

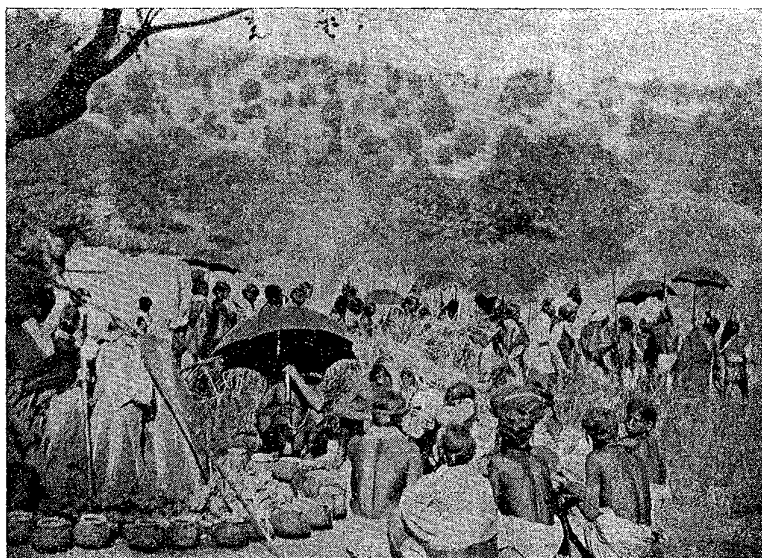
AN ABORIGINAL TRIBE OF S. INDIA

By A. Catherine McA. Munro.

The Soras are an aboriginal tribe dwelling in the Eastern Ghats of the Madras Presidency. They are perhaps the most primitive people to be found in India, thanks to fever-ridden and almost inaccessible Agency Districts of their habitat. The inroads of civilization creep slowly in a region where even ox-carts would be a luxurious mode of travel, so we find this people still following their former fashion of life and language.

All sickness among them or their cattle is attributed to spirits. So the procedure in every illness is to ascertain what spirit is angry, what will appease it and then make the necessary invocations, libations and sacrifice. If recovery is delayed, other spirits are always found to have a finger in the pie, and the sacrifices are always in the ascending scale—fowl, then goat, pig, buffalo, two buffaloes—I have known as many as forty buffaloes to have been sacrificed in a protracted case.

Every village or village group has its own medium, who when consulted goes into a trance, and while in this condition reveals the case. I have happened along to their villages many times when the medium was going into, in or coming out of trance. There is nothing faked about it.



THE SORA FESTIVAL OF THE DEAD

One seldom hears of any complication following childbirth. Very often the expectant mother comes in from the mountain side where she has been helping at heavy clearing or cultivation, just in time to give birth to her baby. She brings in with her a blade or two of sharp grass with

which to cut the cord. A big spider is caught—they are always to be found in the thatch, and burnt in a piece of clean cloth. The ash of this is mixed with coconut oil and used as umbilical dressing. Sora babies are darling creamy yellow color, when born, but exposure to the sun soon darkens them. The mother sits on a cloth spread over clean ashes most of the time for three days, after that she is up and about as usual. I have never heard of nor seen a case of sepsis among them at childbirth. The only untoward incident I have encountered was that of a primipara whose bladder had been ruptured when her baby was born.

The Soras wear very little clothing. A woman's garb consists of a wrap-around skirt reaching from hip to knee, and fifty to one hundred and fifty strings of tiny red glass beads on her neck. Men wear an eight-inch wide loin cloth four yards long, both ends heavily fringed in red, and one end hanging before and one behind. The men also wear similar quantities of beads and large colored turbans surmounted by a coque of egret feathers.

The accompanying snapshot is taken at their biennial memorial to the Dead, at which time stones are erected in memory of the spirits that have departed this life during the previous two years. Each village group observes its own memorial. Pots of liquor and other offerings surround the stones. The medium is in trance in the centre of the group of immediate relatives of the departed, in the foreground.

Medical work is making an impression on them. Dr. West began work among them in 1922 and now the Mission Hospital which was opened a few years ago, is well patronized. Such cases as round-worm have had a profound effect in disillusioning their minds of 'spirits' as the all-prevalent cause of their ills.

A more likeable, wholesome, hardworking people would be hard to find. Full of fun, lovers of nature. Their folk-songs are charming.

They are listed in *Castes and Tribes of South India*, under the name Savara, which is a misnomer as there is no 'v' sound in their language.

Who will volunteer an article on Blackwater Fever—Its Symptoms, Nursing, Care and Treatment?—This has been requested.

Are you all set for the forthcoming T.N.A.I. Conference at Bangalore? The reports of our returned I.C.N. delegates will be a special feature.