

due to the fact that they are wanderers and unable to carry oil about or resort to the barber, but there is no special tabu on the use of hair oil except in case of children in certain circumstances (See paragraph on Child birth).

Internal Administration.--The Bhantus lead their nomadic life in gangs consisting of a dozen families, keeping as far as possible away from villages when they camp; men from different gangs would however combine in the event of a raiding expedition. The system of internal administration of the clan is communal, all disputes being dealt with by the Panchayat or council of elders. In theory this may be composed of any five members of the tribe called together to settle any particular dispute, but in practice certain persons by reason of their knowledge of tribal laws, etc., come to be regarded as the Panchayat of any particular gang. Age has little to do in deciding who shall sit on the Panchayat. On a dispute arising, the parties concerned appear before the Panchayat, each party having its own advocate to state its case and wrangle for it. The whole matter has the appearance of a debate more than anything else, others (including women and children whatever the nature of the enquiry may be) attend, and most have something to say in the matter. Generally speaking the Panchayat aims at reconciling parties rather than punishing them. They have however considerable powers to inflict punishment, usually in the shape of pecuniary fines, some of the fines becoming the Panchayat's perquisite. Besides disputes, all manner of offences against tribal custom such as incest (marriage within a got is so regarded), divorce, adultery, etc., are dealt with by the Panchayat, not to speak of tribals by ordeal, settlement of marriage-price and questions of general importance affecting tribal life; for their services they may also charge from ten to fifteen rupees.

Crime.--As has already been said, the Bhantus prior to being confined to settlements lived entirely by crime. A few were ostensibly engaged in agriculture but this only covered up their real activities. Their nefarious practices found most scope in dacoity or robbery by violence but being a community organized for crime, nothing came amiss to them.

On deciding to commit a dacoity in any particular locality ~~in xxxxxxxxxx~~ spies would be sent out to select a suitable victim, study the general habits of the villagers and the distance from any effective aid, and enumerate the number of men and firearms. Inspector Baldeo Sahai also asserts in his report that they have been known to travel very great distances in disguise by rail for the purposes of committing thefts, robberies, and dacoities, never committing offences of any kind near their "campment". The raid usually took place at midnight. Acting on the information given by the spies, men would be posted at various points in the village, and by firing off their guns attract attention from the main gang which would attack the particular house or houses previously appointed. The gang would usually consist of some thirty to forty men and would not be over-scrupulous in their methods. If resistance was shown they were merciless, indeed, the particular gang sent to Port Blair had com-