

CHAPTER XXIII.

TALCHER STATE.

THE State of Talcher lies between 20° 52' and 21° 18' N., and 84° 54' and 85° 16' E., with an area of 399 square miles. It is bounded on the north by the Bāmra and Pāl Laharā States; on the east by the Dhenkānāl State; and on the south and west by Angul district. The Brāhmanī river traverses the State, and Talcher village, which contains the Rājā's residence, is picturesquely situated on a bend on its right bank. The State consists for the most part of open cultivated lands and there are no hill ranges of any considerable size or height. The largest is the range running at right angles to the Brāhmanī river near Samal, and forming the boundary with the Dhenkānāl State. The State contains a coal field of which an examination was made in 1875. It was then reported that there is no seam of workable thickness and fairly good quality; that a final and thorough exploration could only be effected at a considerable expense; that the local consumption would never suffice to support a proper mining establishment, and that with the long and costly land carriage, no class of coal equal to Rāniganj coal could compete successfully at the Orissa ports with coal sent from Calcutta by sea. The project for utilizing the Talcher coal-beds has, therefore, been abandoned for the present. Iron and limestone are also found near the banks of the Brāhmanī river, which separates Talcher on the east from Pāl Laharā and Dhenkānāl. Small quantities of gold are found by washing the sand of the river, but little profit accrues to the workers. The average rainfall for the six years from 1902-03 to 1907-08 was 51.70 inches. The headquarters of the State are at Talcher.

According to tradition four sons of the Chief of Jaipur came to Puri on pilgrimage to see Jagannāth. In their pride of the *Sūryabansa* and *Rānā Thākur* family to which they belonged, they failed to properly salute the then Rājā of Puri. They were not therefore allowed to see the idol of Jagannāth, and two of them were put to death under the Rājā's orders. The other two brothers fled to a place named Nādhārā, in the Dhenkānāl State, and there established a fort under the name of Bhīrzanagari.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS.

HISTORY.

They also built a temple near the fort, and set up an idol named Rāmhāndī Devi. This idol now belongs to Dhenkānāl.

The boundaries of the State at the time of its establishment were on the north Gāngnan in the Bāmra State; on the south Kamlāng in the Dhenkānāl State; on the east Altumā in the Dhenkānāl State; on the west the States of Bāmra and Angul. It is said that the Rājā of Purī fought a battle with the Rājā of Tālcher, conquered him and took away Nādhārā, Rāmhāndī, Parjang, Palāsuni and Subalayā, and made them over to the Chief of Dhenkānāl. Gāngnan was similarly conquered by the Chief of Bāmra. None of the Chiefs received any *farmān* from the Mughals or Marāthās, but Dayānidhi Birabar Harichandan helped the British troops at the time of the rebellion of the Angul Rājā in 1847, and was rewarded with the title of Mahendra Bahādur, a *khilāt* and an elephant.

In very early times this family held sway in what is now the important village of Subalayā, in the Sonpur State, but was eventually driven out. Tradition relates that one of the Rājās of this race crossed the Brāhmanī on a hunting expedition. Near Taleswarī Devi, a hare killed the Rājā's dog, and the Rājā accordingly established a fort there. Some time after he was defeated by the Khonds of the place and fled to the forests. One day while asleep in the forest, Hingulā Devi appeared to him in a dream and addressed him thus:—"If you worship me and Taleswarī, you will become victorious over your enemies, and in that case you should name the place Tālcher." The Rājā followed this advice and took the field. During an action Hingulā Devi appeared in the shape of a tiger and destroyed the opponents of the Chief. After that, when the Rājā was asleep, the Devi again appeared to him in a dream, and said that it was she and not a tiger that had destroyed his opponents. She advised the Rājā to sign his name with the initial of a tiger's head. The Rājā named the place Tālcher, and bestowed a village named Padmanāvapur on Brāhmins.

In the village of Gopalprasād, about 14 miles to the south-west of headquarters of the State, there is found the site of a goddess who is worshipped under the name of Hingulā. The site of the worship extends over the area of the coal fields which extend for some two or three miles in the neighbourhood of the village: the actual manifestation consists of a jet of gas issuing from the coal, which is either lighted by the priest or itself ignites on contact with the air. The worship of the goddess takes place on the fourteenth day of full-moon in the month of Chaitra (March-April). The goddess Hingula is alleged to appear some

days before this in a dream to her *sebait* (priest), and indicates to him the exact spot of her coming revelation. The *sebait* then proceeds to the spot indicated, and finding the natural fire burning keeps the flame burning by adding coal till the appointed hour of worship arrives, when a large crowd of worshippers attend from all quarters and make offerings of *ghi* (clarified butter), sugar, plantains, curd, goats, etc. Besides this annual worship, Hingulā is also worshipped as an idol throughout the year in a secluded and solitary spot in the forest near the village. The *sebait* sends forth emissaries throughout the States and the neighbouring districts of British India to spread the worship of Hingulā. With threats of secretly firing their houses these emissaries extract contributions from the people and from time to time put into execution their threats. A very close watch has to be kept on their movements. The emblem of the State is a tiger.

The population increased from 52,674 in 1891 to 60,432 in 1901; it is contained in 293 villages, and the density is 151 persons to the square mile. All but 179 of the inhabitants are Hindus. The most numerous castes are Chasās (17,000) and Pāns (10,000). The population is classified as follows: Hindu—males, 29,857, females, 30,396, the total of Hindus forming 99·7 per cent. of the population: proportion of males in total Hindus is 49·5. Musalmāns:—males, 89, females, 90; the Musalmāns form only 0·29 per cent. of the population: proportion of males in total Musalmāns is 49·7. The percentage of literates to the total population is 2·1. Averages—the number of villages per square mile is 0·73; houses per village, 41·6; persons per village, 206; houses per square mile, 30; persons per house, 4·9. Many of the villages are large and prosperous, and the people are well-to-do cultivators, with the exception of the Pāns, who form a considerable number of the population; the majority of them are landless labourers and are the professional criminals of the State: endeavours are being made by the Chief to improve their status and to assist them to holdings of their own, giving advances for plough-bullocks and seed-grain.

The 293 villages in the State are classified as follows: 261 with less than five hundred inhabitants, 28 with from five hundred to a thousand, 3 with from one to two thousand, and 1 with from two to five thousand.

The State is mostly open country and well watered by the Brāhṃanī, which forms the natural drainage channel: the climate is healthy and epidemics of fever and other diseases are not common. During the period from 1893 to 1902 the average

THE
PEOPLE.PUBLIC
HEALTH.

ratio of births and deaths per thousand was 21 and 16 respectively. There is a charitable dispensary at headquarters, with a small indoor ward in charge of a Civil Hospital Assistant and the number of patients treated in 1907-08 was 4,751. There is also an Ayurvedic dispensary at headquarters. Vaccination is not popular with the people, but receives attention from the State authorities. In 1907-08 the number of primary vaccinations was 1,631 and revaccinations, 1,441.

AGRICULTURE.

The total acreage of the State is 255,350 acres, of which 176,359 acres are forest and 19,306 acres non-culturable waste. The normal cropped area is 42,930 acres, of which 27,084 acres are under rice: oil-seeds are normally sown on 3,780 acres, the principal oil-seed crops being *til* (sesamum) 1,588 acres, and castor, 1,217 acres. The land is well cultivated, the fields are carefully terraced and irrigated from tanks and embankments, which are a striking feature of the State. There is a State agricultural farm, where experiments in improved seeds and new varieties of crops are made, and seed is distributed to the more experienced cultivators.

**RENTS,
WAGES
AND
PRICES.**

The average rate per *mān* (two-thirds of an acre) for first second and third class rice-lands is Rs. 2-10-2, Re. 1-11-1 and Re. 0-15-11 respectively, and for uplands, Re. 0-10-5. During the period from 1893 to 1902 the rate of wages for skilled labour has remained stationary, but that of ordinary labour has increased slightly: the average daily rate of wage during this period is as follows:—Superior mason, 6 annas, common mason, common blacksmith, and common carpenter 4 annas each, superior carpenter and superior blacksmith, 8 annas each, cooly, 1½ annas. The average price during the same period of wheat, rice, gram and salt has been 8½ seers, 25¾ seers, 14½ seers, and 10½ seers respectively.

**OCCUPATIONS,
MANUFACTURES AND
TRADE.**

There are no special manufactures or occupations. At the headquarters, however, an industrial school has been started by the Chief with a view to improving the ordinary village trades: at the school superior leather work, especially in boots and shoes, gold and silver ornamental work, and superior carpentry and smithy work are taught. A considerable export of surplus rice, food-grains, and oil-seeds is carried on down the Brahmani: a certain quantity of timber is floated down the river from the State of Pāl Laharā and sleepers are brought from Athmallik and similarly exported down to Jenāpur railway station on the Bengal-Nāgpur Railway. The principal imported articles are spices, salt, piece-goods, cloths and kerosine oil. The village of Tālcher is an important mart.

There are good roads connecting the headquarters with Angul and Pál Laharā, and there are rest-houses along the roads. The Brāhmanī affords a ready means for transport. There is an imperial post-office at the headquarters.

MEANS OF
COMMUNI-
CATION.

The State for some time was, owing to the minority of the present Chief, under the administration of Government: during that period a careful settlement was made for a period of fifteen years from 1897-98 to 1911-12. There are four dates (*kists*) for payment of revenue, viz., February, May, July and December, and at each *kist* one-fourth of the revenue is payable and the land revenue demand is collected without difficulty. The system of land tenures is the same as in the other States, the *sarbarāhkārs* receiving a cash commission on collections and being responsible for the rent collections: no certificates are issued until and unless the *sarbarāhkār* has first paid in the total amount due from his village. No cesses are levied, and there are no zamindāris in the State: the maintenance allowances to members of the Chief's family are known as *khanjā* grants. The current land revenue demand amounted to Rs. 36,461 in 1907-08.

LAND
REVENUE
ADMINIS-
TRATION.

The relations between the State and the British Government are regulated by the *sanad* of 1894, which was revised in 1908. The Chief administers the State himself, and is assisted by his uncle, who exercises the powers of an Assistant Sessions Judge. The State pays to the British Government an annual tribute of Rs. 1,040 and has an estimated revenue of Rs. 65,000. There is a regular Forest Department, and every effort has been made to protect and reserve the forests, which have been demarcated: the cutting of fire-lines remains to be done. In former years the forests had been recklessly denuded of good timber, and it will be several years before the forests can recover. In the year 1907-08 the forest revenue yielded Rs. 3,770. The excise revenue of the State amounted in 1907-08 to Rs. 3,994. Opium and *gānja* are obtained in the usual manner. The people are not litigious, and in 1907-08 the number of civil suits was only 250, of which 88 per cent. were for sums below the value of Rs. 50. Crime is fairly heavy for the area and population of the State, but mostly consists of theft and burglary cases: a good deal of the crime is attributed to the Pāns. The number of cases reported to the police was 399 in 1907-08. The police force consists of 2 Sub-Inspectors, 8 Head-Constables and 45 constables, besides 242 *chaukidārs* (village watchmen). There is a masonry jail at the headquarters with accommodation for 70 prisoners: a new jail is under construction. In 1907-08 the daily average population was 43.

GENERAL
ADMINIS-
TRATION.
FINANCES.

Forests.

Excise.

Justice.

Crime.

Police.

Jail.

P. W. De- In 1907-08 the State spent Rs. 7,232 on account of public
partment. works.

EDUCA- The State maintains a Middle English school, 2 Upper
TION. Primary and 62 Lower Primary schools and one good Sanskrit
tol: besides there are one Government *guru*-training school and 4
private schools. The State receives a grant for primary educa-
tion from Government, and enjoys assistance from Government
Educational officers. The number of pupils on the roll in
1907-08 was 1,872. There is an excellent girls' school at head-
quarters.