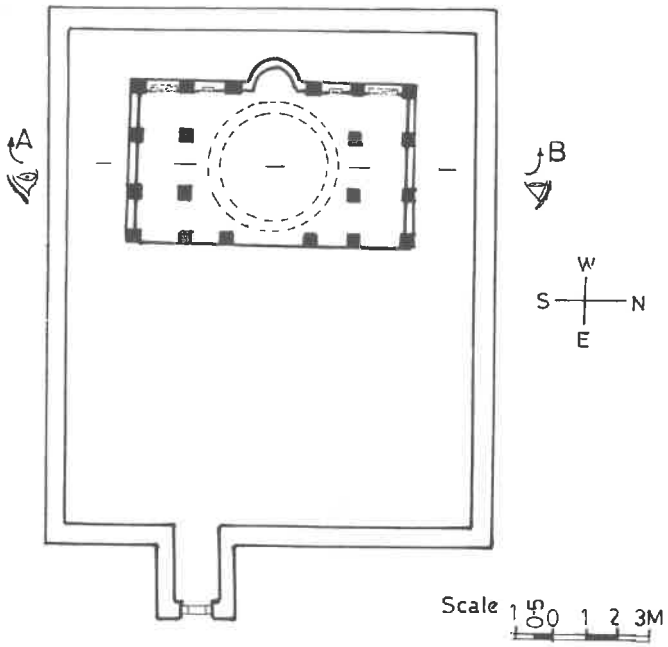


PLAN

Bodhesar *tala*, water tank, at the foot of the Karoonjhar range.

It is said that the mother of Sultan Mahmood Begra, the ruler of Gujerat, went to perform Hajj. Her caravan had to halt at Bodhesar where the Rana of the time forcibly fleeced money before allowing them to move out. This happening enraged the Sultan who attacked the area in 1505 and subjugated the local ruler. It was at this time that he ordered to be built a mosque at this spot. (Sheikh:77) An inscription found from the mosque in mutilated shape though clearly reads the name as Mahmood Shah bin Muzaffar Shah bin Ghiyasuddin and the year H.880/1505. (Ojha:70) This scant though clear epigraphic

Bodhesar Tala

evidence is enough to refute certain notion that the mosque was built at the orders of Mahmood Ghazanvi, clearly mistaking the one for the other because of the similarity in the names.

Built entirely in chaste marble, it is a domed structure with influence of Hindu and Jain architectural styles and decoration. (Nadiem:38) The main chamber is roughly square in plan, each side measuring about 9.2m. The main chamber is supported by marble pillars and beams. The facade is decorated with merlon-shaped battlements.

The mosque has a courtyard on the eastern side of the main chamber. The whole rectangular complex is enclosed with a perimeter wall less than a metre in height and measuring about 15.5m x 14m. The boundary wall is built in dressed local sand stone.

2.Jain Temples at Bodhesar

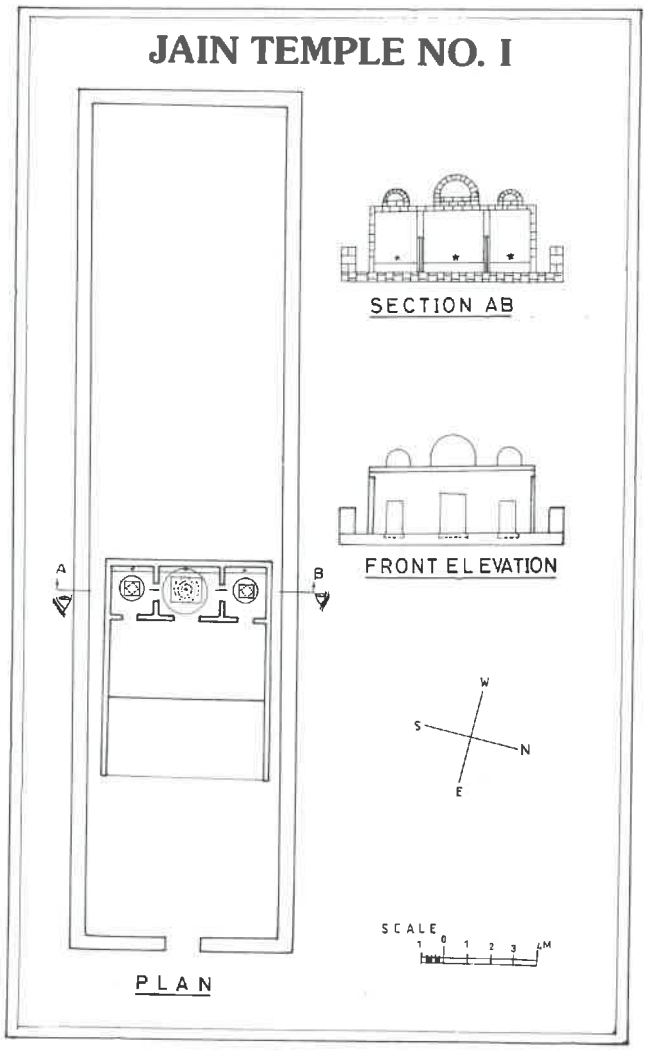
Close to the foot of the Karoonjhar hills and south of the Bodhesar mosque are situated three Jain temples, separated from each other by small though furrowed plain. These structures are supposed to have been built in 1375 and 1449.

Temple No. I

It is a small temple. It measures 8.5m in width at the front on the eastern side and 7.8m in length along the sidewalls on the north and south. It stands within a compound wall, a little less than a metre in height, and built in rubble masonry in local granite stone. It has an entrance from the east. The main building of the temple consists of a single but long cell. The two haunches on northwest and southwest corners suggest a one-time presence of the usual octagonal hall.

In the side walls of the courtyard are two niches of carved red

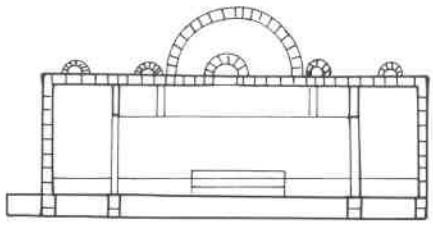
sand stone, projecting out from the surface of the wall. The main chamber which appears from outside to have three cells actually has only one long room with three compartments and is roofed with three corbelled low domes. In this chamber there is a platform running longitudinally along the western wall for keeping idols. This chamber has three entrances opening in the courtyard. The central one has red sandstone pilasters and carved images on sides and at the top of the lintel.



Temple No. II

The temple No. II is the largest of the Bodhesar group. It stands on a platform about a metre high and 12m wide on the front side, which is on the north. In the middle of this side it has the entrance door with a niche on either side of its exterior and interior. This door is of *kanjur* stone and has a jinn in a small niche carved over the lintel. The side niches are of red sand stone with carved *dassa*, which projects out of the surface of the walls. Corresponding to this door another one opens in the back courtyard towards south. This temple is a centrally planned structure with nave and a square aisle around it. The nave is

JAIN TEMPLE NO. II AT BODHESAR



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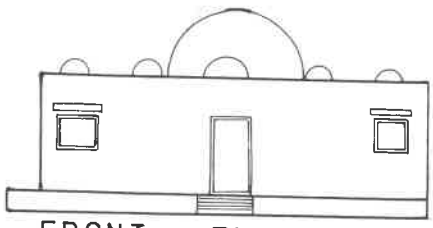

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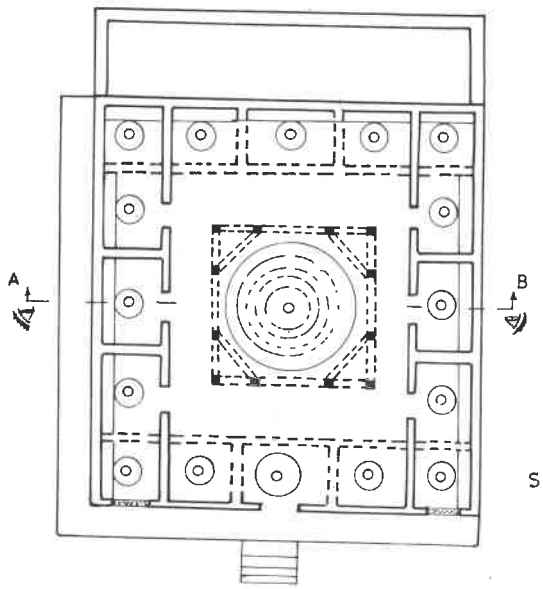


PLAN

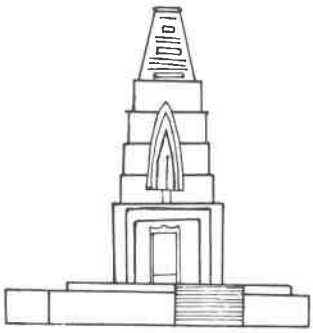
colonnaded with 4 columns on each side and roofed with corbelled low dome of the shape of an inverted bowl supported on octagonal base of beams resting on eight columns. The floor space under it is square and below the level of the floor of the surrounding aisle and has three steps descending to it from all the four sides. On the roof there is a central dome of the nave, surrounded by 16 domes of the aisles, with 10 more domes of the two rows of the cells.

All the stone used in the temple is *kanjur* and red sandstone, which are not available locally. However, the stone used in the platform and the attached compound wall is local sand stone or granite of red tint.

Temple No. III

The third temple at Bodhesar consists of open hall called *Mandapa* with an intermediate chamber known as *Arthi mandapa*, connected will cells. In plan and construction excepting enclosure wall, it is like Temple No. I, mentioned earlier.

JAIN TEMPLE NO. III AT BODHESAR, NAGARPATKAR



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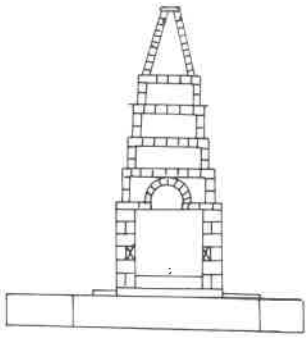

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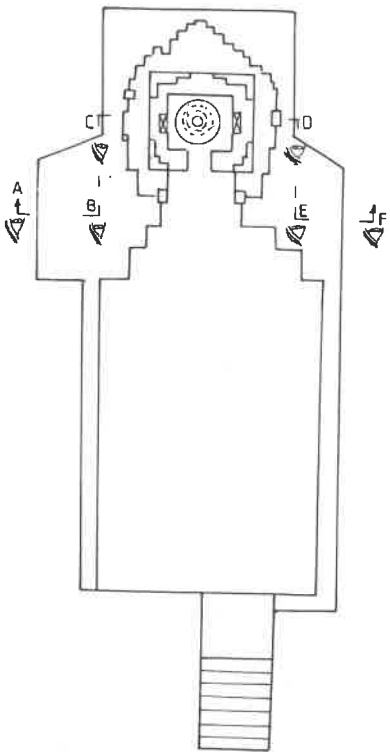

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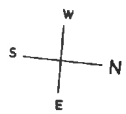

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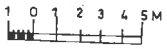
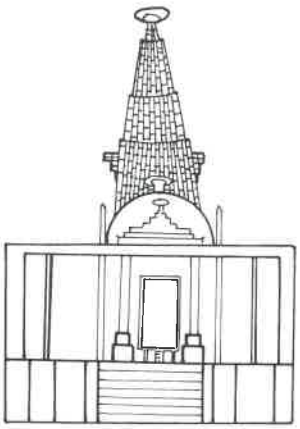


3.Jain Temple at Viravah

Viravah, about 24 km north of Nagarparkar town, stands close to the ruined remains of Pari-Nagar which is thought to be an ancient port destroyed either by the troops of the Delhi emperor in 1226, or by an earthquake.(Cousens:144). Viravah itself appears to have been built over part of Pari-Nagar. A small singly standing temple still survives at the place. It is wholly built in white marble and consists of an open group of pillars with carved capitals.

The remains of buildings of which this single structure could have been a part are still visible in the vicinity. A number of marble pieces, in chiselled and dressed blocks, lie scattered although much of the material has already been re-used in other

JAIN TEMPLE AT VIRAWAH



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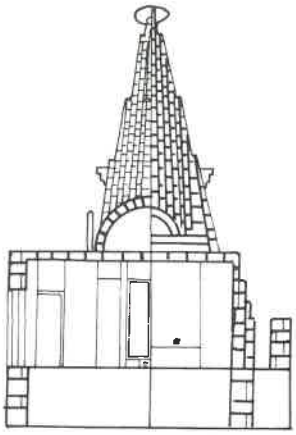

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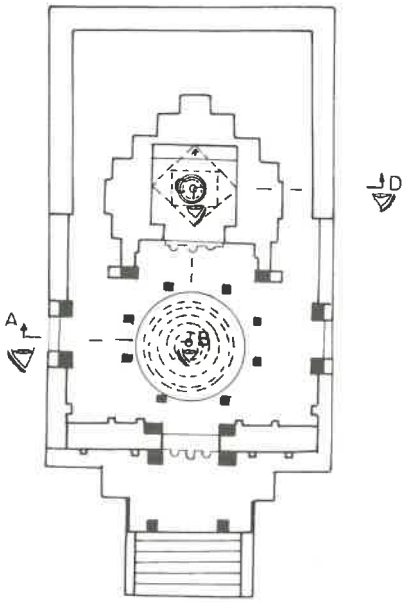

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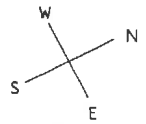


SCALE

buildings. Among these ruins of foundations was found a beautifully carved block of marble 2m x 0.87m. This stone is now displayed in the National Museum of Pakistan at Karachi. A few other carved marble stone blocks also adorn the officers' mess of the Pakistan Rangers situated near the site.

4.Jain Temple at Gorri

At Gorri, about 22km northwest of Viravah, some 4 km from *Marui jo Magh Malir*, and deep in the desert lies an old Jain Temple. it is very similar to the one at Bodhesar but far more superior in craftsmanship and finish. Although no inscription to the effect of its origin has been found from here yet it is said that it was built during the heyday of Sodhas around 1376.(Harijan-I:151)

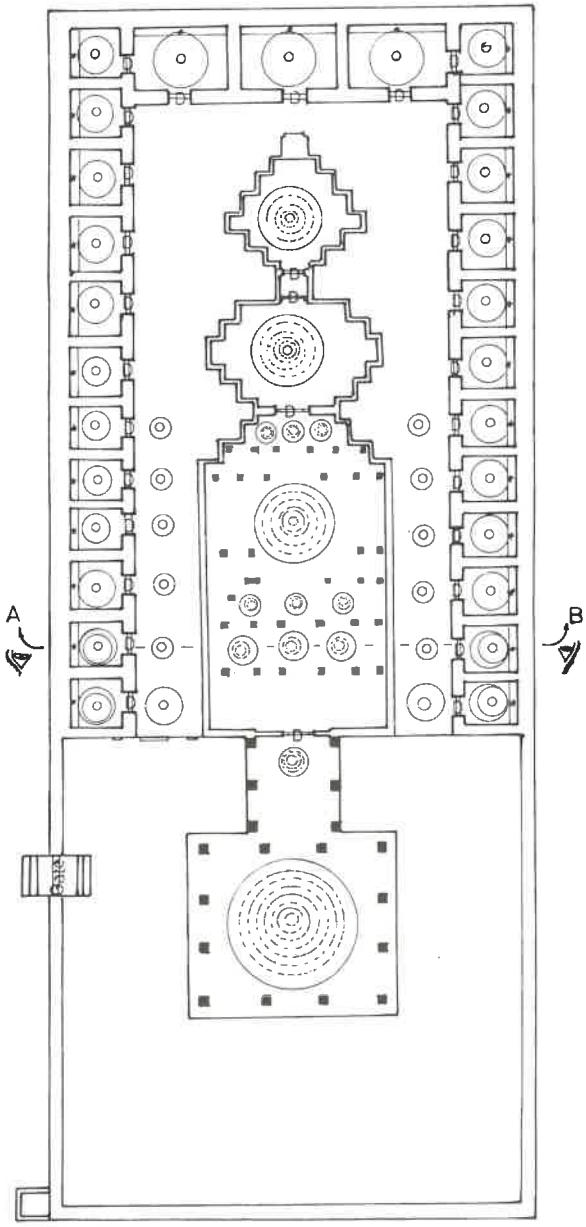
The temple is located within an enclosure with an open space in front on the northern side. It is constructed with Jodhpuri stone

much like marble. The main building is 27.6m in length and 18.5m in width. A *chhatri*-like domed extension with freestanding columns covers the front door of the main building. The interior of its top is decorated with painted figures of men and women. There are two rows of cells, six each on east and west, while entering towards south from the door. These cells also carry domes at the top.

By the side of the front door there appears an opening leading to the basement, which could not be accessed due to closure for a very long period of time. It is said that sometime during the first quarter of 18th century H.C.Watson, the then Deputy Commissioner of Thar and Parkar districts, had made an attempt to dig it out but, under the influence of superstitions, had to abandon almost right at the start.

It is recorded to have been much defaced at various times by Sindhi troops. 'It is said to have suffered from fire, and from gunpowder which was used by Colonel Trywhitt, at the time of Nagar outbreak, in order to secure a Sodha chief who was

JAIN TEMPLE AT GORRI



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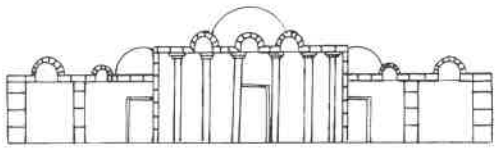

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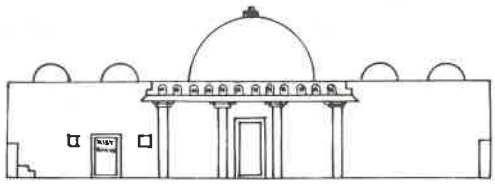

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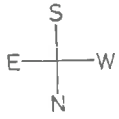

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supposed to be hiding himself in its passage.' (Cousens:145) The last major repairs are recorded to have been carried out in 1715. Some of the much-dilapidated cells have been provided prop-up pillars in brick and cement during the 1980s.

The followers of Jain religion are the worshippers of Parasnath, also known as Gorrejo hence the name Gorri. Raikes has an interesting story to tell about the idol of Parasnath belonging to this temple.

> "The Soda Chiefs of Veerawow are said to have taken the idol called Goreeha out of the temple for safe custody, and to have exhibited it occasionally to the Banians, who worshipped it, for payment. The present chief's grandfather was the last who thus exhibited it, and who accumulated a large sum by the exhibition. He however kept its hiding-place a secret, and subsequently, dying rather unexpectedly, omitted to communicate to his heirs and successors where the

cherished idol was deposited; nor has it been found to this day, much to the chagrin of both Chiefs and Banians, - to the former, as its possession was a source of no inconsiderable revenue periodically; and to the latter, from superstitious apprehensions of the deity's wrath being excited, by apparent though unintentional neglect." (p.10)

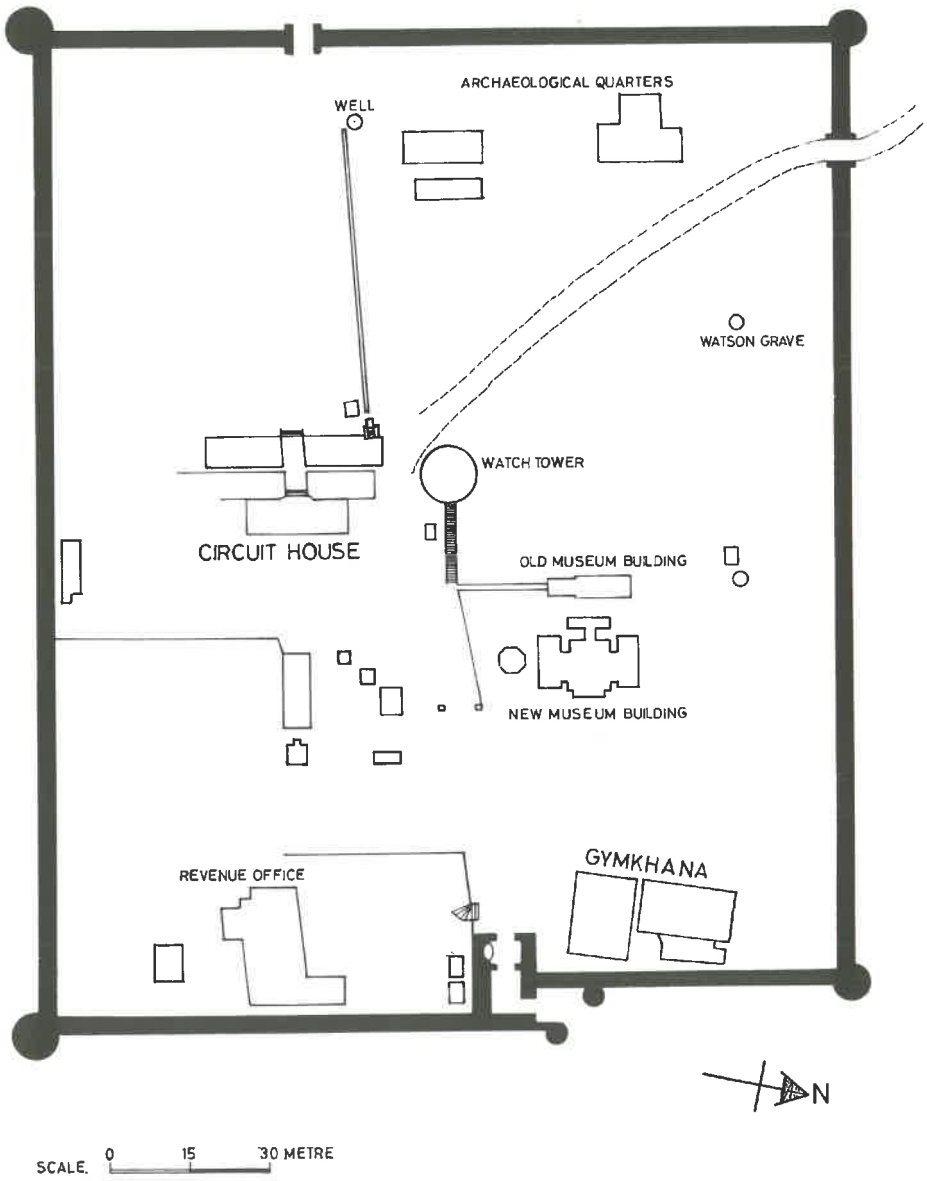
b) Military Architecture

The military architecture is represented mainly by forts and fortresses. A fort, as defined by dictionary, is a stronghold usually garrisoned and normally having a rampart and a ditch around. Such buildings had been constructed and maintained in Thar since time immemorial. However, the earliest surviving stronghold in the whole region seems to be Umerkot, literally meaning fort of Umer. With a view to consolidation of their power in the Desert, the Sindh rulers, around the close of the 18th century, also built and garrisoned several forts in Thar. As already given elsewhere they built a fort each at Islamkot in 1795, at Mithi a few years before that of Islamkot, the fort at Naukot in 1814 and the one at Singalla in 1800. Out of these forts only that at Naukot survives to this day, others having perished or making way to other buildings like high schools or other institutions. This was probably done by the British to get rid of such strongholds from where they could face any threat to the consolidation of their own power in the area. Captain Raikes also makes a passing mention of such an intention.

1.Umerkot Fort

The knowledge about origin of Umerkot is such a riddle, which has not yet been solved with any degree of success by scholars. Its founding is attributed to Umer Soomro the Second, who ruled it from 1355 to 1390. However, the old writers prefer to write it as Amerkot and argue that it is much older than the said period of the 14th century. According to them its earliest mention is met in connection with the marriage of Yadvansi Raja Mandam Rai with the daughter of Parmar Raja Sodha of Amerkot. (Harijan-I:77 on the authority of Tod (Gujerati) and Ghalot (Hindi). As Raja Mandam Rai is recorded to have ascended *gadi* in Sambat 616, which makes the year 559, it would be fair to assume that the town of 'Amerkot' had already been founded. The founding of 'Amerkot' is attached to Parmar

UMERKOT FORT



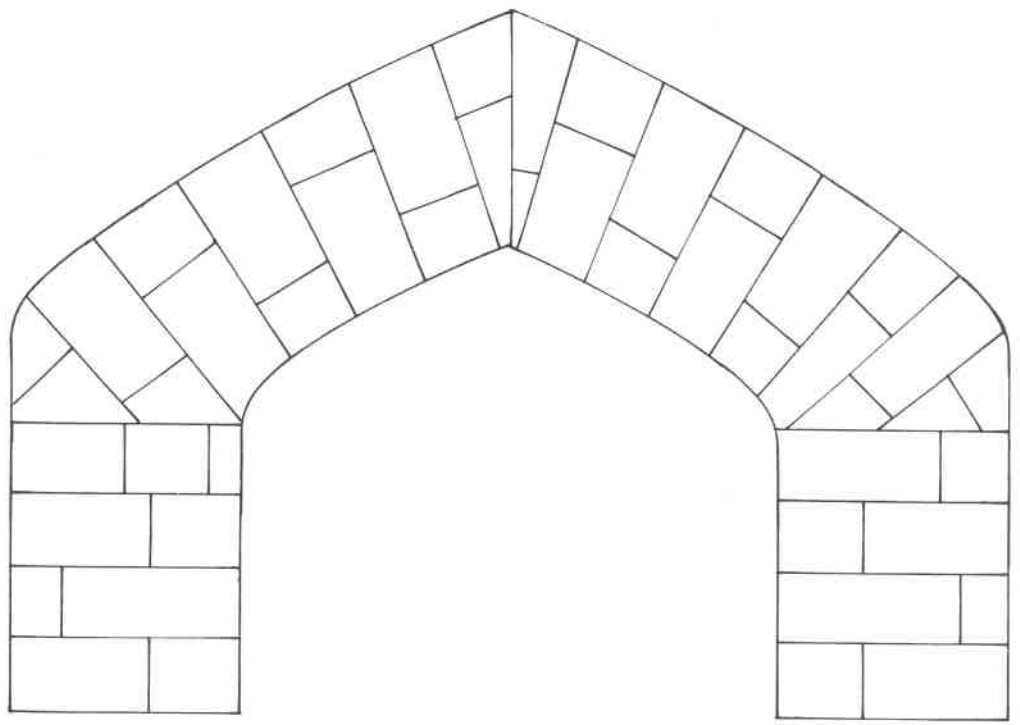
Shahi Gate

General view showing Chhatri

Interior view

Drains under fortification

UMERKOT: WATER DISPOSAL ARRANGEMENT



Sodha Raja, Omrah Sumra, after whose name it is said to have been called. (Maulvi:48-52) It would thus suggest that even if it were that old it would be correctly called 'Omrkot' or simply Umerkot - without any reference to Umar Sumra the Second who came to rule the place much later.

The founding of the fort is supposed to have taken place along with the town itself. The present fort, however, is not that old but recorded to have been constructed by Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora in 1746. In the background of this fact some writers are tempted to believe that the Mian in the process destroyed the earlier fort lying a couple of kilometres north of the present stronghold. (Harijan-I:176) They are of the view that the spot presently marked as the birth place of Akbar was the site of the old fort where Humayun and his entourage enjoyed the hospitality of the Rana in 1542. This hypothesis may not have much currency, as even after deep survey no signs of any earlier fort, or even a habitation, have been found around this particular spot. The possibility, however, of the place of birth of Emperor Akbar away from the fort may be justified by the fact that the first halt of Emperor Humayun in Umerkot was outside the fort. (Ansari:219 on the authority of Khudadad Khan). This school of thought, however, think instead that the Mian did not build it afresh but renovated the old fort which was situated at the very place of the present fort. (As quoted in Ansari:231) From the circumstantial evidence the present writer is convinced that while building the fort anew the Mian did not change the site. This theory is amply supported by the fact that cultural material is found buried within the fort denoting an earlier occupation of the place.

The fort is roughly rectangular in plan measuring 292m x 228m. The fortification wall, which is 3m in width, gives a tapered look both on the exterior and interior. It has four semi-circular bastions at the corners. At present one of the bastions has completely vanished while still another reduced to shambles.

The walls and bastions have burnt-brick facing with the filling of sun-dried bricks or simple mud and earth.

Burj or Watch Tower

The main gate, also known as Shahi *darwaza*, is situated roughly in the middle of the eastern wall. In plan, it is a crooked type of entrance, with an arched opening and a couple of bastions, all built in sand stone. The parapet, which seems to be of later period, is built in burnt-bricks and has musketry holes. The bastions are also provided with machicolations for pouring hot water or molten lead or oil on the advancing army trying to force their way through the entrance. Such machicolations are also found provided in the brick-wall around the fort.

Close to one of the bastions, on the bricks making the facing of the Gate there seem impressions of hoofs of a horse, locally attributed to those of Rai Rattan Singh's, which had tried to cross over when its master was about to be hanged in the fort by the British.

Almost in the centre of the fort, in front of the main entrance or Shahi Gate mentioned earlier, is a large *burj* or watchtower. A flight of 58 steps, about 3m wide, is provided on the eastern

side. The *burj* is a little over 17m high from the level ground. The *burj* is made with burnt-bricks, also clearly showing many repairs at different times of history.

On the top of the *burj* are fixed seven cannons with their barrels jetting out of the parapet. These cannons rest on platforms constructed on an equal distance from each other.

Immediately south of the burj is a British period circuit house still in use even after over hundred years of its existence.

In addition to the main Shahi gate the fort now has two simple entrances. The one with a rampart on the outside opens on the Umerkot-Mirpur Khas road, a little east of the northwestern bastion. The other doorway opens in the middle of the western fortification wall, opposite Circuit House. Both of these entrances, devoid of any special features, are simple doorways probably opened during the British period.

Near the northern entrance there is a brick-built pond-like depression which opens to an arched-shaped tunnel made to discharge the water collected inside the fort.

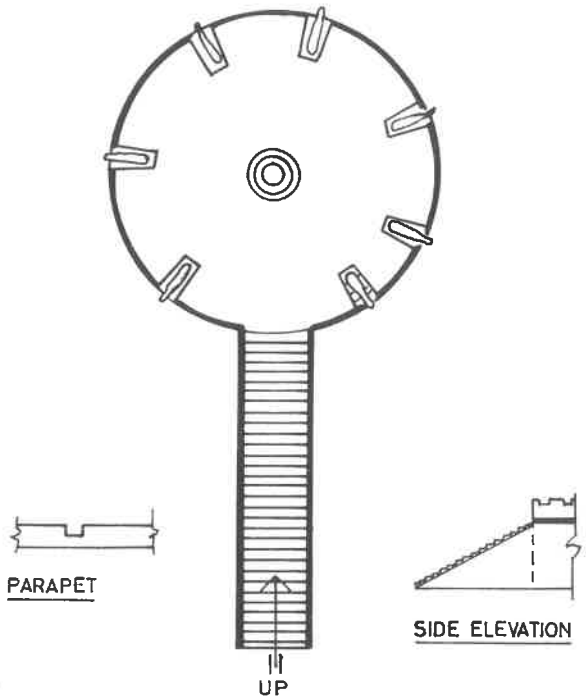
A beautiful *chhatri*-like structure in *sang-e-khattu*, yellow sand stone, supported on eight pillars, stands in northwestern side of the fort, near the above-mentioned drain. Here in the shape of a cross is the grave of H.E.Watson, sometime Deputy Commissioner of Thar and Parkar. There are three inscriptions in English:-

1. "H.E.Watson Sindh Commission: for many years Deputy Commissioner of this district born 23rd November,1846 died 26th February 1894.

   This memorial was erected by the subordinate officials and zamindar of Thar and Parkar in Remembrance of his good qualities and in token of their affection for him."

2. "In loving memory of Herbert Edward Watson Deputy Commissioner Thar and Parkar. Died Feb, 27th 1894 aged 47."

WATCH TOWER IN UMERKOT FORT



Existing Museum building

3. "Well done thou good and faithful servant Entre thou into the ion of the God."

There are some other buildings, though not of any historical or architectural consequence, in the fort. Near to the northwestern gate are some residential quarters for the staff of the Umerkot Museum. In the southeastern portion are the buildings housing provincial government offices while on the other side in the northeastern corner is the newly built, ugly looking and still unfinished building of the 'gymkhana'. On the western side of this building is yet another scar on the historical fort, this time in the name of a new museum building. Built by Pakistan P.W.D. this building presents a ghostly look even before it were occupied to establish a new museum. The old museum, lying immediately west of it, is set in a single hall of considerable dimensions. It was inaugurated in 1968. Still serving well the scholars and general visitors alike it was conceived keeping in view the importance of Umerkot as birth-place of Emperor Akbar the Great. On display are some of the rare manuscripts,

New Museum building

framin, specimens of calligraphy, miniature paintings, coins and armoury. Some cannon balls and stone carvings retrieved from random excavations in the fort are displayed in the open outside the museum.

Replica of Akbar's coin

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Replica of Akbar's coin

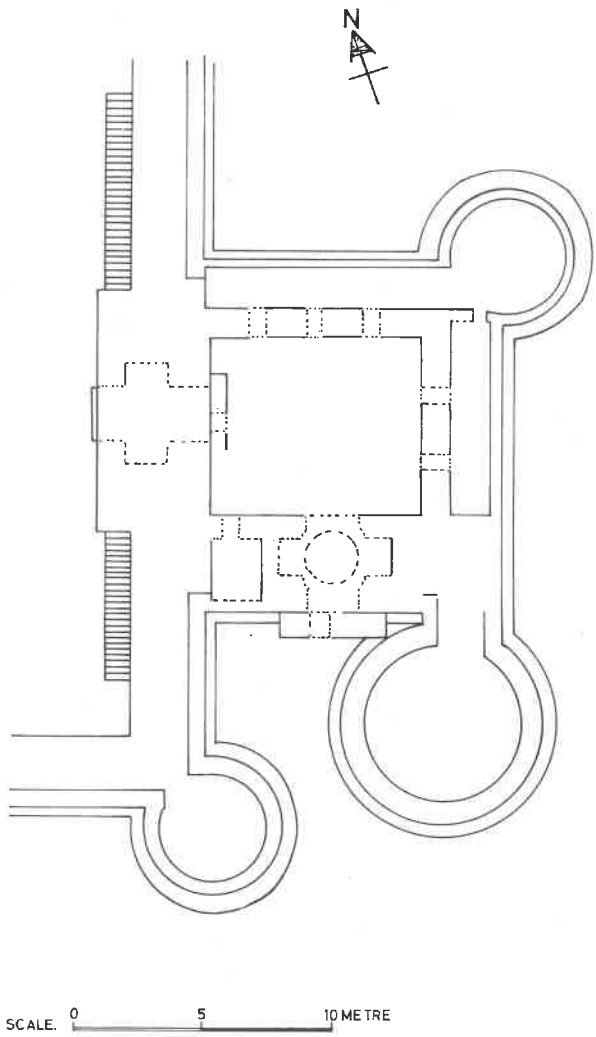
2.Naukot Fort

Some 63km south of Mirpur Khas, Naukot town lies at the edge of the desert. Another 3km on the road to Mithi an awe-inspiring fort attracts the eye in the wilderness. It is said to have been constructed by Mir Karam Ali Khan in 1814 to consolidate his power in the desert and to subdue the Thari and make effective - and forceful - arrangements to collect *dhal*, revenue.

The fort is built of burnt-bricks in mud mortar and measures about 113m in length and 98m in width. Another squarish construction on the southern side of the fort, measuring 15m x 13m has in it the only entrance and narrow access to the interior of the fort. All the walls and bastions give tapering look. The narrow entrance is approached through a crooked passage formed by two heavy and semi-circular bastions. The bastion close to the doorway, and making a part of the squarish construction, is about 9.5m high with a diameter of about 42m at the base.

Main gate

MAIN GATE OF NAUKOT FORT

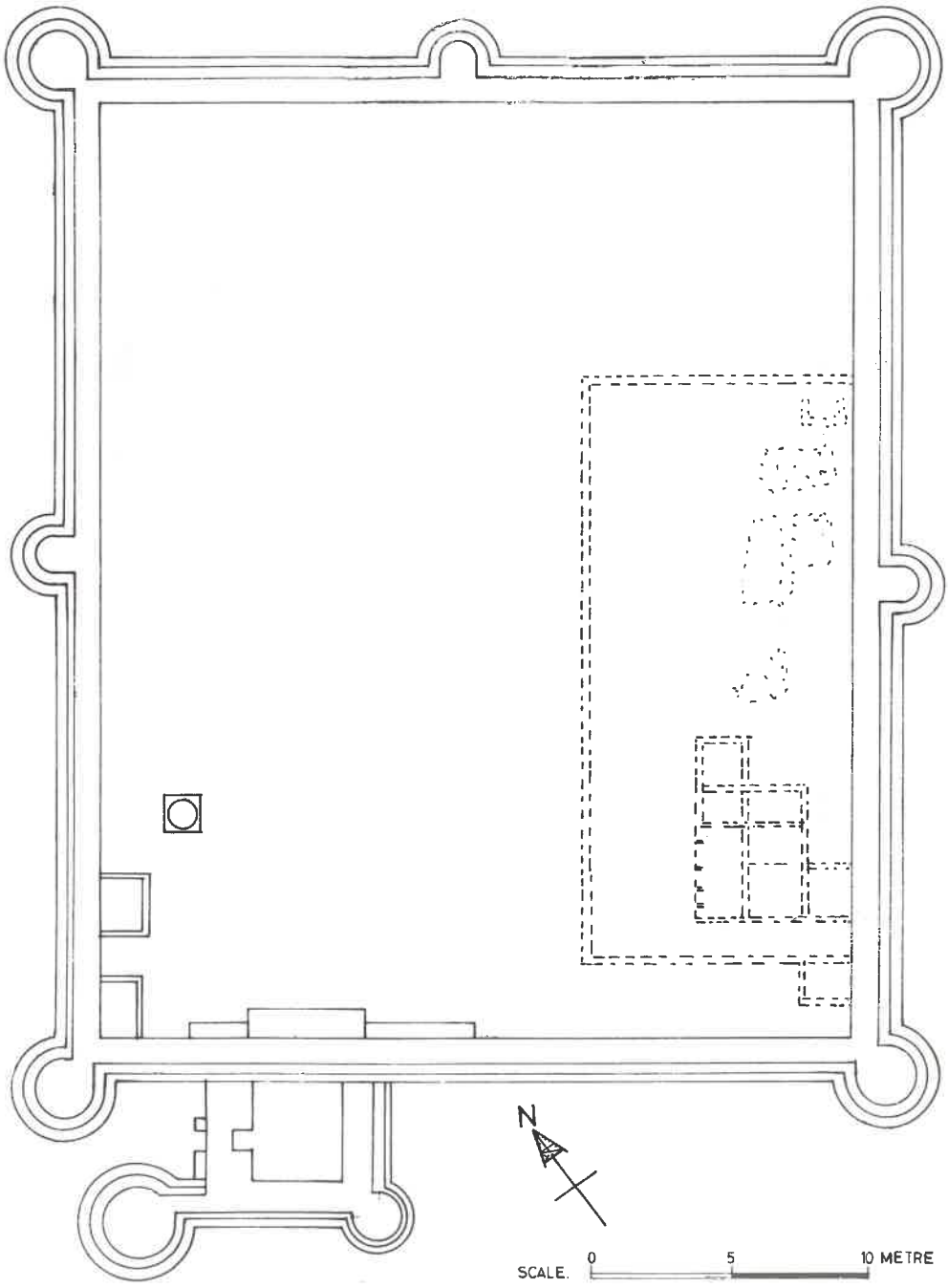


Entrance

General view of fortification

Barood khana

NAUKOT FORT



General view

The arched entrance is around 7m in height and about 4m in width. The approach to the interior of the fort is through causeway type hall and room, which make part of the squarish construction, itself a fortress.

The fort has nine semi-circular bastions, two of them guarding the main entrance, four at the corners and one each in the middle of the northern, southern and western walls.

A 4m wide wall runs on the four sides of the fort. It has two burnt-brick stairs to climb the wall top, from the interior of the fort.

Inside the fort there are a few remains of rooms etc., which may go to suggest that these were the residential quarters. A small construction like a dungeon could have been the *barood khana*, or the place to store ammunition. The water seems to have been easily accessible by digging wells inside the fort. Even now a hand-pump serves the visitors well.

Epilogue

The slow rate of inroads of modern means of communication into Thar has helped a great deal in preserving most of the ethnic flavour of the Thari. The hostile terrain impedes the construction of roads, supply of electricity and providing of telephone facilities. Its only the towns of Umarkot, Naukot and Mithi which are connected through good black-top roads with Hyderabad and Mirpur Khas in Sindh proper. About 25km beyond Mithi into Thar, the road to Nagarparkar could have been metalled by December, 1999, but the work was still seen being done on its extension. Similarly, the sandy desert road from Umarkot to Chhachhro has also been converted into good *pucca* road. The hundreds of kilometres of the rest of the tracks of Thar still present the same hazards of journeying over them.

The electric energy is available only to the inhabitants of Umarkot, Mithi and Islamkot. Along the main Thar 'Highway' electricity-supply towers can be seen erected up to Nagarparkar. Most of them are also provided with the requisite wires for high-tension power for the last many years but the project does not seem to be nearing completion for many years to come. The case with telephone system is also not very different. The connection does exist in remote part of Nagarparkar, but it is the same out-dated and antiquated one, which might have been used by the British. Judging from the present degree of development speed it is not difficult to assume that these benefits of the advanced world will continue to be denied to the Thari even in the foreseeable future.

The slow progress in development may also be taken as 'a blessing in disguise', even if in theory, for the scholars. It has helped a great deal in preserving ethnic culture of the desert.

Except for the *kekrra*, the wartime tough vehicle, to have transformed into 'luxury-coach' meant only for passengers much of the rest of the way of life of the Thari remains unchanged. The normal *kekrra* still transport men and material but not to all the settlement areas, nor does it serve others on daily or regular basis. This has only helped maintain the ethnic identity of different tribes and clans.

It, therefore, seems high time to make some sincere and concerted efforts to collect and record the ethnological material for the benefit of posterity. It would also be in the fitness of things that large tracts of Thar are declared as protected areas, or reserves, to preserve their ethnographical wealth, fauna and flora and the natural physical features. It is all the more urgent in view of the threats of 'modern development' in the face of imminent mining of coal reserves in the Islamkot area.

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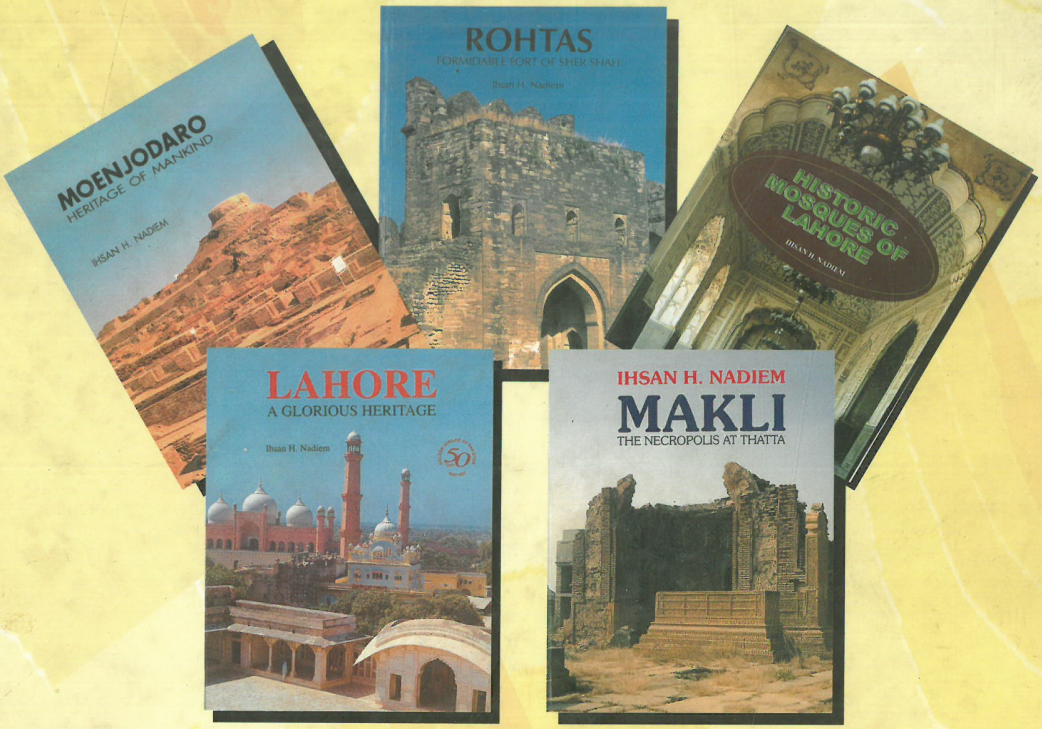

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