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THE KATKARI.

(Report of an Enquiry into the Conditions of Life)
and work of the Katkari Tribe.

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THE KATKARI.

Report of an enquiry into the conditions of life and work
of the Katkari Tribes.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE KATKARI :

The Katkaris, also known as the Kathodis, are spread over most of the Marathi speaking parts of the Bombay Presidency. However, they are chiefly to be found in the Western Ghats - especially that part of them which is found in the Thana and Kolaba districts, in the native states to the east and north-east of Surat and also along the base of the Sahyadris between the Poona and Nasik roads. Their mother tongue is a dialect of the Marathi language and the ordinary Poona Marathi is understood very well by them. According to the latest census report their total number is 75,710 including 37,317 males and 38,393 females. The exact distribution of the Katkari population, according to districts and states is given in Appendix A. As Enthoven has pointed out, the term Katkari is derived from the Marathi Kat, catechu, the thickened juice of the Khair (Acacia Cateia) tree, and KARNE to make, the whole meaning makers of catechu. This was the original occupation of the tribe still pursued by some of their number. The term Kathodi is similarly derived from Kath (Catechu) and vadi (a cake) which would give the meaning "(sellers of) cakes of catechu."

SCOPE OF THE ENQUIRY :-

An aboriginal tribe may be studied from various points of view - anthropological, sociological, economic, political and so on. The scope of this enquiry is however, restricted to the economic and occupational aspects of the life of the Katkari community.

From the economic point of view it is difficult to imagine a more poverty-stricken race of human beings. As may be imagined the money-lender plays a very important part in the life of a Katkari.

By occupation a large number of Katkaris are wage earners, some are petty agriculturists, some have to maintain themselves by selling headloads of firewood brought from the jungles and when that is not possible by catching field rats and sometime fish to eat. Women and children - as soon as they can be made to work - all have to work though in many cases they do not get any wages - their wages being presumably included in the wages of their husbands or fathers as the case may be.

In the following pages attempt has been made to describe the nature and causes of these economic and occupational disabilities of the Katkari community as a whole. It is also attempted to gauge the disparity between the earnings and the production of a Katkari wage worker in the coal making industry so as to form a rough idea as to the surplus value which he produces and to the extent of which he is exploited every year and throughout his life.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION :-

The indirect source of information consists in various accounts regarding the Katkari community hitherto published by (i) official agencies such as the District Gazeteers and by (ii) private individuals like Enthoven, Rajwade, Chaphekar, etc. A list of such publications is given in Appendix B.

The more fruitful source of information was direct investigation.

In course of the investigation I visited villages in more important of the districts inhabited by the Katkaris and came in direct contact with Katkaris of about 40 villages.

An average Katkari is not very communicative. In most cases I could trace this reticence to fear of those who are chiefly responsible for the tyranny and oppression to which the Katkari community, as a whole, is subjected. These are all grades of Government officers chiefly of the forest department, employers of Katkaris who are also their money lenders and also other important individuals with power who are accustomed to extract free and forced labour from the Katkaris. This fear creates suspicion in the mind of the Katkari about every individual with an urban appearance. The fear is so ingrained that I was told by a Mamlatdar, whose guest I happened to be, that if the Katkaris of the surrounding villages knew whose guest I was, they would not be willing to speak to me at all. This is the role that State plays in the lives of these people

For the Katkari it is not necessary to study Marx in order to understand that the state "consists in organised, systematic application of force against human beings."

With the help of local workers who were above suspicion, I was, however, able to come into direct contact with a large number of Katkaris - both men and women - and I could hear the tale of their sorrows from their own mouths. Besides the Katkaris themselves I endeavoured, with some success, to collect material from a variety of other individuals including public spirited men who are trying to work among the Katkaris, disinterested men from districts in which there is a large Katkari population, employers of Katkaris including the forest coal contractors, Government officials of all grades from Mamalatsars to chaprasis and also some missionaries. Barring some of the missionaries most of these gentlemen, whatever their other differences, seem to agree that the Katkari community, as a whole, leads a life which is, "nasty, brutish and short," that every member of the community is presumably a dishonest thief unless he or she otherwise proves, that the rule of the rod is the only possible method of making them work and that all efforts to help them out of their present depth of want and misery are bound to meet with ignominious failures. Efforts have been made in the past and efforts may be made in the future but, according to these gentlemen, the results will be what they have invariably been.

My investigations, however, have led me to arrive at conclusions which are somewhat different from those given above. These conclusions and the data^a with which they have been arrived at from the subject matter of the following pages.

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OCCUPATIONS OF A KATKARI :-

Roughly speaking the Katkaris adopt one or more of the following occupations :-

- (1) Coal making;
- (2) Agriculture and agricultural labour;
- (3) Tree cutting; and
- (4) Miscellaneous.

These are given in their order of importance which has been decided by taking into consideration two factors :-

- (i) the number of Katkaris engaged in the occupation, and
- (ii) the number of days in the year that he is so engaged.

The statements made in the course of this chapter cannot be regarded as quite accurate or precise for two reasons viz., the inadequacy of available statistical information and the want of more general information. Broadly speaking, however, the statements may be considered as representing true state of things. We shall now consider each of these occupations with its attendant circumstances.

COAL MAKING.

GENERAL.

Coal making is by far the most important and the most extensively adopted occupation of the Katkari community. Out of the total population of nearly 80,000 as many as 60,000 Katkaris are

engaged in the coal industry. The districts of Thana and Kolaba have the largest share of the Katkari population the former having more than 33 thousand and the latter nearly 31 thousand to its credit. Most of the Katkaris of these districts together with a few thousands from the Javhar and Janjira States have made coal making the chief and in many cases the only occupation of their lives.

The manufacturing of coal begins by the middle of October and ends by the middle of the next June when rains set in. For eight months during the year the Katkari engaged in this industry, is required to work in the jungle without a break. In this connection the Katkari always means the Katkari and his family; for every Katkari has to take his wife and children to the jungle because they are not only useful but necessary for him in his work. This is so much so that the contractors actually encourage Katkari boys and girls to marry as otherwise they are not as useful as they are when married.

The employers of the Katkaris in the coal industry are the forst coal contractors who are allowed by Government to exploit the coal resources of defined forest areas called 'coupe's which are auctioned out to them for this purpose. These contractors generally vie with each other in offering highest bids to Government through their tenders. Besides they have to make profits for themselves. This makes it necessary for them to

cut down the cost of coal production in every other possible way. In some cases big contractors engage sub-contractors who have naturally to take greater care to keep down costs. In very few cases Katkaris themselves undertake to manufacture coal on contract system. They, however, never employ any other workers for this purpose; but work themselves. The experience of the last many years is that Katkaris who manufacture coal under this contract system are generally deceived by the original contractors with the result that they realise as their remuneration practically nothing more than what they would have done by working for wages. This circumstance has a very discouraging effect on independent enterprise on the part of the Katkaris.

Stages of the Manufacture of Coal :- Generally speaking there are four stages of coal-making:

(1) Cutting of the Wood: An average Katkari is an expert feller of trees and cutter of wood. He can mow down huge trees in an incredibly short time. He is so expert in this art that he can bring a tree down to the ground almost to order in any direction he pleases and without doing harm to neighbouring trees.

(2) The second stage is that of gathering the pieces of wood and taking them to the place of the coal kiln. In this the Katkari finds his wife and children very useful. Katkari women and children carry to long distance big logs of wood which, considering their age and physique, are

apparently too heavy for them. And they do it very quickly too.

(3) Arranging Kiln:- This is an art in itself; for the quality of the coal considerably depends upon the quantity of heat given to the wood. Logs and branches of the same tree require different quantity of heat according as they are hard or soft or according as they belong to the trunk or the top of the tree; and so the quantity of heat to be given to them has to be adjusted according to their requirements. The bigger logs of wood are first arranged and a passage is kept in the pile from the ground upto the middle of the pile in order to facilitate the action of fire. The smaller pieces of wood are then arranged in their places and the whole heap is covered first with dry grass and then with earth. The kiln is then set fire to through the passage kept for that purpose. The Katkari or his wife have to keep incessant, though alternate, vigil over the kiln for from three to six days which is the period required for carbonization. The kiln has to be prevented from breaking or collapsing and so great care has to be taken in arranging the logs of wood as well as putting the grass and earth over the heap. The kiln must not also be allowed to be burnt down completely thus reducing the coal to ashes; on the other hand it must not be extinguished before complete carbonization has taken place. The skill of the Katkari consists in hitting the exact mean between these two extremes.

As the price of the coal very much depends upon its quality the coal contractors and their assistants are keen on seeing that the Katkaris employed by them do not neglect the kiln. The quality of coal is regarded as excellent when two pieces of coal can produce fire only by mutual impact. Deterrent punishment for alleged negligence in this respect is a common thing, but we shall look to that aspect of the situation a little later on in this study.

When the coal is ready it is shoved out by a long pointed stick and extinguished by sprinkling water over it. In all this process the comparatively lighter part of the work is done by the wife and the children.

CONDITIONS OF WORK AND WAGES :- Before proceeding to discuss the wage position a simple statement about the hours of work will be enough. The Katkaris are supposed to be available for work for twenty-four hours in the day. The contractors take care to see that the Katkari labour is so speeded up and sweated as to extract from it the greatest amount of output. Their only limit is the capacity of the Katkari to work consistently with the maintenance of his life.

If the Katkari falls sick his wages are immediately stopped and his family has to starve unless it is helped by his fellow workers. If his wife falls sick he has somehow to manage to do the work of both either himself or with the help of others. Pregnant women have to work almost upto the

last hour and after a few hours of child birth. If his children are healthy they are compelled to work and if they fall sick they are allowed to die, he and his wife being generally disallowed from wasting their time in nursing them. In no case is the labour of the wife and the children paid for.

During the eight months that are spent by the Katkaris in the jungle they do not get a single holiday as such. The Katkari or his wife gets just enough time on a bazar day to run to a neighbouring village for bringing chillies or similar things from the market. If the kiln is on fire they have to forego this pleasure also because there is no knowing when it will collapse or be burnt to ashes, which contingency is, sometimes, literally a question of life or death to a Katkari, as we shall see later on. In order that a Katkari should continue to live and work, just enough paddy of the worst variety mixed up with husk, is supplied to him from time to time and its price set off against his wages. Usually the price charged by the contractors is a little less than double the market price. But there is no option left to the Katkari in this respect. If the paddy supplied is not enough for him and his children he has to maintain his family as best he can on roots and bulbs collected from the jungle. Sometimes he is informed that unless he ~~returns~~ out a particular amount of work in a particular

period of time his paddy allowance and wages would be stopped during such extra period as he might take to finish that particular amount of work. This threat is literally carried into effect.

Before a Katkari and his family go to the jungle for coal making they are supplied with clothes. The clothes are one dhoti for the man and one 'ludge' and one bodice for the woman. The children are supposed to go naked unless their parents somehow find old clothes for them. The price of these articles supplied to the Katkari by his employer is, on an average, two rupees. Five rupees are, however, deducted from the wages of the Katkari for this purpose. The Katkari prefers to get five rupees and wants to purchase his own clothes but, as a rule, he is not allowed to do so. He must purchase from his employer clothes worth rupees two for rupees five.

In some places the contractors take the precaution of getting written contracts thumb-impressed by the Katkaris. The terms of such contracts are not very unfair according to the existing standard of fairness. But the peculiarity about all these contracts is that they are never acted up to by the employing classes. The Katkaris, as a rule, are made to work harder and get less money. There is no question of the Katkaris ever taking steps against the employers. The reasons are simple. He has no money and again he is almost sure that he would be physically tortured if he is even suspected of having any such untoward designs in his mind.

It is very difficult for various reasons

to ascertain the exact amount of wages that are paid to a Katkari for coal making. In the first place part of the wages is paid in kind as we have seen above and the Katkaris and their employers differ widely as to the actual price of the goods supplied by the latter to the former as part of the wages. However, the fact that the Katkari prefers to have cash payment and the contractors compel him to accept payment in kind creates the impression that the contractors are, somehow interested in making payment in kind.

While in the jungle, the Katkari is given about eight to ten 'pailis' of paddy and about four to eight annas in cash every week. As was said above the money is used for small necessities on a market day. Some contractors say, they pay more about eight annas per week - and some Katkaris say that many times they do not get even four annas. Thus a Katkari may be assumed to get as his weekly wages in cash anything between nothing and eight annas besides his paddy allowance which is, roughly speaking, about a rupee worth. The Katkari family thus earns about five to six rupees per month while working in the jungle.

Besides this there are some special occasions during the year when the coal contractors who are also their money lenders, advance to the Katkaris small sums of money. The Katkaris observe certain Hindu festivals such as Nagpanchami, Divali

etc. They require money on these occasions and they also require money to maintain themselves during the rainy season when no coal making is possible. Some of them procure their occupations during this period of the year but many of them have no means of living. They have, therefore, to borrow money from the contractors. In all a Katkari family gets from the money lender anything between 5 to 25 rupees during the rainy season. The number of those getting ten to twelve rupees is the largest. The total seasonal income of a Katkari family engaged in coal making will thus ~~XXX~~ be seen to be between Rs. 50 and Rs. 60.

The methods of recruiting Katkari Labour for Coal making:-

In the Thana and Kolaba Districts, during the month of October, scores of Katkari families can be seen squatting ('camping' would be too dignified a word) by the road-side awaiting the orders of the employers camping under a shady tree nearby. These are the coal contractors or their agents. They generally have leather whips or rods in their hands and the Katkaris have frightened looks on their faces.

Going behind the scene and trying to understand the causes of this phenomenon we arrive at certain facts regarding the method of recruiting Katkari labour. These are described below.

The coal contractors are naturally very

anxious to reserve for themselves a steady labour force. The Katkari community is the only community which can effectively supply this need. The contractors, therefore, want to bind down a Katkari family to themselves. This consideration is at the root of the idea of making small advances of money to the Katkari during his time of need. At the time of making an advance a Katkari is sternly warned that if he tries to serve any master other than the maker of the advance, he would have to suffer for it. The idea that a debtor is the slave of the creditor, body and soul, is very carefully cultivated in the mind of the Katkari not only by the coal contractors but also by the guardians of law and order who are generally found to be extraordinarily friendly towards the contractors.

The Katkaris, however, have no other alternative than to borrow money for their maintenance during the rainy season when they are not engaged in coal making. During this season some of them work as land labourers for peasant~~s~~ proprietors but the total available employment is not always enough to absorb all of them; neither is the earning enough to maintain them. Borrowing, therefore, is the only course open. The coal contractors are, generally speaking, the creditors or money lenders of the Katkaris. They play this part willingly for reasons of their own which we shall presently see.

By making advances of money referred to

above the coal contractor gets such a hold on the Katkari that it has become quite customary for him to regard Katkaris, thus indebted to him, as "his own". The Katkaris thus "belong" to their creditor and employer. Sometimes some of the Katkaris who can otherwise maintain themselves do not go in for these advances from the contractors. This gives them a position of advantage as they are free to work for any contractor whom they choose in the beginning of the coal making season. They naturally go to the man who is supposed to be less exacting and less dis-honest than his fellows. Such a situation, however, is regarded as very dangerous by the average coal contractor. If he finds that one or two of "his" Katkaris have failed to take ~~advances~~ advances from him he immediately reports the matter to the police. The police department also takes a very serious view of the facts. The defaulting Katkari is immediately summoned and required to explain the nature of his "ostensible means of subsistence". His explanations, cogent or otherwise, are brushed aside as inadequate. He is ordered to take advances from his employer immediately or, in the alternative, to submit to all manner of harassment by the Police. The poor man naturally chooses to be indebted and to "belong" to a coal contractor rather than being subjected, together with his wife and children, to maltreatment and disgrace. The moment he borrows money from a coal contractor he thinks his fate is sealed. He

has to work for the creditor under whatever conditions the latter imposes.

It is thus that the coal contractor reserves his labour power in advance. The further task of actually taking the labour power to work places in jungles is comparatively easy- From the beginning of October the agents of contractors can be seen moving about the villages and seeing that "their" Katkaris are not enticed away by their rivals. They order the Katkaris to be ready to go to the jungle at a moment's notice. The actual work of "lifting" a Katkari and taking him to the jungle is generally done during night time. The process is not very pleasant to the Katkari and so the cover of the night is necessary. If a Katkari refuses to go he is reminded of his indebtedness to the contractor and the consequent ownership of the contractor over him and his wife and children. If he says he would otherwise repay the money owed he is given a sound thrashing, his wife is dragged out of her hut, the children are ordered not to cry and the whole family together with their worldly goods, which are about a basketful, is hustled into a motor lorry waiting to take them in. One such 'example' is generally enough to bring all the katkaris of the locality to their senses for at least a week. If a particular Kathodi (a locality outside a village in which the Katkaris have their huts) contains a considerable number of insubordinate Katkaris, the aid of the police is invoked and is very willingly given. The Police under what provision of law they

themselves must know- personally go to the Kathodi and force the Katkaris to accompany their masters to unknown destinations and untold agonies.

The place of work is sometimes within a few miles from a Katkari's village. If it is not more than, say, thirty or forty miles he is required to walk together with his wife and children and belongings. If it is longer the contractors, for their own convenience provide motor lorries which are generally packed to suffocation point. If a lorry overloaded to the utmost degree contains Katkari families it is, somehow, allowed to pass in peace even by the police station officers on the road side.

The places of work are sometimes even more than a hundred miles away from a Katkari's village. As was told above he is taken to these places in a lorry. But when the coal season is over he is not given the same facility to return to his village. The season ends in June when the rains set in. The Katkari has not a copper on him to spend. He cannot afford to purchase even paddy to eat, much less can he afford to spend anything on travelling. He has somehow to return to his village together with his wife and children. Destitution cannot indeed be more complete. Sometime he has one or two long cherished brass or copper utensils. He sells them for a quarter of their price in order to be able to buy something to eat. He also sells for a song his other belongings such as his axe. For weeks together he walks and walks in

rain and in storm. He reaches his native village probably to find his already delapidated hut completely ruined. He has absolutely nothing to fall back upon. Perhaps he commits a petty theft or two. What else can he do ? He also has to live after all.

CHILD LABOUR :- The evil of child labour is very deep rooted in the Katkari community. As soon as a child becomes capable of doing any work it is required to help its parents in their work. In the coal-making industry the child is useful to the parents but no wages are ever paid to it. The employers of Katkaris and especially the local contractors do not encourage the education of Katkari children. The Katkaris ~~KNOW~~ somehow have in their minds the idea that if they got their sons educated they are sure to be recruited in the army and sent to war. I met a large number of Katkaris who seriously believed in this story. Partially as a result of such and other kinds of propoganda against the education of Katkari children the Katkaris have become generally unwilling to send their children to school - even those of them who are not employed in the coal industry and who can send their children to school. At Wada, a Taluka Town in the Thana District a boarding house and a school is run for the Katkaris boys by the District Local Board helped by Government. There is provision for education and free boarding of 15 Katkari Boys. But the number of katkari boys taking advantage of this institution was never more than 13 at a time. There is another very significant fact showing how child labour is

deliberately and methodically encouraged by big employers of katkaris. I was told that there is a very rich coal contractor in the Thana District who employes thousands of Katkaris from year to year. He keeps a regular register of births in the families of "his" katkaris. As soon as a boy is born the parents get one rupee as present. The date of birth and the name of the boy is noted down. Exactly after eight years the father or the mother is asked to produce the boy for the work.

FORMS OF PUNISHMENT:-

It is generally recognised that an average Katkari is an expert coal-maker and that the coal contractors reap a veritable harvest of profit by engaging karkari labour for the purposes of coal making. About profit, however, it is said that the more you have it, the keener becomes your appetite for it. This statement is only too true about the coal contractors. In order, therefore, to make their contracts as much profitable as possible the contractors have devised a very simple technique of speeding up Katkari labour. This technique consists in making the Katkaris suffer punishment, both physically and in respect of their wages or paddy allowances for alleged neglect of or default in what are supposed to be their duties. These various forms of punishment are given below.

As was noted once before, sometimes a Katkari is ordered to finish a particular amount of work in a particular period of time. If at the end of that period of time, it is found that some of the work remains to be finished the daily paddy allowance of the Katkari family is immediately stopped. The karkari has to finish the given amount of work before he begins to get his paddy again. If this takes two days he has either to starve or to borrow from the meagre resources of his fellows or to maintain himself or his wife and children on jungle roots and bulbs and rats and even monkeys other than the

brown faced ones.

In the alternative or even in addition to this form of punishment various other kinds of physical tortures are inflicted on the Katkari. The most common and frequent form is to slap him roundly in the face and ^{ck}kick him if he resents the treatment. The punishment is administered generally by the contractors' men whose ability to strike terror in the minds of the Katkari is looked upon as one of the most important qualifications for employment. Vulgarly abusing a Katkari, provoking him to angry words and then thrashing him soundly is quite a common thing. Another method of punishing a Katkari is to pour hot water on his body and "wash" all his laziness away from him, as they call it. This is not very frequent as it involves the trouble of brining and heating the water. The more common method is to fasten him to a tree by means of a rope and flog him till he is completely "softened". This is indeed ^{so}very common that hardly any Katkari man, who has been, for some years, in the coal industry can be said to have escaped flogging. More severe cases of flogging leave their marks behind and they can be seen on the bodies of the Katkari men.

All these kinds of punishment, however, are comparatively light and given only to persons who are accused of neglecting their duties. But there are more severe crimes like ~~XXXX~~ deserting a

contractor or inciting others to desert a contractor. These are all felonies and are regarded as obviously detrimental to the peace and tranquility of the forest life and death with accordingly.

What is narrated in the following few paragraphs may be well ⁿigh incredible to persons who live in comparatively urban areas away from the jungles and who are accustomed to a generally peaceful and orderly life. Moreover it is very difficult to bear out by evidence the very grave allegations made against the coal contractors. However, in the rural areas of the Thana district, it is common knowledge that the ^{coal} ~~KATKARI~~ contractors are capable of ^mitting any conceivable crime against a Katkari man or woman. Naturally it is only the Katkaris or the contractors themselves who can throw some light on the real state of affairs. Out of these two the contractors, as a class, cannot be expected to reveal the whole truth. Many of them, however, admit that some of them (not they themselves, of course) are rather harsh in their treatment of the Katkaris. It is also indirectly admitted that, as a last resort and as a matter of absolute necessity, severe physical torture has to be inflicted on a Katkari if any amount of work is to be expected from him. The contractors on their ~~own~~ own behalf, say that they would be ruined if they do not deal with the Katkaris in the manner they do.

Whatever that may be, the present writer has no doubt in his mind that what is written below is substantially indicative of the true state of things. This conclusion has been arrived at only after careful investigation and severe cross examination of Katkaris, who have been either themselves subjected to torture or have been eyewitnesses of scenes of torture.

It may also be noted here that most Katkaris agree in holding the views that the contractors are particularly reckless and imprudent in torturing Katkaris if they happen to be in the territories belonging to the ^{Indian} native states.

If a Katkari gets disgusted with the constant disgrace to which he is to put and wants to get rid of it by running away from his employer, he incurs the gravest displeasure of his employer. As soon as a man runs away reports are made to all the neighbouring police stations and there is a regular combing of the jungle and the neighbouring villages in his search. Generally he is caught by the police. It is said that they quietly hand him over to his employer. The employer's men take him back to the jungle.

The process of taking him back is reported to ~~XXX~~ be not very simple in every case. About six years back a deserter was arrested near the town of Karjat in the Thana district. He was fastened to a bullock cart by means of a rope just as an unruly buffaloo

or cow would be ordinarily fastened. The bullocks are were spurred and the man had to run behind the cart as best he could. He stumbled and ~~XXX~~ fell and was dragged along the streets of Karjat which is a Taluka Town and an important railway station between Poona and Bombay. The proceedings were watched by scores of people one of whom described them in great detail to the present writer.

Even after being forcibly taken back to the jungle, if a Katkari shows signs of insubordination it is said that the extreme form of punishment - the capital punishment - is given to him. Hanging is not fashionable in the jungles though there may be many convenient trees. Besides, utmost secrecy is necessary to be maintained in such cases. The most convenient form is to burn a Katkari alive in the coal kiln though cases of poisoning are not very exceptional. The process is also very simple as it simultaneously serves both the purposes - that of killing the man and disposing of his body. Thus a Katkari, sometimes, digs his own grave, or rather ~~XXXXXXXX~~ constructs his own pier. In a small village near Karjat, live the brother and the former wife of a Katkari who was burnt alive about three years back. They are absolutely unwilling to give evidence to the police because they know they will meet with the same fate if they do so. At Karjat also lives a clerk who describes, with tears in his eyes and horror on his face, how he had once the misfortune of witnessing the burning ceremony of an alive Katkari. This

clerk had been appointed as a supervisor by a railway contractor who had engaged Katkaris for work. One of the Katkaris was, one day, found missing and the clerk with another Katkari went in search of him into the jungle. There he actually saw his workman being bodily thrown into the shooting flames of the coal kiln to the horror of about a dozen Katkari spectators. It was later found out that the dead man had received some money as advance from the coal contractor and that he had later on deserted his master and taken a job with the railway contractor. At a distance of about five miles from Wada, another Taluka Town in the Thana District a Katkari was alleged to have been burnt alive about four years back. The Police Officers made investigations but ultimately nothing came out of them. It is also said that when a Katkari is burnt alive, other Katkaris who may be present on the scene are sternly given to understand that if they utter a word about what they had seen they would meet the same fate without delay. Over and above this warning they are given sweets to eat and some money to drink toddy with. The wife of the burnt man is generally treated more generously. She is rudely shaken by the shoulder, and shouted at and ordered to keep mum. Then she is presented with a cash of about five rupees, a new dress and also a new husband. The procedure is simple and the news generally does not leak out.

The police is informed that a particular Katkari is missing or that he died of snake bite or of ~~the~~ typhoid or what not. And the usually incredulous Police Department believe in the story .

A more spectacular but a very rare form of punishment is to bury a Katkari alive and construct a coal kiln over his grave. Only one such case was heard in the Wada Taluka but there are no eyewitnesses and the available evidence ~~is~~ is also of a hearsay character.

What may not be regarded as a form of punishment but rather as a piece of ~~feastliness~~ ^{feastliness} is the violation of Katkari girls and women by the contractors themselves and their men. There is nothing uncommon about these events. Young Katkari women are generally asked to do the menial work of the contractors' jungle household. The work consists in sweeping of huts, cleaning of utensils washing clothes, bringing water and such other things. If a Katkari is unwilling to allow his wife to do this kind of work he incurs the displeasure of his master which is a staggering thing. He is absolutely helpless and so is his wife. If a Katkari somehow happens to displease any of his superiors and is not physically punished for his crime and happens to have a young wife the latter is generally invited for doing some menial work at night time.

The ire of the Katkari men is sometimes

roused against these atrocities. When this happens there is no extent to which they may not go. They may even attack their masters with their axes. Generally the attacks are unsuccessful as the masters have sometimes firearms with them which they are not slow to use. Only a few months back, towards the end of 1937, a contractor was "wanted" by the Police of the Thana District for having shot at two Katkaris. One instance of a successful Katkari rising is known in the Wada Taluka. Three of the contractors' rapacious men were cut down to pieces by an infuriated mob of Katkaris about 20 of whom were subsequently sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. In one or two cases contractors' men also are known to have been punished. But in these cases the punishment is generally not of imprisonment. It is only a fine.

There is a very curious and significant form of punishment which is known in some Talukas of the Thana District. A particular employer of large numbers of Katkaris is specially noted as a man with particularly pronounced abilities. If a Katkari is found to be insubordinate he is threatened that he would be sent to work with this man who was to ~~KIKANGIKAN~~ straighten him out. Some years ago a Katkari who was thus sent to this man by a coal contractor ran away from his new master returned to his place and attacked the contractor with an axe. The contractor was

permanently disabled and the Katkari was ~~sentenced~~ ^{sentenced} ~~to~~ several years imprisonment. There is a general notion prevailing in the minds of the Katkaris that to be sent to the gentleman mentioned above was worse than being sent to the gallows.

SURPLUS VALUE:- It is extremely difficult to assess the exact value of coal that a Katkari family produces every season just as it is difficult to say ^w that amount a Katkari family gets as wages in course of the coal making season. Certain statements of a very general nature, however, may be made from the available data.

The Katkari community ¹ was taken to coal making industry very recently. In fact in ~~the latest~~ ^{Bombay} ~~edition of~~ Enthoven's "Tribes and Castes of India" published in 1922 there is absolutely no reference to coal-making in the Section dealing with the Katkaris. Today the Katkaris are expert coal-makers; not only that, they have practically monopolised the field of the coal industry in the Thana and Kolaba districts and also some ^{Indian} ~~native~~ states adjoining them. The Katkaris today can make more coal in less time than they used to do, say, about five or seven years back.

Side by side of the fact that the Katkari today produces more coal we have the fact that he gets less amount of money as his wages today than he used to get some years back when the competition between the coal contractors in bidding for "coupes" in forest areas belonging

to Government was not as keen as it is at present and consequently exploitation of the Katkari labour also was less intense. The competition is becoming more fierce^e every year and the necessity of exploitation of labour is also proportionately growing. In the Budget Memorandum for 1938-39 of the Government of Bombay there is reference in the section on forest, among other things to increased revenue on account of "realization of better prices in all circles from "coupes". This increased revenue of Government must mean either reduction in the rate of profit to the contractors or greater exploitation of the Katkari Labour by paying less and exacting more work or possibly both of these things together.

A Katkari family produces in the course of a season from 250 to 400 bags of coal, according to the size of the family and chiefly the efficiency of the man. An exceptionally hardworking and skillful family can produce even 450 bags; but this is now done only in very rare cases as the Katkaris who are especially hardworking do not get any extra remuneration for their hard work. Formerly^{er} a silver waste-band worth about Rs. 10/- used to be given to them as a present but that practice also is not now very common. The average seasonal production of coal per family may not therefore^{be} taken to be less than 300 bags. The usual size of the bag is 56" X 33". A railway waggon of 18 tons' capacity contains on^{an} average 200 bags. So an average Katkari

family may be said ^{to be} producing 27 tons of coal during the whole of the coal making season. According to a rough estimate Government or the owner of the "coupe" in the forest, in case it is privately owned, gets about Rs. 50/- per waggon of coal i.e. for every two hundred bags of 18 tons of coal. This is the price of the raw material that ~~the~~ they supply. The price of the coal in the Bombay Market, where most of it is sent, is in the vicinity of Rs. 40/- per ton. Every waggon thus contains coal worth more than Rs. 700/-. If the price of the raw material, the transport charges, the commission for agents at both ends, the establishment and other charges of the coal contractors are together roughly estimated at Rs. 200/- the net contribution of the Katkari family comes to be Rs. 500/- per every waggon load of coal sent to Bombay. But a Katkari family produces 300 bags of coal i.e., $1\frac{1}{2}$ waggons of it. That means in course of the coal making season an average Katkari family produces coal worth about Rs. 1000/-. Out of these about Rs. 75/- is the price of the raw material and about Rs. 300/- are the overhead charges, The amount actually paid to the Katkari family is about Rs. 50 or 60/-. Making allowance for other items of miscellaneous expenditure we may say that every year, the employers of the Katkaris get~~s~~ at a rough estimate Rs. 400/- per each ^{family} employed. That explains the "realisation of better prices from 'coupes'" on the part of Government and acquisition of large fortunes on the part of the coal contractors.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL LABOUR.

Next to coal making the most universally adopted occupation of the Katkari is agricultural labour. The Katkaris engaged in coal making return to their places from the jungle by about the first week of June or in some cases a little earlier. At this time, as was previously pointed out, they have absolutely nothing to maintain ^{themselves} with. Most of them, therefore, have to take whatever employment they can get. They generally approach the farmer. As this is the beginning of the rainy season farmers also are in need of labour and they welcome the cheap labour which the Katkari gives. The usual remuneration for ^a day's work is two annas in cash or two "pailies" of paddy which costs nearly the same in the market. For a few days during the year ~~XXXX~~ when agricultural labour is in greater demand the Katkaris get wages slightly higher than these. But these days are very few. On the other hand the employment is not ^a steady one. A Katkari is thrown out of it at least for a month and a half during ^{the} four months beginning with June.

Both man and woman get the same wages as both can work equally hard. The farmers generally prefer Katkaris as land labourers as they can be made to work harder than others for a comparatively smaller remuneration. Besides, the Katkari man as well as woman is found to be willing to work in open

fields even when it is raining and other workers would prefer to keep indoors.

The number of Katkaris who cultivated land on their own account is practically negligible. Out of these the majority is of those who have taken on rent somebody else's land to cultivate. Landlords are generally found to be very unwilling to lease out their lands to Katkaris as they regard the latter as very dishonest and unreliable. However, there does not seem to be any ground for this belief because the lands that can yield enough to support the cultivator and still ^eunable him to pay the rental are ^ainvariably in the possession of the better class of peasant proprietors and the lands that are in some places, available to Katkaris are invariably of the worst variety which would lie absolutely fallow if they are not given to the Katkaris. In fact ^{the} only ^{so} crops that can be raised in the lands cultivated by the Katkaris are Nachani and Vari. The lands cannot grow paddy or any other better ^{so} crop. Nobody has apparently ever tried the experiment of making available to the Katkaris the better type of land .

In the District of Kolaba, especially in the Pen and Panvel Talukas, some waste land belong to Government has been given to the Katkaris to cultivate. As ^aresult of this the statistics of petty [^]thefts committed by the Katkaris has, of late, considerably gone down. It appears, therefore, that the so called tendency of the Katkari to commit

consequence of the pressure of economic ~~pressures~~ necessity. The Katkaris who are given Government land to cultivate are, it is said, kept under the impression by the Government Officers concerned that in return to this ^{he are} ~~they~~ always to be ready and willing to render all sorts of services free to Government and also the Officers personally.

As a tiller of the soil, and raiser of crops the Katkari is ^a advanced-or rather as backward - as the ordinary farmer belonging to communities supposed to be higher in the social scale of values. The only difference is that he can work harder and his labour can be procured at a cheaper rate.

TREE CUTTING.

As was observed before, the Katkari is an expert feller of trees and cutter of wood. In some of the Talukas of the Thana District, especially the Shaha-pur Taluka, there are big areas covered with Sag forest. Defined areas in this forest are auctioned out by Government to contractors who are allowed to cut down certain marked ~~XXXXXX~~ trees in those areas and utilise the wood for whatever purposes they want. The contractors make coal from ordinary trees but it is more profitable to them to sell the wood of more valuable trees especially the SAG trees. The Katkaris are engaged by the contractors for the work of cutting down these trees in the forest. It is very difficult to give the exact number of Katkaris engaged in this particular kind of work but it may be generally observed that most of the Katkaris in the Sholapur Taluka (i.e. about six thousand) and a few thousand of them from the neighbouring places engage themselves in this work at least for some months during the year. The work is not done very regularly and goes on during the whole of the year by fits and starts.

In this work also the wife and children of the Katkaris are very useful to him. The method of paying wages being on the contract basis no question of the wages of women and children arises.

About six or eight years back the usual rates of wages was As. 6/- or sometimes even As. 8/- per day per family. The Katkaris in the Shahapur Taluka tell stories of these happy days with enthusiasm mixed with sorrow. For the present rate of payment is proportionately very low. At present a Katkari gets Rs. 6/- for felling and cutting to pieces one hundred trees of average size. At the most a Katkari can finish only one tree per day; some times less but never more. His wages, therefore, work out at Rs. 2/- or even less per month. This low level of wages is due to the fact that unlike coal making, the work of cutting trees can be done and is done by ~~many~~ people belonging to the communities other than the Katkari community. The contractors have, therefore, been able to bring the wages down to starvation level.

Owing to this extremely low level of wages the Katkaris are not particularly anxious to take to this occupation. Only those of them who cannot have anything else to do for some reason or other adopt it as the last resort. Some of them cannot manage to get even this work and have to remain unemployed for some time during the year.

Miscellaneous Occupations:

Besides coal making, agriculture and tree cutting the Katkaris engage themselves in various other occupations of a miscellaneous character. They work for the road and railway contractors and the forest department, they sell firewood, they go^t about fishing and hunting in the jungle and some times they commit petty thefts.

Out of these occupations the work provided by the contractors of the P.W.D. and the Railway is comparatively more remunerative. For this kind of work the Katkari usually gets wages at the rate of four annas a day. Some times he gets less but there are times when he can get a little more also. The road contractors some times induce the Katkaris to take up work on piece rate but this system is generally less remunerative not because the rates, as agreed to in the contract, are very low but because the contractors can, on some pretext or other, deceive the Katkaris out of a part of their duly earned money.

The contractors have their own grievances against the Katkaris. According to them the Katkaris would not work at all unless they are consistently^e goaded or even driven to do so, and so the supervision charges are higher than they would normally be. The contractors also complain that a Katkari sometimes runs away from his work and has to be brought back almost by force. In short they say the Katkaris have no sense^s of responsibility.

If the Katkaris have no sense of responsibility that is because he has absolutely no rights and also because he knows that whatever he does, his condition cannot be worse. He has nothing to lose and this circumstance makes him desperate.

The Katkaris also work - or rather are made to work- for the forest department. The forest department needs ~~his~~ ^{their} help many times during the year but especially on four principal occasions. In May and June the Katkaris have to burn the ground in the forest on which new trees are to be planted. During the months of July and August they are required to do the work of planting new trees. In September comes the time for cleaning the forest and in December lining and measuring of forest areas is in progress. On all these occasions the help of the Katkari is necessary. The Katkaris are very unwilling to work for the forest department because their complaint is that they do not receive any remuneration whatsoever for their labour. I was told by Katkaris in one place that after the work is over the chaprasis of the forest department take their thumb impressions on a piece of paper and inform them that their wages bill has 'gone up' for sanction. The sanction is apparently never given because, the Katkaris complain that their wages are never paid to them. Whatever that be, it is a generally known circumstance that the Katkaris have to render free labour to the forest department for a long period and on as many

occasions during the year as the department chooses to take it. If a Katkari refuses to make himself available to the department he is informed that no longer ~~xxx~~ would he or his wife be allowed to bring fuel from the jungle. This threat generally works well, but if in a particularly bad case it does not work the Katkari concerned is harassed in various ways. Technically he belongs to a "criminal tribe" and this disability of his is utilised for making his life a burden to him. Sometimes men from the forest department suddenly appear before his hut and seize the planks of shafts of the hut, for, they say, they have been ~~stolen~~ from the jungle. The Katkari's hut is pulled down, his wife and children are thrown on the street, he himself is charged with theft and his small belongings are ~~xxxxxxx~~ auctioned in order to make good the loss to the forest department. This is an extreme case and generally it is not necessary for the forest department to go to this extent in order to 'persuade' a Katkari to give free service to the department. It is enough if they threaten him with prosecution for theft and attachment of the material of his hut as stolen property.

Hunting and fishing are two other occupations which the Katkaris-especially those in the coastal districts - adopt in order to support their income. A Katkari makes use of a bow for the purpose of hunting and is generally a good marksman. His big game is wild boar but he also hunts smaller game like the hare and the monkeys (other than the red faced

ones). He generally eats his game except in the case of hare which brings comparatively good price in the Market. He is also an expert in the art of catching fieldrats and acquiring their grain store. He does not eat the ordinary domestic rats but he undertakes ^{to} fumigate rats out of houses for ~~the~~ a small remuneration. In the costal districts he follows the occupation of fishing also though he is not regarded as a skilful fisherman like the Koli. It is seldom that he sells his fish in the Market probably because he catches only just enough to eat and wants to eat it himself.

Another occupation almost universally adopted by the Katkaris - especially women and old men amongst them - is that of bringing head-loads of firewood from the jungles and selling it in bigger villages. An ordinary woman brings two headloads every day with the help of her grown up children and gets about an anna and a half for both of them together. In bigger villages or talukas towns she sometimes gets two annas but not more. For being allowed to bring fuel from the forest the Katkaris are obliged to the forest department and they complain that they have to meet this obligation in more ways than one. They have to render free services to the department as was seen above and they have also to supply fuel and other forest products free of charge to the people in the forest department. They cannot possibly run the

risk of incurring the displeasure of any of the men in the department as that would mean withdrawal of permission to bring firewood from the forest and also graver disabilities noted above.

About firewood selling it may be observed that this occupation is paying only in bigger villages and Taluka Towns. In very small villages the villagers themselves are too poor to purchase their fuel which they themselves gather from the forest.

A very small number of Katkaris still follow the profession which has given a name to their community viz; the profession of making catechu. But the already small number is dwindling very fast and it may be assumed that within a few years it will be a matter of historical interest.

The last and most talked ^{of} occupation of the Katkari is thieving of petty nature. It is true that there is a widespread belief that the Katkaris are, as it were by nature, accustomed to comit thefts. If articles of clothing are put on a hedge to dry, a Katkari may lift one of them, if hens and chicken are allowed to wander about the backyard of a house a Katkari may escape with a couple of them without allowing them ^{to} cackle, if fields are not watched during night time a Katkari may steal a bundle of paddy. All this is true and the Government has accordingly declared the Katkari community to be a "Criminal Tribe". I had occasion to discuss this matter with many Katkaris. A Katkari admits frankly that some times he does comit a petty theft. What he

denies is that he has a liking for the occupation or that he has an irresistible impulse to commit thefts. In every case the theft is committed under pressure or sheer economic necessity. It is not seldom that a Katkari family is faced with actual starvation coupled with unemployment. Under these circumstances he runs to the farmer, to the moneylender or to the ^{coal} ~~XXXX~~ contractor for a loan. He does not always succeed. The position is - he must either commit a theft or he must famish together with his family. The first course is easier and is generally adopted.

This notoriety of Katkaris regarding their "tendency" to commit thefts is taken advantage of by various classes of people. There are the purchasers of stolen property. It is said that their chief business is to induce Katkaris as well as others to commit thefts. They also point out opportunities and occasions for stealing valuable articles. A golden ornament is generally purchased for the price of brass and in rare cases for that of silver. Grave allegations are made even against Police officers. Some years back a Fouzdar was somehow antagonised by a rich man in a town in the Thana District. The police officer caught hold of four Katkaris and tried to persuade them to steal away the paddy belonging to the rich man. Katkaris as a rule, are extremely distrustful of the police and hence these Katkaris

refused to do so, evidently being under the impression that the Fouzdar was purposely putting their honesty to test. As a result of their refusal to commit the theft they were beaten and put in the village lockup and informed that they would be released only if they decide to commit the theft. And they did so. They carried away, under cover of night, one half 'Khandi' of paddy belonging to the rich man and restored it in the house of the Fouzdar whose first business the next morning was to arrest them and prosecute them for housebreaking and theft. The Katkaris ~~XXX~~ in their defence, told^d the story exactly as it had happened but it was regarded as fantastic and faked up. The Katkaris were convicted and the Fouzdar was transferred to another Taluka.

There is also another method of the Police to virtually compel the Katkaris to commit thefts. As 'criminals', ~~declared as such by an Act of the Government of India~~, the Katkaris have to report themselves to the Police Station every few days. In some places I was told that every time a Katkari goes to a Police Station to report himself he has to take with him something or other to be presented to the Officer in charge of the Police Station or one or other of his subordinates. It may be a hen or chicken or ~~eggs~~ or it may be ^apumpkin or a bunch of plantains but it must be something - at least a headload of firewood. It is evident that the poor Katkari cannot afford to spend money to purchase such things and the Police Officer

also knows this fact. But he does not care to know how the things presented to him by the Katkari is ~~is~~ acquired by him. If a Katkari is found to be fairly regular in his gifts to the ~~RM~~ police he enjoys certain concessions which his less devotional fellows do not have. For instance the rule that he should report himself to the police regularly is relaxed in his case. The police reports about him are generally favourable so that he is not usually suspected of any petty crime. Thus a Katkari who is competent enough to commit more thefts for the sake of the police department is given a certificate of honesty by the Police Department while his more honest brother may be harassed for thefts not committed by him and actually committed by another man in order to keep the police pleased.

THE KATKARI AND THE MONEYLENDER.

Like most other people in this country who have nothing but their labour power to sell the Katkaris are perpetually under the thralldom of their money-lenders. In many cases the coal contractor is the accredited moneylender but in the lives of Katkaris who do not take to coal making as their profession the ordinary village moneylender plays his usual part. In this Section we shall discuss only the relations between the Katkari and the moneylenders other than the coal contractors. These are of two kinds. The professional moneylenders and the employers of Katkaris like the farmer and road and railway contractors. The road and railway contractors generally do not advance such money to the Katkaris. The farmer sometimes gives small sums but generally gives paddy.

The moneylenders use all their usual methods of dealing with poverty stricken debtors. I found among certain public workers in the Thana and Kolaba Districts the view that all this exploitation by the moneylenders is due to complete illiteracy and general ignorance of the Katkaris. I do not entirely agree with this view. While the spread of literacy and general education are highly desirable they cannot be regarded as sure remedies for the ills of poverty and destitution. Even an educated man would have to allow his want and poverty to be exploited under pressure of economic necessity.

It is a common belief that the money

advanced to a Katkari is never returned in cash. The belief is not entirely justifiable though the utter poverty of the Katkari prevents him from paying his debts regularly. But the belief is there and is also very convenient to the moneylenders. They assume that the loan advanced to the Katkaris is to be realised in the form of services from him. This state of things has given rise to the notion that the debtor is the personal property of the creditor - especially when the debtor is a Katkari. This idea is taken advantage of the fullest extent by the moneylenders. Indebted Katkaris are made to work by the moneylenders whole days and all days during the year for practically no remuneration. The Katkaris are supposed to be repaying their debts in the form of services. In these cases of practically perpetual bondage the Katkaris are generally fed by their moneylender. This costs the latter about an anna a day at the most. To this may be added the daily interest on the sum advanced to the Katkari. I did not come across a single case in which this sum was more than fifty rupees. This process of repayment goes on not only for years together but literally for generations together. I know the case of a middleaged man who was rendering services to his creditor for nearly 20 years since the age of fifteen when he had incurred a debt of forty rupees for the sake of his marriage. Not a rupee from the

principle of the debt had yet been paid and the man did not hope to pay it during his life time. His son who was about twelve years old was to succeed him in his services after the father's demise unless the son himself got into the bondage of some other creditor on account of his own marriage in which case the small belongings of the man would be auction-sold to satisfy his obligations. In this connection it may be pointed out here that there is, in vogue among the Katkaris, a very significant term which indicates the nature of the relationship between the creditor master and his debtor servant. That term is "Marriage - Katkari.". A 'marriage - Katkari' means a man who had borrowed money on the occasion of his marriage and who is endeavouring to repay the debt in the form of personal services for years and years together. Apparently the marriage brings the creditor and debtor closer together than the man ~~and~~ and wife themselves.

In the Thana and Kolaba Districts there is prevalent a system of moneylending called Palemudi. Katkaris as well as other peasants are victims of it. According to this system a debtor undertakes to repay his debt not in cash, but a matter of obligation, in kind. Generally the agreement is that three to four months after borrowing the amount, the debtor is to give to the creditor one maund of paddy for each one rupee borrowed. The variety of paddy has to be approved by the creditor. The market value of the paddy is anything between Rs. 1-8-0 to Rs. 2- 4- 0 per maund.

Thus the rate of interest comes to be anything between 150 to 225% per annum. Besides, sometimes some creditors insist upon getting the paddy measured not by the legal measure with Government stamp but some of their own ancestral measuring utensils which are (probably because they are ancestral) invariably more generous to the creditor. The moneylender absolutely refuses to take payment in money and insists upon being paid in kind. He always succeeds.

The methods of realising money from the Katkaris in cases in which the debt is to be repaid in cash are also somewhat remarkable. The moneylenders man can and usually does almost arrest a Katkari, hold him by his arm and take him forcibly and physically to his creditor who abuses him roundly and makes him sit in his compound for hours together without food or water. He is also made to do whatever work may have to be done absolutely without remuneration.

There are also other methods more remarkable ~~than~~ than this. Three Katkaris from a village in the Kolaba District went to the another village about ten miles away where they had found work with the farmer. The Katkaris had asked their wives to follow them to their work place after three or four days during which period the wives' presence was necessary at their own village. This circumstance became known to the creditor of the three Katkaris

who wanted to realise his money. He simply ordered his servant to bring the women before him which the latter did. The frightened and tearful women with crying babies in their arms were detained for four days under arrest and practically starving. Their husbands, on knowing this, returned to their village whereupon the women were released. It may be noted that the moneylender concerned is a high class Brahmin and does not belong to a criminal tribes.

SOME CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS FOR REFORM :-

It must be admitted that the task of improving the conditions of life and work of a whole backward community numbering about a lakh is not an easy one. But it is also true that the present policy of dismissing from consideration such communities only by declaring them to be 'criminal' is not only harmful to the communities concerned but is detrimental to the progress of the country as a whole. It is high time that the Government and the people took keener interest in the welfare of these communities not from humanitarian motives but from motives of enlightened self-interest.

At the outset it may be suggested that the Government of Bombay should institute a thorough enquiry into the conditions of the Katkari community. The resources of ~~an~~ private and individual investigator are very limited and generally he does not get access to all the material that is necessary for such a investigation. Allegations made by the Katkaris against their employers, especially the coal contractors, stories about the nature of the relationship between the Katkaris and the coal contractors that are current among the public in the Thana and Kolaba Districts and even things ~~known~~ tacitly and sometimes openly admitted by the coal contractors themselves are so grave as to be on the first blush, incredible. In comparison to the alleged illtreatment meted out to the helpless Katkaris the

condition of slavery are, in some respects, preferable. A slave has to be looked after by his master throughout his life. No such responsibility rests on the coal contractors. They possess most of the advantages of owning slaves without any of the disadvantages. Under these circumstances it is necessary that an impartial enquiry should be made by Government. The results of the enquiry will be very valuable ~~XX~~ data with the help of which future line of work among the Katkaris can be chalked out. I am, however, making below a few concrete suggestions which, if given effect to, will give effect to will give immediate and welcome relief to an oppressed community, pending the results of an exhaustive, authoritative and thoroughgoing enquiry by a Committee appointed by Government.

The first thing that the Government can do to improve the lot of the Katkari community is to make available to the Katkaris waste land belong to Government. The Katkaris are not in way inferior to the ordinary farmers in the art of agriculture such as it is as present in this country. Moreover the Katkari is capable of raising crops of Vari, and Nachani from the most inferior variety of land and again the Katkari is generally so anxious to avoid the coal making work that he would be only ~~XXX~~ too glad to peacefully settle down as an agriculturist. I spoke about this to most of the Katkaris that I met and I found every one of them

willing and eager to have land to cultivate. At Wada, a Taluka town in the Thana District, about forty acres of land belonging to the forest department was only until recently given to ten Katkari families, four acres to each family. It was, however, reclaimed by the forest department with the result that ~~XXXX~~ the Katkaris who were originally occupying it are left with no occupation except coal making. The Katkaris are evidently very sorry to have lost the land which they had improved considerably by their labour. This is only the indication that Katkaris are capable of following agriculture as their profession if only they have land to cultivate.

There is also another consideration in favour of giving waste land to the Katkaris. As was once noted above, some land belonging to Government has been given to the Katkaris in the Pen and Panvel Talukas and that as a result of this the statistics of petty crimes by the Katkaris has considerable gone down. If the same salutary practice is followed elsewhere and on the greater scale the Katkaris will cease to indulge in the commission of petty thefts. This will be directly beneficial not only to the Katkaris but to the rest of the community as well.

Another thing that can be immediately done by Government is to remove the artificial disabilities imposed on the Katkari community by declaring it to be a "criminal tribe" under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1924. It is not proposed here

to enter into detailed argument regarding the justifiability or otherwise of such a piece of legislation. That would involve the discussion of various theories of crime and punishment. It may, however, be broadly stated that the Criminal Tribes Act, besides being useless, is definitely harmful to the Katkaris as it has come to be an oppressive and vicious weapon, in the hands of the police. A vicious weapon ^{it is} well said, may even tempt a saint and it is well known that people in our police department are not particularly noted for their saintliness. It was noted above that the machinery of this Act is utilised by the Police for the purpose of extortion which, sometimes, actually encourages crime. In short it may be said that the Criminal Tribes Act is a great burden resting heavily and injuriously on the Katkari community as a whole and that the earlier it is lifted the better for all concerned.

We may now discuss the special cases of Katkaris who are primarily engaged in the work of coa making and tree cutting. As a very large majority of Katkaris are engaged for considerable part of the year in these two occupations endeavours to reform their conditions are bound to be beneficial to the Katkari community as a whole. With regard to the occupation of tree-cutting the only grievance of the Katkaris is that they get low remuneration for their work. About six to eight years back a Katkari used to get ^{As.} ~~Rs.~~ 6/- to ^{As.} ~~Rs.~~ 8/- for a day's work as wages. Now he has to

undertake the work on piece rate basis and this is so slow that he can make only Rs. 2/- per month. If this position is to be improved it is necessary that Government should insist upon having a fair wages clause inserted in their contracts with the forest contractors who undertake to cut down trees in defined forest areas. Moreover, Government must have some means of satisfying itself that fair wages - say As. 8/- per day per worker - are being actually paid to the Katkari by the contractors. The only convenient agency through which this can be done is the forest department. Unfortunately that department does not enjoy a very good reputation and people are found to have their own misgivings about it. Even then, the insertion of a fair wage clause in the original contract and entrusting a Government Department with its enforcement will be a progressive and welcome step to take. If the forest contractors decide to continue the piece rates system the ~~XXXX~~ level of the piece rates should be such as to ensure to the Katkari worker a monthly income of at least Rs. 15/- .

The chief thing, however, that is necessary to improve the lot of very large majority of the Katkari community is to introduce far reaching reforms in the coal making industry. The conditions of work in this industry are the worst of their kind and it is these that affect nearly three fourths of the whole Katkari population for the better part of

year. The following are a few concrete suggestions in this direction:-

The Method of Recruitment:-

(1) The method of recruiting Katkari Labour itself requires to be considerably modified. No Katkari ~~should~~ should be compelled to go to the jungles for coal making. If the contractors advance any money to the Katkaris they are free to recover it by the ordinary methods including that of going to a court of law. This involves change of attitude towards the whole problem of recruiting labour not only on the part of the contractors but also on the part of the whole Police Department. It should be the duty of the Police to see that no Katkari is taken to the jungle by force or even by show of force. Use or show^{of} force or intimidation on the part of the coal contractors or their agents in order to recruit Katkari Labour may also be made a cognizable offence. If a complaint of force or intimidation is lodged with the police by or on behalf of a Katkari the onus of proving that no force or intimidation was used or shown should be on the contractor or his agents against ~~the~~ whom the complaint is made. Without such drastic measures the current forms of oppression in course of recruitment cannot be stopped.

(2) Extention of the Factories Act:- Mainly in order to mitigate the evil of excessively long hours of work it is necessary that the coal making industry should be brought within the purview of

the Factories Act 1934. At present the act is applicable only to industrial concerns making use of machinery in their manufacturing process and employing 20 or more workmen. But Section 5 (1) of the Act Local Governments are empowered to extend the application of the Act by executive action without legislation to other industrial establishments not using machine power but employing at least ten or more persons. The Government of Bombay have justly exercised these powers in case of many such small industries. The coal making industry in which the Katkaris are engaged is also one to which the provisions of the Factories Act should similarly be extended.

(3) CHILD LABOUR:- As a result of the extension of the Factories Act, children under the age of 12 would not be allowed to work. This is as it should be. It is difficult to suggest a definite scheme for their education while they are in the jungles with their parents but the possibilities of making some arrangements in that direction have to be explored.

(4) Payment of Wages:- Payment of wages should be made regularly every week and in cash. As was observed above Katkaris get hardly any cash from the contractors. They get paddy and the price charged is nearly double the market price. The contractors refuse to pay wages in cash. Moreover, they insist upon purchasing for the Katkari his clothing also.

This practice should be immediately stopped and the Katkaris should be allowed to make his own purchases. Indeed it would be very advisable to extend the application of the Payment of Wages Act to the coal making industry. The local Government can do it by executive action without legislation after the ~~XXXX~~ application of the Factories Act is extended.

Again equal amount of wages for equal amount of work should be given to women workers also. At present a woman working with her husband does not get any wages ~~XXXXXXXX~~ whatsoever. The wages are supposed to be included in these of her husband. This, in fact, amounts to compelling the woman to work without wages. It is only fair that a woman worker should get separate wages for her work. Adequate remuneration must also be given to children, who may be allowed to work after they have completed 12 years.

(5) COMPENSATION FOR ACCIDENTS:- The work of felling and cutting trees and managing the Charcoal Kiln is so heavy that the workers engaged in it are bound to meet with accidents sometime or other. At present an accident means double loss to a Katkari. He is physically impaired and again he and his family lose employment also. It is, therefore, necessary that Katkaris meeting with accidents in course of their work should be protected in some way against complete destitution.

If the application of the Factories

Act is extended to the Charcoal industry as a whole, as was suggested above, the Katkaris engaged in that industry would be entitled to compensation for accidents under (ii) of Schedule II of the Workmen's compensation Act, 1923. The extension of the application of the Factories Act to the charcoal industry would, therefore, be a very welcome move on the part of Government.

The Bill to amend the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, as recently passed by the Central Legislature includes persons employed in "the felling or logging of trees" in the list of persons who are comprised in the definition of "workman" for the purposes of the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923. This is a welcome amendment of the Act from the point of view of the Katkaris engaged in the work of "felling or logging of trees". The Bombay Legislature can further amend the Act so as to include in the definition of "workman" persons engaged in the charcoal industry.

(6) MINIMUM WAGE:- The rate of wages must be fair.

At present there is practically no wage rate fixed. The contractors advance to the Katkari anything from Rs. 10/- to Rs. 25/- supply him with clothes worth about Rs. 2/- pay him in cash four or sometimes eight annas a week and give him less than two 'pailies' of paddy every day every day during the coal making season. But this all that the whole Katkari family gets for hard labour extending over a period of eight months. In place of this unjust system every workman or woman should be given payment of wages in cash and the wages should be

calculated at the rate of Annas 6 /- a day.

(7) Housing:- Under the present system there is practically no arrangement for the housing of the Katkaris while they are in jungles. Some of them build some sort of a shelter for themselves and their families, but that is very inadequate even according to the standard of the Katkaris themselves. The rest of them, with their wives and children, have to cook and to eat and squat and recline under bushes and trees. This exposes them not only to the rigours of the weather but also to the mercy of insects and reptiles so abundantly found in the jungles. It is, therefore, advisable that some arrangement for the proper housing of the Katkari families should be made. The coal contractors should shoulder the small expenditure that will have to be incurred for this purpose. The Katkaris will very willingly supply their own labour. Scarcity of drinking water and long distances from which it has to be brought is another great disability of the life of the jungle. The Katkaris have to satisfy themselves with bad water or no water at all. As a result of this many are found to be suffering from all manner of skin diseases and even other graver maladies when they return from the jungles after the coal season is over. There should, therefore, be a common storage of drinking water for every small group of huts. Here again the Katkaris can supply their labour. The only thing for the contractors to do is to supply the necessary utensils for storage and allow the Katkaris to

bring water by turns during their working time.

(8) MEDICAL FACILITIES :- The life of the jungle is, by its very nature such that the incidence of sickness is considerably higher than in villages. The Katkaris suffer from most of the diseases due to scarcity and bad quality of water used for drinking and other purposes. Malaria is especially very common and cholera is not rare. The indigenous system of medicine prevalent among the Katkaris is practically of no use in combating these evils. It is, therefore, necessary that some arrangements should be made by the employers of the Katkaris, if possible, with the help of Government or local bodies to make available to the Katkaris free medical aid in cases of illness. At least free supply of quinine and other simple medicines is immediately necessary.

(9) PREVENTION OF ILL-TREATMENT:-

Perhaps the worst feature of the life of a Katkari engaged in the coal making industry is the ill-treatment to which he is subjected by his superiors. It is hardly necessary to suggest that the system of physical punishment for alleged neglect of duty must be immediately and ruthlessly put down. It is true that the person offended has a remedy under the Indian Penal Code but that does not give enough protection to the Katkari, firstly because he is mortally afraid of offending his employer in any manner and chiefly because he is accustomed to regard the Police department as an ally of the employers and the moneylenders and the rich people

in general. He has his reasons to think so and the reasons are sound also. It is in order to obviate this difficulty in the way of the Katkari to get his grievances redressed through the ordinary process of law that some special form of protection is necessary to be given to the Katkari engaged in the coal making industry.

In order to put into practice all or any of the reforms suggested above it is necessary to entrust some department of Government with the task. The most suitable department would be the forest department, as was once suggested above. The forest department may have the assistance of a special labour officer with a suitable staff to work under him. This will mean some expense on the part of Government but the amount spent will be amply justified in view of the good that it is calculated to do to the Katkari community.

It would be very advisable to work out a detailed scheme for the welfare community but this can be done only after making a ~~XXXXXXXX~~ thorough going and authoritative enquiry. Only a broad and rough outline is attempted here.

APPENDIX. "A"

Distribution of Katkari Population.

	<u>K A T K A R I</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female.</u>
<u>Northern Division.</u>		
Ahmedabad, Bzoach etc.	Nil	Nil.
Thana	11,186	11,116
Bassein	104	96
Bhiwandi	1,887	1,888
Dahanu	71	53
Kalyan	2,586	2,683
Mahim	227	192
Murbad	1,156	1,109
Sassette	218	200
Shahapur	2,590	3,411
Mokhada. Peta.	377	353
Vada	1,970	2,131
<u>Central Division</u>		
Ahmednagar.	190	285
Khandesh East	8	3
" West	187	213
Nasik	353	349
Lagatpuri	107	108
Peint	30	26
Sinner	216	215
Poona	235	313
Dhond Peta	4	
Haveli	24	24
Mulshi Peta.	31	25
Khol	85	76
Ambegaon Peta	66	73

K A T K A R I.

	Male	Female.
Maval.	146	115
<u>Southern Division.</u>		
Belgaum	223	205
Bijapur	207	217
Dharwad	14	
Kolaba	14,232	15,550
Alibag	1,013	1,168
Karjat	2,745	3,798
Khalapur Peta	1,497	1,429
Mahad	604	654
Mangaon	1,309	2,158
Panvel.	2,559	2,513
Uran Peta	127	106
Pen	1,984	2,366
Nagothana	886	906
Roha	1,507	1,452
Ratnagiri	413	434
Chiplun	61	124
Dapoli	102	98
Mandangad Peta	184	156
Khed	32	32
Rajapur	8	5
Ratnagiri	7	2
Sangmeshwar	18	15
<u>Native States</u>		
Gujarath Group	761	675
Mahikatha	6	10

KATKARI.

	Male	Female.
Palampur Agency	141	141
Surat Agency	554	524
<u>Konkan Group</u>	2,109	2,091
Janjira	758	786
Jawhar	1,351	1,305
<u>Deccan Group</u>	2,288	2,185
<u>RMN</u> Bhor.	2,325	2,147
Khandesh Agency	63	38

APPENDIX. "B"

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