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Food Avoidances of Indian Tribes

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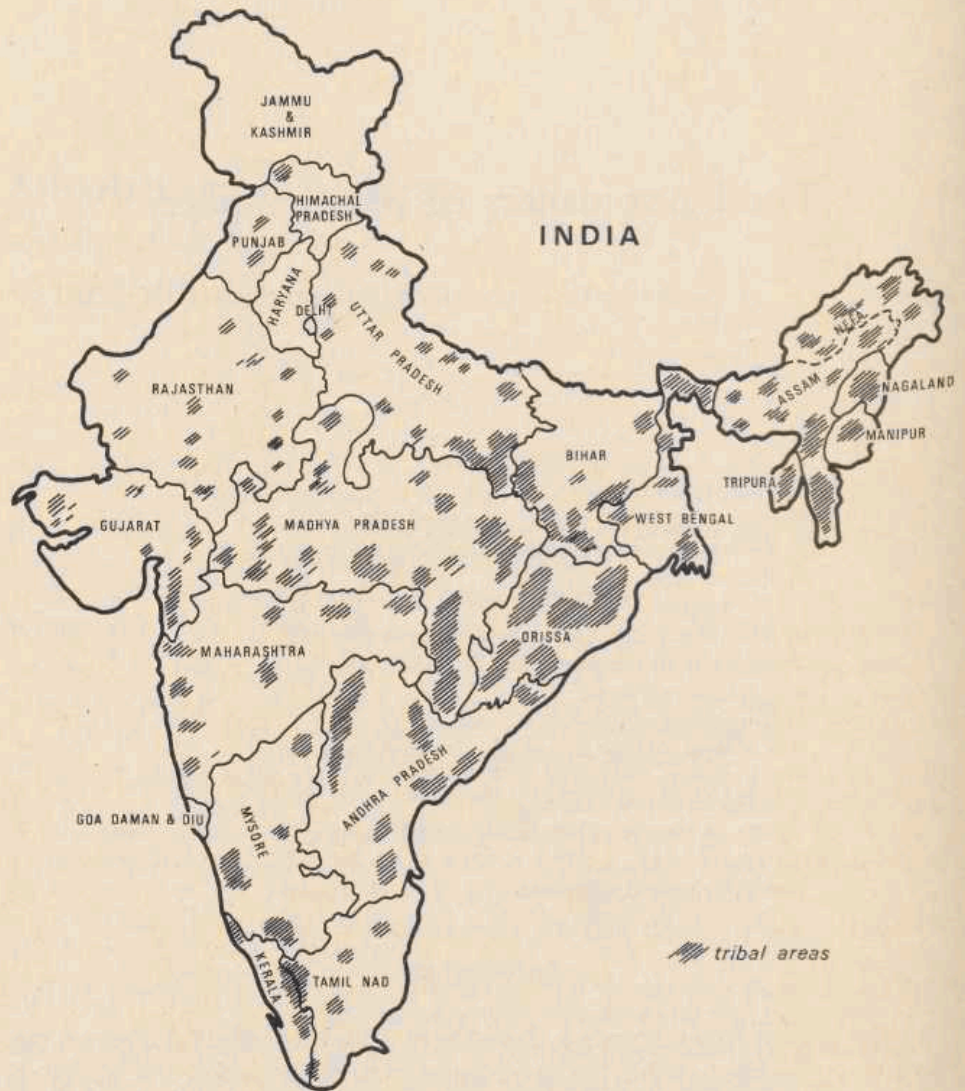
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Introduction

The present paper intends to show the multitude of beliefs and reasonings which may give rise to tribal food avoidances in India, as well as the numerical and cultural importance of these prohibitions. Purity ideas will be demonstrated to be one of the most significant factors in their genesis. Furthermore the study will examine the relationship between tribal avoidances and Hindu culture and will draw some parallels to similar practices in other parts of the world. Change in the observance of these prohibitions will be put in evidence and the direction of this change will be traced.

By food avoidance I mean the abstention from an available food item considered to be edible by other communities. The paper is concerned with culturally determined prohibitions by groups and not with individual dislikes. Among culturally determined restrictions of food, emphasis will be put on those of magico-religious origin and on those linked to the social structure in a different way from those of western food avoidances.

Geographical Distribution of the Tribes Examined
(The shaded areas are no indication of the density of tribal population)



List of Tribes Examined in this Study

- | | |
|--|--|
| Abor or Adi (N.E.F.A.) | Bhaina (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Agaria (Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh) | Bhatra (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Aheria (Uttar Pradesh) | Bharia-Bhumia (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Aka (N.E.F.A.) | Bhil (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra) |
| Andh (Madhya Pradesh) | Bhilala (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Apa Tani (N.E.F.A.) | Bhuiya (Orissa, Bihar) |
| Asur (Bihar) | Bhumij (Bihar) |
| Badaga (Tamilnad) | Bhumia (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Baiga (Madhya Pradesh, Bihar) | Bhunjia (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Banjara (Andhra Pradesh) | Binjhal or Binjwar (Madhya Pradesh) |
| Bathudi (Orissa) | Binjhia (West Bengal) |
| Beda or Boya (Mysore) | |

- Birhor (Madhya Pradesh, Bihar)
 Bonda (Orissa)
 Boro (Assam)
 Chenchu (Andhra Pradesh)
 Chero (Bihar)
 Chik (Bihar)
 Chingathan (Kerala)
 Chutiya (Assam)
 Dafia (N.E.F.A.)
 Dhangar (Uttar Pradesh)
 Dhanka (Gujarat)
 Dhanwar (Madhya Pradesh)
 Dire (Andhra Pradesh)
 Dombur (Mysore)
 Dubla (Maharashtra, Gujarat)
 Eravallen (Kerala)
 Ernadan (Kerala)
 Gadaba (Orissa, Madhya Pradesh)
 Gaddi (Himachal Pradesh)
 Galong (N.E.F.A.)
 Gamit (Maharashtra)
 Garo (Assam)
 Gond (Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh)
 Gorait (West Bengal)
 Grasia (Rajasthan)
 Gujar (Uttar Pradesh)
 Gurchha (Uttar Pradesh)
 Hajong (Assam)
 Halasar (Mysore)
 Halba (Madhya Pradesh)
 Ho (Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh)
 Irula (Tamilnad)
 Jatapu (Orissa)
 Juang (Orissa)
 Kachari (Assam)
 Kadar (Tamilnad, Kerala)
 Kadugolla (Mysore)
 Kaikari (Madhya Pradesh)
 Kamar (Madhya Pradesh)
 Kanikkar (Tamilnad)
 Karimpolam (Kerala)
 Kasuba (Kerala)
 Katkari (Maharashtra)
 Kawar or Kanwar (Madhya Pradesh)
 Kewat (Uttar Pradesh)
 Khairwar or Kharwar (Uttar Pradesh)
 Khangar (Uttar Pradesh)
 Kharia (Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh)
 Khasa (Uttar Pradesh)
 Khasi (Assam)
 Khond or Kandh (Orissa, Madhya Pradesh)
 Kisan (Uttar Pradesh)
 Koch (Assam)
 Kol (Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh)
 Kolam (Madhya Pradesh)
 Koli (Maharashtra, Gujarat)
 Kora (West Bengal, Orissa)
 Korava or Korama, Yerukala (Mysore, Tamilnad)
 Koraga (Mysore)
 Korku (Madhya Pradesh)
 Korwa (Madhya Pradesh)
 Kota (Tamilnad)
 Koya (Orissa)
 Kudiya (Mysore)
 Kuki (Manipur)
 Kuricchan (Kerala)
 Kuruba or Kadukurumba, Kurumba (Tamilnad, Mysore)
 Kuruvikkarana (Mysore)
 Lakher (Assam)
 Lepcha (West Bengal)
 Lodha (West Bengal)
 Lusai (Assam, Manipur)
 Mahili (Orissa, Bengal)
 Majhi (Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal)
 Majhwar (Madhya Pradesh, Bihar)
 Malapantaram (Kerala)
 Malasar (Tamilnad)
 Malavetan (Kerala)
 Malayali (Tamilnad)
 Malayan (Kerala)
 Malayaran (Kerala)
 Maler (Bihar)
 Mal Paharia (Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal)
 Mannan (Kerala)
 Mannewar (Madhya Pradesh)
 Maria (Madhya Pradesh)
 Matya or Matteya (Orissa)
 Medar (Mysore)
 Meithei (Manipur)
 Mina (Madhya Pradesh)
 Mikir (Assam)
 Miri (Assam)
 Mishmi (N.E.F.A.)
 Munda (West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar)
 Muria (Madhya Pradesh)
 Muthuvar (Tamilnad)
 Naga tribes (Nagaland, Manipur)
 Nahal or Nihal (Madhya Pradesh)
 Oraon (Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh)
 Pahira (Madhya Pradesh, Bihar)
 Paliyan (Tamilnad, Kerala)
 Paniyan (Tamilnad)
 Pardhan (Madhya Pradesh)
 Pareng (Orissa)

Parja or Poroja (Orissa)	Soligaru or Sholiga (Mysore)
Patlia (Gujarat)	Synteng (Assam)
Pulayan (Kerala, Tamilnad)	Thakur (Maharashtra)
Rabha (West Bengal)	Tharu (Uttar Pradesh)
Reddi (Andhra Pradesh)	Toda (Tamilnad)
Riang (Tripura)	Tripura (Tripura)
Sansi (Punjab)	Ulladan (Kerala)
Santal (West Bengal, Bihar)	Urali (Kerala)
Sauria Paharia (Bihar)	Vishnavan (Kerala)
Savara or Saora (Orissa)	Warli (Maharashtra)
Sherdukpen (N.E.F.A.)	Yanadi (Kerala)
Sholaga (Tamilnad)	Yerava (Mysore)
Sikligar (Punjab)	

The negative aspect of food habits was chosen, because avoidances are less apparent and consequently less known than food consumption and because they seem to reveal particularly well the psychological factors involved in eating.

The tribal population of India numbering more than 30 millions has been thoroughly, even though somewhat unevenly, studied. This paper is based on information contained in the literature roughly from the beginning of this century and on what I personally have observed¹. For editorial reasons, not all data and tribes will be specifically mentioned in the text and many similar practices have been grouped together. The references at the end of the paper contain all works I was able to consult, giving information on the subject.

Tribes have been distinguished from subtribes and from castes mainly on the basis of an unofficial Indian tribal map published in 1965. I am conscious of the fact that there will be numerous points of disagreement as to what should be called a tribe, a subtribe or a caste, also because during the long period of time examined, tribes have been splitting up and some tribes or subtribes joined the caste system.

I am writing in the ethnographic present, even though change is operating and many food avoidances discussed now are a thing of the past. The past tense will be used only when talking about change. As mentioned above, the study is mainly based on bibliographic research, but of the 152 communities (see list) with which it deals, I personally know 25 and among the tribes of Tamilnad I did research on pertinent subjects.

At the Universities of Delhi and Madras I made attempts to identify animal and plant species, for which only vernacular or other imprecise names were given in the literature, but many (above all birds, fish and plants) had to remain unidentified.

In order to simplify the exposition of the data, the multitude of different food avoidances will be classified according to the avoider's mental attitude

¹ Field work was done in 1968/69 and in 1971/72. — Acknowledgement is made to Professor INDERA P. SINGH, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, for making helpful comments on the manuscript.

towards the potential food item refused, i. e. positive, negative and ambivalent. Besides, there is a group of circumstantial avoidances, which is not concerned with any specific item, but rather with the circumstances under which food may present itself.

1. Positive Attitude Towards Avoided Food

A potential food item may not be eaten in spite of a positive attitude towards it. The permanent abstentions of this category are mainly due to respect for the species; the temporary ones are due to deference for gods and spirits to whom the food must be offered before it may be consumed.

a) General Respect and Sentimental Attachment

Since cannibalism is regarded with horror in India, an animal's presumed similarity to human beings is a valid reason for abstaining from it. Such a similarity is given as an explanation for abstaining from eating all types of monkeys in various parts of India, while the South Indian Kadar, Muthuvar, Paliyan, Kasuba, etc. only refrain from the white-faced monkey (*Macaca radiata*) as too similar to man (RAO 1909: 181; EHRENFELS 1952: 295; NAMBIAR 1964: 11, 200). The elephant's volume probably makes the Purum, a Kuki-tribe of Manipur, think that it was created with bits of every other animal, including human flesh, and therefore eating elephants would be like cannibalism (T. C. DAS 1945: 86). Homonymy may explain among the Thakur of Maharashtra (CHAPEKAR 1960: 96) the respect for certain birds whose names remind them of women.

The striking appearance combined with dangerousness may dictate the respect for the tiger, as well as for snakes and in particular for the cobra. As these animals are dangerous opponents, a pact of non-aggression seems to be the best solution. A similar reasoning probably also enters into the frequent totemic avoidances and into the deification of these animals to be discussed below. There also may be a feeling of distant kinship with larger felines. Among the Dafla of N.E.F.A. it is only the priest who considers himself "the tiger's brother"; he does not eat the animal, though he may kill it (STONOR 1957: 12). The Ho, one of the Austroasiatic tribes which in general fear and revere the cobra, hold themselves to be of snake race. They do not only abstain from eating snakes, but also affirm to avoid drinking milk for the benefit of snakes (MAJUMDAR 1937: 29; 1950: 75). Most Sema Naga taboo the flesh of the great hornbill (*Dichoceros bicornis*), the largest bird in Assam with magnificent appearance, and they may not even touch the rufous-necked hornbill (*Aceros nepalensis*) (HUTTON 1921: 392).

I need not expand on sentimental attachment, sometimes combined with usefulness, for these are well-known reasons for not killing and eating animals also in the West. Most people will agree with the Lakher of Assam who abstain from eating horses, as they carry man (PARRY 1932: 84). The

degree of pity for certain species, however, may vary considerably according to the community. Thus a strong sentimental tie seems to bind the Gond to the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) he planted, so that he refrains from eating its fruits (FUCHS 1960a: 157). The Rengma Naga becomes so attached to his pigs, that he does not eat the pig, that he has had longest (MILLS 1937: 93), while the Sema Naga's pity for his aging hunting dog prevents him only from eating it, but not from selling it to others for food (HUTTON 1968: 70). The reluctance to eat female animals, or at least to kill them for meat, also may have a double ethical and economic basis. Special avoidance of female animals, however, as the case of the Majhwar and Kanwar of Madhya Pradesh who gave up eating female goats (National Council of Applied Economic Research 1963: 31), is connected with the veneration of mother animals, in particular of the cow, and will be treated below.

The Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa*, the respect for all life, though not a tribal feature, has taken hold in sections of various tribes. It is frequently held that *ahimsa* is the spiritual gift of Buddhism and Jainism, but ALSDORF (1962: 561-568) shows, to my mind without doubt, that neither Buddha nor Mahavira were vegetarians and that both religions only made themselves the spokesmen of ideas rife in the last centuries of the pre-Christian era. DUMONT (1966: 187-192) proposes that the *sannyāsin*, a consequent follower of the doctrine, also was its inventor and argues that the Aryans could not have met vegetarianism in India, as it is no primitive idea. I am more inclined to look for the roots of *ahimsa* in the Indus culture, where the "military element did not loom large" (WHEELER 1968: 72), which might point to a gentleness of spirit characteristic for many modern Hindus and basic to the doctrine of *ahimsa*. A Dravidian priesthood, perhaps, derived from the southern centres of the Indus culture, which escaped destruction, might have spread vegetarianism. After joining the ranks of the Aryan priests - the existence of some not very Aryan looking South Indian Brahmins could suggest their ancestors' conversion to the Vedic faith - their influence could have gradually increased, enabling them to reimpose some of their ancient customs and beliefs.

The distribution of vegetarians in modern India may lend support to this hypothesis. GANDHI writes that "the opposition and abhorrence of meat-eating that existed in Gujarat among the Jains and Vaishnavas were to be seen nowhere else in India or outside in such strength" (1969: 15). The "Diet Atlas of India" (GOPALAN et al. 1969: 45) more or less confirms this state of affairs. It shows the vegetarians to be most numerous in rural Gujarat (about 42%) and in rural Rajasthan (about 40%), while the urban vegetarians are slightly more in Punjab and Rajasthan than in Gujarat. All the three states, however, are close to the centres of the Indus culture.

As in the case of the cow's sanctity, vegetarianism seems to have received reinforcements in the course of history through sectarian movements like Vaishnavism. The present campaign in its favour probably is so successful, because it is waged by Brahmins and other vegetarian high-castes who now are the dominant strata of society.

Vegetarianism among tribals has reached its apex in the Toda of the Nilgiri who 70 years ago still ate *sambhar* (*Cervus unicolor*) and an occasional calf (RIVERS 1906: 274, 432), but now are pure vegetarians. The neighbouring Kota who were known for omnivorousness and carrion eating, in the Kollimalai village, as I could observe, gave up that habit and are on the way to vegetarianism. Buddhism may also work in the same direction, forbidding, for example the Sherdukpen of N.E.F.A. from eating their domestic animals (SHARMA 1961: 38).

b) Totemism

Rather than to deference in the above mentioned form, more often tribal food avoidances are due to the respect for the totem species. Ideally the totem is respected and therefore not eaten. Where the totem is eaten, it is likely that it has not always been so, as there are many instances of recent disappearance of the totemic avoidance or of some accommodation. In most cases of vital food totems, like rice or salt, however, restrictions may always have been limited to certain varieties or circumstances (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 447; ELWIN 1942: 82).

As the literature often does not distinguish between not killing, not eating or not otherwise using, it is difficult to ascertain, when totemism gives rise to food avoidances. Where the term "respect towards" or "not injuring" the totem animal is used, it has been assumed *cum grano salis* that it is not eaten. In the case of plants only specifically mentioned avoidances have been counted, as it seems possible to respect a plant and not destroy it, yet eating its leaves and fruits.

Totemic avoidances comprise practically the whole fauna and flora of India. About 150 different animals or groups of animals and 65 different species of plants or groups of plants have to be abstained from by descent groups. In addition, totemic avoidances may concern parts of animals, milk and milk products, honey, salt and culinary preparations, like a cake of *mahua* flowers (*Bassia latifolia*). Finally the circumstances under which animals or plants present themselves (as a parallel to the circumstantial avoidances to be discussed in chapter 5) may decide the abstention. A sept of the Dravidian Kamar, for instance, is forbidden to eat animals, birds and fish that died of natural death (DUBE 1951: 71) and an Oraon sept, another Dravidian tribe of the Deccan, may not eat plants that grow in ponds (RISLEY 1892/2: app. 114).

Among avoided totems the tiger, the cobra and the tortoise clearly emerge as champions. Out of 53 tribes with reported totemic prohibitions 22 avoid tiger totems. 21 tribes have descent groups avoiding *nāg*, usually identified with the cobra.

The striking appearance of an animal, this time not mingled with fear, seems to be responsible for the preference for tortoise totems. The tortoise is avoided for totemic reasons among 20 tribes. The very slowness of the animal, its longevity and its protective carapace may be the reason, why the tortoise inspires confidence and usually figures as a rescuer in totemic myths.

Bovines are next in importance on the list of totemic avoidances. Abstentions may be distinguished according to wild or domestic species, according to sex and even according to colour. A Muria clan (Madhya Pradesh), though called after the tiger, does not eat the buffalo, as the members consider themselves to be betrayed by the tiger who ate their ancestor (ELWIN 1947: 66). This is one of the quite frequent cases, when totemic name and avoidance do not coincide.

Goat and sheep, sometimes including their milk, wild and domestic dog, as well as wild boar and domestic pig are other conspicuous totemic prohibitions. The latter pair of totems, interestingly enough, is found mostly among Austroasiatic tribes and among tribes speaking tongues of the Tibeto-Burmese language family, who have no prejudice against these animals and where pork is greatly appreciated as food by those without totemic prohibitions.

Even pork-clan members find it hard to abjure pork altogether. Thus pork-clans of the Austroasiatic Mahili and of the neighbouring Dravidian Oraon only throw away the head of the pig and eat the rest of the animal (RISLEY 1892/2: 40; S. C. ROY 1915: 331).

Bird totems are avoided among 27 tribes. Gallinaceous birds dominate, i.e. peacock, wild and domestic fowl, quail and pheasant. It is perhaps significant for the frequent choice of the former three species as totems that the peacock is of Indian origin and the wild ancestor of the domestic fowl is still to be found in India (BROTHWELL 1969: 55). Sparrows and crows, geese and ducks, pigeons as well as rapacious birds are also abstained from as totems by several tribes.

18 tribes have descent groups abstaining from fish totems, the most popular being the eel (*Garra lamta* Ham. Buch.) and the sal (*Ophicephalus marulis*).

Contrary to other parts of the world, West Africa, for instance, (EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI 1967) vegetable totems are very frequent in India among tribes and also among those castes who still possess totemic rules. Vegetable totems are avoided among 30 tribes. The majority of these are trees, a fact which seems to be connected with the general reverential attitude towards trees in India and in particular towards trees of the ficus genus. The avoided part usually is the fruit. The single most popular tree product abstained from as a totem is the areca-nut (*Areca catechu*). As in the case of animal totems, where the striking and not the insignificant species are preferably chosen, so the choice of the areca-nut probably is due to its economic and cultural importance as an ingredient in *pan*, a symbol of luxury and well-being. It may be significant that most of the tribes with areca-nut totems are Austroasiatic, since the tree probably has been introduced into India from farther East (MILLOT 1965: 119) ².

² In rare cases totemism provides positive dietary prescriptions. A Santal sept, for instance, is not allowed to throw away any part of the animal sacrificed to their clan god (CULSHAW 1949: 76) and the Sema Naga even have an "eat everything" clan in distinction to most other clans which observe food taboos (HUTTON 1968: 123).

Infringements of totemic prohibitions are believed to entail supernatural punishment, main sanctions being blindness, skin disease and leprosy.

Most totemic prohibitions last for life, but women who change clan through marriage, may henceforth have to follow their husband's abstentions, their own becoming optional. A Muria wife, for instance, is free to eat her father's totem, but before doing so, she offers a few drops of liquor to her ancestors (ELWIN 1947: 67).

c) Deification

If man possesses what JUNG has called "a natural religious function", this function must be specially well developed in India, judging by the number of human and super-human beings, animals, plants, objects, heavenly bodies and geographical features that receive divine honours.

Even totemism in India reveals this tendency to worship. Whereas elsewhere totems are mostly distinct from gods, in India they often become totem-gods. The tiger, the cobra, the tortoise and bovines, most frequently chosen as totems, also emerge as typical totem-gods. Deification of the totem, however, need not depend on the species, but rather on the reverential attitude of the tribe, as for instance, the Bhil who worship every totem including plants and lowly animals (HERMANN 1964: 272).

Totemism clearly is a tribal feature and totems among Hindu castes probably are survivals of a more primitive past. The deification of animals, however, though also a tribal characteristic, has been incorporated in Hinduism and the cultural importance of animal-gods among Hindus rivals and perhaps even exceeds that among tribals.

Animals occupy a particularly favourable position as claimants to divine honours. They may be separate gods or they may be associated with other gods as their representatives, incarnations, vehicles or protégés.

Apart from being totems and totem gods, *bagh* (the tiger) and *nāg* (the cobra) also are frequently gods in their own right among Indian tribes and castes. No instance of a separate tortoise-god has come to my attention, but the Malapantaram of Kerala avoid the tortoise as well as the white monkey in order not to displease their gods (IYER 1937/1: 113).

Not only striking species, but practically any animal may become sacred. The Kaikari of Madhya Pradesh, as worshippers of *Khandoba* (a warrior incarnation of *Śiva*) hold the dog especially sacred, since it is associated with this god (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 301). The North Indian Aheriya worship *Mekhasura* in the form of a ram (CROOKE 1968/2: 225) and for Khasa castes, a Hinduized tribe of the Himalayan foothills, the sheep is sacred (MAJUMDAR 1962: 267-268). The Saora's red ant-god is believed to take home with one family of a village, which then abstains from eating red ants (ELWIN 1955: 95)³.

³ Not all animal gods are necessarily avoided. The Saora apparently eat their other animal gods. There also may be exceptional cases of ceremonial eating of totems or totem-gods.

In the animal realm, the bovines enjoy the widest worship. The Hindu veneration of the cow has taken root among tribal communities and is still spreading. The veneration of the cow, I believe, has a long and complex history. It might have arisen out of the merging of two cultural traditions: 1. the respect of pastoral cattle keepers for their animals – and in India pastoralists have lived since neolithic times (ALLCHIN 1963) and still live; 2. the cult of female goddesses associated with female animals of sedentary communities from the Mediterranean area to India. In the course of history the sanctity of the cow in India seems to have received various reinforcements through the rise of the *Krishna* cult, through Muslim invasion, when Hindus rallied around the cow as a bulwark of defence (LAL 1967: 13–34) and through GANDHI who used the cow as an ideological focus in his campaign against the British (HARRIS 1966: 58).

Hindu influence and cow protection, of course, are strongest in North and peninsular India and are mainly felt among tribes of that area, but even the Assamese Boro now prescribe a purification for the killer of a cow (SIGER 1956: 62) and it goes without saying that cows are not eaten in this tribe.

Abstentions from killing and eating cows extend to buffalo-cows and to male animals. The Thakur also abstain from the *nilgai* (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), because they feel that it belongs to the cow category (CHAPEKAR 1960: 96), as its name meaning “blue cow” suggests. The Khasa's nearly total abstention from cow's milk prescribed by their god *Mahasu*, may be a variation and extension of Hindu beliefs. There are, however, tribal avoidances of bovines probably independent from Hindu influence, when they stress the sanctity of bulls, bisons or buffaloes rather than of cows. The Banjara of Mysore, for instance, worship the bull (CROOKE 1968/2: 235), the Malayaran and Paliyan of Kerala hold the bison sacred (IYER 1937/1: 196; 1939/2: 79) and the Ullatan of Kerala would annoy their gods by drinking buffalo milk, but have no such taboo on cow's milk (IYER 1939/2: 219). The best known example, of course, are the pastoral Toda's sacred buffaloes and dairy cult. Not only the animals may not be eaten, but also the milk of the most sacred *ti*-buffaloes is forbidden to all (RIVERS 1906: 102, 240) and limitations apply to the use of other milk.

Though many trees are worshipped in tribal India as among Hindus, this does not normally call for any permanent abstention. The only vegetables forbidden by divine order seem to be gram and *chama* (*Panicum miliare*), which may not be eaten by the Urali of Kerala for fear of incurring the wrath of a sylvan deity (IYER 1939/2: 243).

d) Temporary Avoidances in Deference to Gods

While the preceding abstentions were practically all permanent, there also are temporary prohibitions of valued animal and vegetable foods.

Animals sacrificed to the gods are usually eaten by the community or at least their flesh is consumed, whereas for the head and other parts there may be special restrictions, as we shall see below (p. 403). This eating with the gods is one of the essential rites in tribal as well as in non-tribal religions.

As in Indian history the Aryan meat-eating priests gradually became Brahmin vegetarians, passing through the stage of eating meat only after sacrifice, so now many tribes eat domestic animals only after sacrifice. Not only among Hinduized tribes, but also among communities little affected by ideas of *ahimsa*, there may be a certain uneasiness about killing animals. This uneasiness seems to be due less to ethical motives than to the fear of offending the gods. The Mongoloid Lepcha eat only fowls without ceremony. Bulls, cows, pigs and goats are consumed only after sacrifice (SINGER 1967/1: 95). The Apa Tani of N.E.F.A., though appreciating dog meat, consider the dog a sacrificial animal and rarely eat it for the sake of meat (N.K.DAS 1947: 298).

While the raising of domestic animals seems to give man at least some right to them, wild animals are believed to belong to sylvan deities, which have to be propitiated before game can be consumed. The Kamar cut off the head of the animal hunted and offer it to the forest-god (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 328) and the Oraon of Chota Nagpur (Madhya Pr., Bihar), before eating game, sacrifice a red cock in atonement (S. C. ROY 1915: 166). For fear of the god's revenge, the hunter is often subject to various dietary and other prohibitions. He may be entirely forbidden to eat game killed by himself or he may have to observe this rule for the first 150 animals killed (HUTTON 1968: 77).

Everywhere in India as well as in many other parts of the world new crops must be abstained from until the "new eating" or "first fruit" ceremony has taken place. The offering of the first fruits combined with a temporary abstention has three purposes according to ELWIN (1955: 488): 1. the sacrifice acknowledges the overlordship of the gods and 2. it bargains protection of future harvest for the honour paid. In addition, 3. it assures that the gods never receive leavings (the typical Indian concept of leavings), which would happen, if men ate of a crop and on a later occasion offered the vegetable to the gods.

Such harvest festivals are held for all types of cultivated crops: cereals, oil-seeds, pulses, tubers, fruits, leaves, gourds and even for some wild fruits and flowers like mango and *mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*). Some tribes offer only a few crops to the gods; the Bison-horn Maria of Bastar (Madhya Pradesh), however, celebrate a festival preliminary to almost every act of gathering (GRIGSON 1949: 137). These temporary prohibitions as a rule are strictly observed. The Dravidian Maler, for instance, would prefer to starve rather than take out products of the field before offering them to their gods (VIDYARTHI 1963: 46).

The habit of the Sansi, a gipsy tribe of northern India, to spill the first mother's milk on the ground as an offering to Mother Earth (SINGH 1965: 201) may be considered a variation of the same religious practice.

Other temporary avoidances of valued food will be discussed below (pp. 403-406), as they mostly occur in concomitance with the avoidance of objectionable food.

2. Negative Attitude Towards Avoided Food

A potential food item may be refused because it is held to be dangerous, because it inspires disgust or because it is regarded as impure. Since the latter two reactions often coincide, they will be treated together.

a) Dangerous Food

One hundred and thirty odd species or groups of species, about one third of which are birds, may be avoided as dangerous. Parts of animals, dairy products, culinary preparations and circumstantial avoidances (p. 406) must be added to this number. The groupings may sometimes be very vast and heterogeneous due to global prohibitions of all tree-living animals, of all big animals, etc. Most of the foods of this category are supposed to harm by a magical process, i. e. the quality of the animal or of the plant (which may be its outward appearance, hidden characteristics, behaviour, or mode of death, etc.) are thought to be contagious and to pass into the eater or his offsprings. Prohibitions of this type have been particularly well studied among Naga tribes and the majority of the above bird-avoidances are found among them. Though there is less information about other communities, this probably does not mean that such avoidances are less frequent among them. Analogical thinking seems to be typical of populations living in a pre-scientific world. It is known to exist in tribes all over the world and it survives to some extent in non-tribal cultures. Thai villagers, for instance, avoid eating duck during feasts, as otherwise the guests would not come together again. The analogy giving rise to this assumption is based on the duck's unmotherly habit of ignoring its eggs (TAMBIAH 1969: 439). I have tried to show elsewhere (EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI 1975) that such reasoning also enters into the prescriptions of ayurvedic medicine as well as into the concept of purity and pollution. The belief in thermal qualities of food, one of the tenets of ayurvedic medicine, is found among tribals, but seems to be less developed than among caste-Hindus. Hindu influence, however, need not be present in the tribal beliefs of this type, since hot/cold ideas probably can be developed independently by different cultures and also exist among Assamese tribes little affected by Hinduism.

The dangers ascribed to food reveal areas of major concern. Women have to be specially protected. They are physically weaker and by extension are held to be weaker in all other respects and easier to be influenced. In their child-bearing quality they would be able to transmit undesired influences to the offsprings. For this reason, prohibitions for women, and above all for pregnant and nursing women, are particularly frequent. Old people, on the other hand, are less important to the community and therefore often may eat what they please.

Foods are avoided as dangerous, because their consumption would have an undesired effect either on the personality or on the physical well-

being, or else would have other unpleasant consequences. The following examples will make this clear:

Intelligence would be impaired by eating nightbirds like the owl (*Glaucopteryx cuculoides*, *G. radiata* and *G. bordiei*) and the nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*), which are idiots in the Sema Naga's eyes, as they prefer darkness to light (HUTTON 1968: 92). For fear of stimulating the libido the Naga tribes of Manipur prohibit male animals to girls, to women and even to young men (HODSON 1911: 184; HUTTON 1921: 92; MILLS 1937: 111). The serow (*Capricornis sumatraensis*) rarely sleeping in the same spot and chicken laying here and there may not be eaten by women lest they acquire similar habits (MILLS 1922: 77; HUTTON 1968: 95). In peninsular India generic prohibitions of meat during pollution periods, to be discussed below (pp. 404-405) are also due to its reputed passion-raising qualities. In order to prevent a negative influence on their children's character the Birhor of Chota-Nagpur do not give goat's milk to them, as this would make them quarrelsome (S. C. ROY 1925: 379). The Naga tribes eschew birds with screaming and scratching habits as well as "idle" birds, since they would transmit these traits. As the Naga set great stake on thriftiness and good house-keeping, they forbid their women to eat animals reputed to be wasteful, like monkeys prone to stealing from granaries (MILLS 1937: 110).

As a wide range of pathological conditions may befall the healthy by eating the wrong food, therefore the sick, the pregnant and the nursing mother have to be even more careful as to what they eat. Diseases of the head, the skin, the digestive tract, the reproductive organs, as well as malformations, etc. are all hoped to be prevented by avoiding certain foods. Oraon women, for instance, do not eat leafy vegetables (cold) during the later stage of pregnancy, since the baby would catch cold (SARKER et al. 1955: 48). The Birhor, as well as Naga tribes, are preoccupied with youthful appearance and avoid brains of animals or white-headed animals and the like, in order not to grow prematurely bald or grey (S. C. ROY 1925: 378; HODSON 1911: 182; MILLS 1922: 75; HUTTON 1968: 93). The Paniyan of South India, on the other hand, know how to prevent these undesired symptoms by eating land crabs (THURSTON 1909/6: 59).

A particular danger is thought to lurk in eggs, as well as in their producers. The life force hidden in eggs is supposed to act on fertility and libido and hence eggs, fowls as well as other birds are more often forbidden to women than to men. The Korku wife (an Austroasiatic tribe) may not even prepare eggs for her husband (FUCHS 1969). The Ao Naga (SMITH 1925: 113) and the Muthuvar of South India forbid eggs to women from puberty onwards. Besides, an antagonism is believed to exist between the foetus, eggs and birds. For this reason probably, Ho women do not eat jungle fowl, as well as eggs of birds and fish from pregnancy till the child toddles (MAJUMDAR 1950: 181). Hindu women I found to have similar apprehensions.

Food is believed to menace the life of the unborn child and avoidances for fear of abortion are common in tribal as well as in Hindu India. A typical example is the Tamil pregnant women's avoidance of papaya (*Carica papaya*)

which also extends to tribals of that state. Association with untimely death explains why the meat of animals which died while giving birth, died by drowning or killed by wild beasts is shunned by all, but in particular by women.

Other foods would cause ill-luck in enterprises. The Thakur of Sahyadri, for instance, avoid eating sweet oil and onions with venison, as this would spoil their success in hunting (CHAPEKAR 1960: 170-171); while the Kuki, a Mongoloid tribe, hunt and eat venison only once a year, since otherwise their crops would be injured (J. C. DAS 1937: 441). This seems to be an interesting case illustrating the passage from the hunting to the agricultural stage. Besides, animals with big canines, curious beasts or animals of unknown quality are believed to harbour a vague danger, just as they may be considered disgusting or unclean. Meat in general may be viewed with distrust. This probably explains why many communities drastically restrict flesh foods for women. Even the Mongoloid tribes, great consumers of meat, are no exception to this. The Mishmi of N.E.F.A., for instance, forbid all meat of big animals to women, as it would render them barren, allowing them only birds, fish and field rats, and perhaps pork (MILLS 1952: 4; BARUAH 1960: 37).

Apart from medical counter-indications, plants are rarely felt to be dangerous. The Kharia, however, who follow the custom of ceremonially marrying trees (as various other tribes and castes), dare not eat fruits from an unmarried tree, since these would be inauspicious like children born out of wedlock (ROY and ROY 1937: 383-384). The Dafla of N.E.F.A. hold the banyan tree (*Ficus bengalensis*) to be wholly evil and would not even touch its leaves. This latter example is one of the many cultural opposites between Assam and the rest of India, as to Hindus and many tribals the banyan tree and its products are particularly sacred and auspicious. Trees of the ficus genus, as we have seen above, were favourite plant totems.

b) Disgusting and Impure Food

The boundary between a disgust reaction towards a potential food item and its refusal due to impurity is difficult to draw. Often the two coincide, as practically all foods considered to be impure by a certain community would also fill it with disgust; but not all disgusting things need be held defiling for ritual purposes in a given group. Disgust may be a personal reaction, but more often, especially in traditional societies, it is culturally determined. The cultural factors become apparent in the differences of opinion between neighbouring groups of somewhat different cultures or between sections of one group. Also children who have not yet learned the group standards often eat what is shunned by adults.

Every community makes a choice as to what is to be considered edible in its surroundings and what is not. Usually the more primitive a group is, the wider is the range of different items eaten.

Civilization may increase the quantity and perhaps the quality of food,

but it restricts variety. Through cultural selection of food, people become unaccustomed to the taste of the neglected items. Certain strong tastes or rather smells, especially of animal foods, may become unacceptable and disgusting for life, if one does not learn to eat the food in question from childhood. Women, not only in tribal India, are more delicate in their choice of food than men. This may be due to an inborn greater sensitivity, but certainly also to a difference of social pressure. In the West, society is more permissive to girls (WALLEN 1943: 296-297), in tribal India and elsewhere it may even encourage or prescribe greater fastidiousness, since, as we have seen above, many potentially disgusting items might also contain some dangerous quality.

One hundred and ten odd species or groups of species are mentioned as disgusting and (or) impure. In reality this category includes the largest variety of foods. The relatively small number given is due to the fact that often the avoidances are so many, that it is preferable to reverse the perspective and state the few foods (especially of animal origin) eaten, rather than the many abstained from.

The following reasons explain, why a potential food item is refused as disgusting or impure:

1. Real or presumed eating habits of the animal seem to be the major stigma. Reproaches of this type are levied against the domestic pork and fowl, reputed to eat excrements. Their wild counterparts, on account of their "purer" feeding habits are more easily acceptable as food. This distinction between wild and domestic species may even apply to rats. Thus the adult Baiga of Madhya Pradesh eat 21 different varieties of rats, but not the house-rats (ELWIN 1939: 52), probably because they feed on domestic garbage. All carnivora and scavengers are said to be avoided because of their food and aversion is particularly great, if the animals happen to eat human beings. This explains the frequent abstention from large felines, as well as from rapacious birds. Also refusal of vermin falls under this category, since vermin is supposed to feed on dirt and to live in dirt.

2. Association with death is another powerful deterrent. All meat comes from dead animals and strictly speaking it is carrion. Therefore, apart from ethical motives, purists among tribals are beginning to avoid it. Association also makes the Lhota Naga abstain from the red-headed trogon (*Harpactes erythrocephalus*), supposed to have got its brilliant colour from human blood, and from the green magpie (*Cissa chinensis*), said to frequent graves (MILLS 1922: 76).

3. Association with bodily waste is another source of aversion. Kills of animals, though occasionally eaten, are considered to be impure by general agreement. Apart from being carrion, they are also leavings. Leavings are thought to retain the possible dangerous qualities of the eater and to be defiled by contact with the eater's saliva. Contact with saliva, i. e. eating off the same plate, only in rare cases may not be disreputable. Thus the marriage ritual of the Medar (Mysore), as of many castes, includes a ceremony during which the couple eats food in the same dish (NANJUNDAYYA 1931/4: 195). The subordinate position of the wife may also be symbolized by her "privi-

lege" to eat her husband's leavings, as among the Juang and some Hindu castes. The Juang husband, however, would eat only his mother's leavings, showing thereby his respect for her (ELWIN 1948: 49). Association with semen – they say "the smell of semen" – makes the Lepcha abstain from uncastrated pigs (SINGER 1967: 183). Milk and eggs, as coming from an animal body, may equally be avoided as excrements.

4. Habits violating one's sense of decency, as licking over genitals or organs of excretion, may make animal disgusting or impure. The Sikligar, a gipsy tribe of the Punjab, affirm to avoid cats and dogs for this reason (SINGH 1966: 85), which of course rejoins association with bodily waste.

5. Strong offensive smells may disqualify food. The Sema Naga, though not particularly dainty in their choice of food, at harvest time or during dyeing and pot-making, when greater ritual purity is required, abstain from food with strong smells like certain meats, onions and smell-beans (HUTTON 1968: 65).

6. Unknown and unusual characteristics rouse suspicion. Strange animals and, more rarely, strange plants may be declared dangerous, disgusting or impure. I agree with the interpretation MARY DOUGLAS (1966: 54–56) proposes for the abominations of the Leviticus. Human beings have a tendency to divide nature into well-defined categories and animals violating these categories, as the pangolin or the bat, are uncanny not only in India. I should like to extend this uncanniness and impurity to the unknown in general, which appears several times in the course of this paper. During certain periods calling for ritual purity the Khasi and Lhota Naga of Assam may not even eat and talk with strangers (GURDON 1907: 158; MILLS 1922: 143). Among Naga tribes also wild animals are considered impurer than their domestic counterparts, probably because their habits are less well known; whereas Hinduized tribes, though not free from the fear of the unknown, prefer the meat of wild animals, because of their "cleaner" feeding habits.

All the above negative categories apply to disgusting as well as to impure foods. The passage from avoidance due to disgust to avoidance due to fear of pollution therefore does not primarily depend on the food, but requires a preoccupation with ritual status. The magico-religious concept of purity and pollution seems to exist everywhere in the world at a certain level of civilization. It is found in some form or other among all Indian tribes, but some aspects of it have been developed to a much greater extent in Hinduism, which in turn increased the importance of the concept among Hinduized tribes.

While the eating of disgusting food would only be unpleasant to the eater and in extreme cases would make him vomit, the eating of impure food would be a social offence. The eater of impure food becomes polluted and, since pollution is held to be highly contagious, it could spread to the community. Pollution is thought to impair resistance against disease and success in enterprises, besides it would cause the wrath of the gods and make any relation with them impossible.

Nearly all foods declared to be impure in tribal India fall in one of the above categories. The impurity of beef among Hinduized tribes, however, is an exception, since it is derived from the animal's sanctity. There are some tribes who outwardly confirm to Hindu standards by not eating certain bovines, but for opposite reasons. The South Indian Kadar, for instance, consider the bison and by extension the domestic buffalo to be unclean (EHRENFELS 1952: 180). The Mala Malasar of Tamilnad do not eat cow's and buffalo's meat. Their abstention may also be dictated more by a negative feeling than by reverence, since they even refuse milk and milk products and would not touch cowdung (NAMBIAR 1964: 145).

Another exception are stimulants like alcoholic beverages and hot spices. They may be considered impure, though they will hardly inspire disgust. As a rule, Indian tribes are great consumers of spices and alcoholic beverages, but when particular purity is required, there is evidence that these have to be given up. The Toda priest, for instance, may never eat chillies (RIVERS 1906: 103) and the Oraon shaman, the *Ojha*, has to lead a pure life and must do without meat and alcohol (GUPTA 1960: 314). Some tribes feel strongly about liquor. The Myasa Beda of Mysore not only will not touch toddy, they even refuse to sit on mats made from leaves of the toddy palm (THURSTON 1909/1: 184). Parallel to their campaign against meat-eating Hindu reformers also try to abolish liquor among tribes and in section of the Bhil (AURORA 1968: 26), the Gond (MOHAN 1963: 342), the Kora (H. C. DAS 1964: 52), the Meithei (HODSON 1908: 47), the Koch (BURLING 1960: 290) and the Rabha (RAYCHAUDHURI 1970: 97) they are said to have been successful.

There is a good deal of agreement about the above negative categories between Indian tribes as well as between tribes and caste-Hindus. Differences usually only appear when deciding what item should be included in the disgusting and impure category and what item might still be tolerated as food. Often such differences of opinion divide the stricter and the laxer sections of a community, the stricter usually agreeing with the Hindus.

With regard to beef, pork and milk, however, opinions clash. In most of tribal India beef and pork are, or used to be, eaten with relish, while Hindus abhor them. The contrast is most striking between tribes speaking Tibeto-Burmese and Austroasiatic languages and high-caste Hindus, while other tribes and low castes occupy intermediate positions. Without the belief in the sanctity of the cow or the deference to Hindu feelings, in fact, there would be no good reason for abstaining from the tasty meat of a herbivorous animal.

As to the pig, the animal is despised by orthodox Hindus, but praised for its meat especially in Assam, in East Asia and in some Pacific islands. This curious cultural contradiction may have several reasons:

1. The animal may have been domesticated in South-East Asia and food known to a community for a long time, its own food, usually acquires a particular aura of prestige;
2. the pastoralists' prejudice against the animal of a sedentary people is not much felt in the area, except in parts of Indonesia and India;
3. the inhabitants of that part of the world seem to be somewhat less

purity minded than those of the Middle East and India ⁴. While in northern and peninsular India the main reproach against the pig is its excrement eating habits, among the Apatani of N.E.F.A., where the pigsty literally serves as the toilet, pork is considered a delicacy (N.K.DAS 1947: 298).

With regard to milk, the picture is reversed. Many tribes have a prejudice against milk, while Hindus praise it as the best of foods. Again there is a continuum between tribes and castes and I found vestiges of a negative attitude towards milk and milk products also among low castes of Tamilnad. Not only temporary abstentions during pollution periods were longer and more numerous among low castes (EICHINGER 1973c: 11), there even were low caste women always refusing milk. (For details on tribal refusal of milk see SIMOONS' exhaustive study of 1970.) Avoidance of milk appears to be an elemental human reaction against a food physiologically meant only for the suckling. Cultural training is necessary to overcome the disgust and even to digest milk. It seems to me that lactase deficiency alone, though real, could only partly explain tribal refusal of milk, because milk use is rapidly spreading among groups who a few decades ago still avoided it and because Indians appreciating milk also are lactase deficient without being aware of it due to the small quantities normally consumed. I was informed at the National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, that persons who showed signs of intolerance at the intake of 50 g dry skimmed milk, lost these signs, if the same quantity was given in small doses spread over the day. As to the knowledge of milking in India, the Aryans certainly did much to promote it, but I suspect that also the Dravidians knew how to milk, judging from the linguistic evidence that in Tamil there are Dravidian words for "to milk" (*kara*) as well as for various milk products, while for most other practices connected with Brahminism Sanskrit terms are used.

3. Ambivalent Attitude Towards Avoided Food

A small group of avoided foods gives rise to ambivalent feelings, i. e. the potential food item refused is at the same time sacred and accursed.

Ambivalence may be found in totemic avoidances. Often the totem is not only forbidden to be killed and eaten, but also to be touched, which may reveal respect mingled with fear. The ambivalence appears stronger in the Gond's and the Bhil's attitude towards their cat totem. They revere the wild and the domestic cat, but when a cat inadvertently enters their houses, they chase it away and they would eat nothing touched by a cat (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/2: 286; 3: 68; BURADKAR 1940: 128). Among the Kamar, the Muria and the Pardhan, all Dravidian tribes, the goat clans' refusal of

⁴ This mainly applies to the peoples of Mongoloid stock. The Papuas may be considered even more pollution-conscious than the Indians and yet they greatly appreciate the pig, perhaps because in New Guinea the choice of animal food is limited. On the subject of the pig see also SIMOONS (1967).

mutton is not only dictated by respect for the animal, but also by aversion for it, since they throw away the pots touched by a goat and would not use water from which a goat drank (HIVALE 1946: 33; ELWIN 1947: 66; DUBE 1951: 71).

Ambivalence also appears in the attitude towards sacrificial meat. Such food has been sanctified by the act of sacrifice, but it has also acquired a particular magical power, which may be dangerous. Therefore normally only the animal's flesh in the narrowest sense is eaten by the community, while the head, interior organs and extremities are reserved for certain persons. The head of animals sacrificed or ceremonially hunted, or at least the brain, are the prerogative of the priest who alone is supposed to possess the *mana* to cope with the danger. This happens all over tribal India, among Hindus who still practise animal sacrifice as well as in many other parts of the world. Also the liver, the legs, the heart, the lungs and the entrails may be set apart. This particular attention paid to the head, the brain, the liver, etc. is not surprising. Due to the vital importance of these organs, magical power has been attributed to them throughout recorded history and beyond, if we remember the Babylonian and Etruscan hepatoscopy, archeological evidence for ritual eating of the brain or the practice of head-hunting.

Frequently women, or at least pregnant and menstruating women sometimes with their husbands, are barred from partaking in a sacrificial meal or are denied a share of animals ritually hunted. These prohibitions seem to have a double purpose:

On the one hand, since the food is dangerous, women as the weaker vessel and in their child-bearing quality have to be protected from it. If they ate such spiritually dangerous food, they would fall ill. On the other hand, since the food is sacred, it has to be protected from impurity, and women are held to be impurer than men, because of the pollution inherent in menstruation, delivery and, to some extent, in pregnancy. If impure persons ate animals ceremonially hunted, the community would have no more success in hunting. If a pregnant Juang woman (Orissa) for instance, ate of a sacrificial animal, "the gods would go deaf" (ELWIN 1948: 65).

Restrictions of sacrificial food may also have other purposes. Family and clan sacrifices are often reserved for members only. This may be to assure the benefit of the sacrifice for the group concerned. Inversely, animals sacrificed by Nagas in order to rise in status are almost invariably tabooed to the sacrificer himself, perhaps as an act of self-restraint and to express gratitude for the merit obtained through the sacrifice (MILLS 1922: 138, 141; 1926: 258, 377; 1937: 192; STONOR 1950: 10).

4. Simultaneous Avoidance of Valued and of Objectionable Food

In the preceding chapters we have been separately discussing positive, negative and ambivalent attitudes towards avoided foods. Food avoidances, however, have a tendency to accumulate in certain situations. The various

items which have to be simultaneously abstained from may partly be valued food and partly be food held to be not quite pure or safe enough for the occasion or the person. It may not always be easy to separate the categories and sometimes the same avoidance may assume a different meaning according to the community. Abstention from such a spectrum of foods is required mainly during periods of pollution and during temporary as well as permanent austerities.

In tribal as well as in Hindu India the girl at puberty must abstain from a number of food items: some are considered impure and others too pure. All over India, except Assam, she frequently has to avoid all animal food, or at least meat and fish, since the consumption of such impure items would increase her impurity. The Muthuvar girl, for instance, may not eat meat and fish for three months after puberty (EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI 1973a: 171). In Assam, where meat in general has no such negative connotation, at least meat from animal kills or other impure and spiritually dangerous food, may have to be avoided by the Sema Naga boy at puberty (HUTTON 1968: 238). As to the abstention from pure food, tribes who share the Hindu high regard for milk, would consider it an insult, if a girl at puberty ate pure dairy products. The Nilgiri tribes as well as the Hinduized Mahadev Koli (GHURVE 1957: 55) abstain from these items also during ordinary menstruation.

Pregnancy is mainly a vulnerable condition and the majority of foods prohibited to the pregnant are considered to be dangerous. But there also is pollution in this exceptional state and therefore sacred food may have to be avoided in order not to offend the gods.

During birth pollution stress is laid on the prohibition of foods considered to be harmful, but also impure as well as pure foods may have to be avoided. As a general rule, a very sparing diet is prescribed for the mother up to about 2-3 weeks after delivery. She may even have to fast from all food and water for two days, as among the Bhumij of Chota Nagpur (GOSH 1916: 268) or for three days, as among the Kawar of Madhya Pradesh (RUSSEL 1916/3: 369). Probably as a vestige of *couvade* the Pulayan father (Kerala) also has to observe a partial fast for a week (IYER 1909/1: 108; 1937/2: 166). There is a striking agreement all over India, with the exception of Assam, on the undesirability of non-vegetarian food during birth pollution. Since purity considerations are less apparent than health reasons, usually the abstentions are motivated by complaints, which would befall the mother or the breast-feeding baby, if such food was eaten. The real reason, however, seems to me, that non-vegetarian food is held to be impure and stimulating and therefore a counter-indication during pollution. Occasionally also salt, another "stimulant" may have to be temporarily given up after delivery just as at puberty and during death pollution.

Purity considerations even play a part in establishing the mother's diet in Assam. Not all meat, as in the rest of India, but at least "bad meat" may be prohibited. Also wild vegetables, considered less pure than own produces, may not be eaten (HUTTON 1968: 233). Long abstentions from dairy products by Nilgiri tribes as well as by the Yerukala of Kerala (RAGHAVIAH

1962: 429) are examples of pure food forbidden to the impure parturient. Birth pollution with connected avoidances may extend to the birth of domestic animals.

Death pollution is the severest of all situational pollutions calling for the abstention from pure and valued as well as from impure foods. Again the most widely avoided items are meat, fish and eggs. For example on a death in a Birhor *tanda* (food-group) all members must abstain from meat for a week. If they took meat before the purification ceremony has taken place, it would be "like eating the flesh of the deceased" (S. C. ROY 1925: 520). Partial fasts with abstentions from praised items like milk and ghee are prescribed for the mourners among the pastoral Toda (RIVERS 1906: 370-372). Also the abstention from staple foods like rice, auspicious items like turmeric and luxuries like sweets and betel frequently are required as an expression of mourning. On days commemorating the death of family members similar restrictions may be observed. No death pollution for domestic animals has come to my attention, but mourning for the totem species is attested in many tribes. The tiger sept of the Dravidian Agaria (ELWIN 1942: 83) and the Mongoloid Kachari (ENDLE 1911: 25), for instance, mourn the death of a tiger by fasting.

Apart from the above involuntary or situational pollutions, impurity incurred by a person's acts may also be atoned by various abstentions.

All abstentions during pollution periods contain an element of austerity, but there are also austerities without pollution. Austerities as a means to achieve certain ends are known from all over the world. They are thought to work either directly by increasing one's spiritual and physical power or indirectly by impressing the gods and almost obliging them to grant their favours. But while the present-day Christians and Mohammedans, when fasting, only sacrifice their appetite and gourmandise, in tribal communities of India and elsewhere, as well as among Hindus, austerities are inextricably linked with purity scruples, in order not to give offence to the purity-minded gods.

One of the most typical austerities is fasting. Depriving oneself of food constitutes a sacrifice, which is hoped to win the god's favour. Many personal as well as communal enterprises and ceremonies are preceded by fasts. As a rule, the pujari and the shaman fast before and till the conclusion of the ceremonies conducted by them and mostly abstentions are also required of the community. Periods of initiation into the Lingayat sect among the Badaga of the Nilgiri (THURSTON 1909/1: 91) or of learning the art of divination among the Bhil (SHAN 1964: 86) require abstentions from food. The Oraon bridal couple fasts until the wedding ceremony is over (S. C. ROY 1915: 166) and all Naga feasts of merit include dietary restrictions. In addition, war, hunting, fishing, agricultural operations and other economic activities like honey collecting, dyeing, pot-making, thatching a roof, installing a hearth stone, etc. likewise call for austerities in order to assure the success of the enterprise.

The purity element in austerities becomes apparent, when we consider that practically all temporary abstentions from food are accompanied by sexual abstinence, where the double purpose: self-denial and rise in purity

level is particularly evident⁵. Besides, fasts lasting more than a few hours, rarely are total fasts and the items, which have to be abstained from, often are objectionable from the point of view of purity. Examining the foods temporarily avoided by tribals on these occasions, one is struck by the fact how many of them would never be acceptable to Hindus for purity reasons. Even the tribes of Assam who culturally belong to a world different from the rest of India during austerities may proscribe the same foods. On such important occasions they, for instance, abstain from animal-kills, dog-meat or vermin, all impure by general agreement.

Similarities in behaviour in this context seem to be dictated by magico-religious beliefs, which communities may have in common, no matter what their particular culture may be. Cultural differences between Assam and the rest of India, however, appear in generic prohibitions of non-vegetarian food. While during important enterprises the tribes of the Deccan may avoid all meat, fish and eggs, Assamese tribes sometimes only forbid meat and allow fish. Besides their temporary abstention from meat may be an austerity without overtones of purity. At harvest time the Sema Naga are subject to various abstentions, but have to eat pork (HUTTON 1968: 223), which would be quite an inconceivable item of diet during ritual fasts in the rest of India.

Temporary abstentions prescribed for ordinary people under special circumstances have their counterpart in permanent abstentions required of distinguished individuals. The Naga chief, for instance, always is forbidden "good food and bad language" (HODSON 1911: 183) and the first sower and reaper among the same tribe has to lead such an exemplary life, as far as diet is concerned, that either a naturally fastidious person is selected for the office, or he is changed every couple of years, so that his food taboos may not become too great a burden on him (HUTTON 1921: 189; 1968: 217). Also the Saora shaman has permanent restrictions and never may eat entrails, lips and tongues of animals, and in particular no feet of pigs and fowls (ELWIN 1955: 141-142). These above prescription for distinguished individuals again seem to have the double purpose of stressing self-restraint and purity.

5. Circumstantial Avoidances

Food may be avoided not because of any shortcomings in itself, but because of the polluting circumstances, under which it presents itself. Practically all food, except raw provisions, is subject to pollution in tribal India, but Hindu influence has introduced a certain difference in the pollutability of food, as we shall see below.

⁵ How tenacious such beliefs are may be seen in the rules for professional soccer players in Italy for instance. Sexual abstinence is required during the months of training and several days before the weekly game. Alcohol, tobacco, pork, etc. are permanently forbidden. Of course all restrictions are officially motivated by medical reasons.

The following remarks about pollution-fear among Indian tribals also more or less apply to Hindus. There may only be a difference in emphasis; in some cases tribal fears are stronger than Hindu feelings and in others it is the reverse. As we have discussed above (p. 399) persons, animals, plants or objects may be intrinsically impure or become impure through association with waste-products of the body, with death, etc. Human beings, as everything else, may be temporarily or permanently impure. Permanent impurity is a relative one, since it applies to an individual or to groups with respect to others, as for instance women with respect to men. Human beings, contrary to animals, plants, etc. can be polluted not only involuntarily by birth, menstruation and death, but also voluntarily through acts condemned by society. Such polluting acts may be the eating of forbidden food, the committing of adultery or intercourse with a ritually lower person, the killing of human beings or of animals tabooed, etc. Sanctions for such polluting acts sometimes are severe. Thus, if a Kadugolla man of Mysore eats forbidden food, he must pay a fine and his tongue is slightly branded, but if a woman does, she is outcasted (NANJUNDAYYA 1931/3: 230).

No matter how impurity has been contracted, it is infectious and one of the principal vectors is food. Pollution may enter into otherwise unobjectionable food through the cooking process. Therefore care must be taken by whom the meal is prepared. Practically all Indian tribes, just like the Negroes, for instance, exclude the menstruating, the parturient and the mourner from cooking. Only a few less pollution-conscious tribes of Mongoloid stock, as the Daffa (SHUKLA 1959: 67), the Konyak Naga (FÜRER-HAIMENDORF 1969: 66) and the Tharu (SRIVASTAVA 1958: 117, 290) allow their menstruating women to cook; but in the latter case, pollution practices have recently been introduced. Reports that a few tribes of the Deccan do not observe certain pollution periods are doubtful and may apply only to isolated individuals. For instance, I found the usual pollution rules among the Irula who were said not to have any rigid menstrual pollution (LUIZ 1962: 55). Abstentions from handling food during pollution periods vary greatly, but are no longer than the corresponding periods of time among Hindus of Tamilnad (EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI 1974: 158).

The permanent relative impurity of women explains, why milk may never be cooked by Toda women and why the Sansi, the Sikligar and other tribes and castes of the Punjab throw away food and water over which a woman has stepped (SINGH 1966: 85).

The mere presence of an impure person in the vicinity of food may be enough to contaminate it. Therefore polluted persons may not enter the kitchen. They have to prepare their own food outside the house or have to live on provisions brought by relatives. All aliens, being potentially impure, may be forbidden from entering the house. The Kachari, for instance, refuse the Kuki inside, while the Kacha Naga, whom they feel to be related, are allowed to eat and sleep in the porches of their houses (MILLS 1922: XIX). Hindus also often admit strangers only as far as their porches. The Son Koli of Maharashtra having eaten meat and eggs or drunk wine, must first cleanse

themselves by a ritual bath before entering the kitchen (PUNEKAR 1959: 59, 173). Since they are a community of fishermen, fish for them does not have the same negative image as other non-vegetarian food, but before entering the puja room, a bath is required also when eating fish.

The mode of death of an animal and the ritual of killing may disqualify meat. Rules about killing and killer, well known from Jews and Mohammedans, also exist in tribal India. The Kawar of Madhya Pradesh, for instance, refuse the meat of animals killed by Muslims (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 402), just as many caste-Hindus and Sikhs do. As *apotia* (bad) death of an animal may make its flesh unsuitable for consumption (p. 398), so *apotia* death of a person among the Naga may be thought to pollute all his belongings, so that his livestock and crops can no longer be used by others (MILLS 1922: 160-161). Here pollution fear seems to have reached its peak, which has no parallel in Hindu practices.

Also the purpose for which food was meant may leave a permanent stigma on it. Thus the Reddi, digging-stick cultivators of Andhra Pradesh, throw away the chicken sacrificed to appease evil spirits, while they eat animals sacrificed to benign spirits (FÜRER-HAIMENDORF 1945: 114). The Rengma Naga consider all fines for adultery as tainted. Therefore the remains of the feast given in atonement for adultery may not be brought into the village and must be thrown away (MILLS 1937: 149).

Impurity is thought to linger in containers. Earthenware due to its porosity is considered the most pollutable of materials. Not only direct contact irrevocably contaminates mud-pots, they also catch pollution over a distance. Therefore after periods of pollution many tribes, as well as Hindus, discard their earthen vessels. Frequently clan members also destroy these at the death of the totem animal for which they observe mourning. Less strict communities limit themselves to throwing away the earthen pot from which a polluted person ate. The Gallong of N.E.F.A. include persons bitten by snakes in the polluted category. Their cooking utensils are taboo to others and eventually have to be discarded also by the patient (SRIVASTAVA 1962: 104).

As a precaution, the impure often have to eat from leaf platters or must use metal plates. The menstruating woman among the Hinduized Mahadev Koli must eat from a bronze plate. A tinned plate would not be sufficiently pollution resistant (GHURYE 1957: 56), since resistance rises with economic value in Hindu eyes (gold or silver would be even better). In order to be on the safe side, as I have noticed, the Todas never drink in glass, earthenware or china vessels, but only in metal cups.

The vessel may also become defiled by the food cooked in it. Therefore the Saora priest is not allowed even to touch the pot where *ragi* (*Eleusine coracana*), forbidden to him, has been prepared (ELWIN 1955: 527-528) and the Aka woman of N.E.F.A. would get sores, if she ate from a pot, which once contained forbidden food (SINHA 1962: 37). Though the pollution concept has been institutionalized in Hinduism and rendered more complex, some pollution rules seem to be severer among tribals. For them pollution is all-pervading, since they have not invented subtle rules mitigating its impact,

like the pollution resistance of metal or silk. The Kadar throw away a big copper vessel, if the abhorred bison meat has been boiled in it (EHRENFELS 1952: 180), while Hindus would know ways of purifying it, for example by rinsing it with charcoal.

The pots used for cooking sacrificial food retain the ambivalent characteristics of the food, (p. 403) and therefore among the Birhor, for instance, menstruating women and their husbands may not eat any food cooked in it on pain of illness (S. C. ROY 1925: 250).

Pollution danger explains why new pots must be used to prepare food for important persons like the Kota priest (MANDELBAUM 1938: 577) or the Meithei raja (HODSON 1908: 118).

Also the process of eating is open to pollution. The general rule of touching food only with the right hand is far more than etiquette, since the left hand, used for lowlier tasks, would defile the food. Why a privileged position is accorded to the right hand brings us to the subject of symbolic classifications beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to mention that identical rules are found in Africa, where the right hand must be used, in particular for eating sacred food (THOMAS 1965: 620). Also the secularized West does not leave it up to the eater's discretion to use the generally more agile right hand, but makes it a rule of etiquette. The hierarchical distinction between the two sides even appears in language in the double meaning of the word "right".

The mere glance of a defiling person is thought to pollute food. Therefore the Irula who despise the Yanadi will not allow these to watch them while eating (THURSTON 1909/2: 387).

The Khangar of Madhya Pradesh (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 443) must consume food cooked with water in a consecrated space, the *chauka*, and their women take off their outer garments while eating, because these are not washed daily and probably are considered polluted by perspiration. These latter rules, however, seem to be due to Hindu influence and on the subject of eating Brahmanism has developed prescriptions of a rigour unparalleled by tribal customs.

Since communities may be graded according to their ritual purity and since food is pollutable, it ensues that rules must regulate the transfer of food between groups, just as there are rules within the group. In Hindu India unilateral food transfer from the higher to the lower castes, to simplify matters, constitutes a binding link between the castes; only the highest and the lowest are more mutually exclusive (MAYER 1960: 46, 60). Tribes, on the contrary, usually stress separateness. They may go even beyond the low castes' exclusiveness and accept food only from kinsmen. The reason for the refusal of food from all aliens may originally have been the fear of their potentially evil power, which S. C. ROY affirms to linger in their leavings and containers (1928: 107), but which in my mind can be extended to all food from strangers. The fear of the unknown, which we repeatedly met, when discussing dangerous and impure food, may constitute the primitive root for rules about food acceptance from strangers, on which pollution beliefs

have been grafted. Tribals may go so far as to refuse food from their own daughters who, with marriage, entered another descent group, as in the case of the Bhunjia of Madhya Pradesh (DUBE 1950: 75, ROUT 1964: 100) and the Kharia (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 449).

Some less strict communities accept food from other tribesmen, but not from Hindus. The Korwa of Madhya Pradesh take food from the Gond and the Kavar, but not from Hindus, excluding ironically also the Brahmins. In other communities men will eat with related or neighbouring tribes, as the Kamar and the Bhunjia from the Gond, but not their women (DUBE 1950: 75-76).

Refusal of cooked food from aliens thus is a common tribal feature, while the distinction of *pakka* and *kacca* seems to be a Hindu invention, one of the several rules meant to mitigate the impact of pollution and in this case to widen the circle of food transfer. *Pakka*, the "perfect" unpollutable food consists of things fried in ghee, of milk and milk products (the products of the cow are antidotes against pollution par excellence) as well as of sun-dried grains and other preparations without the use of water and salt. Thus care need be taken only about *kacca*, i.e. mainly rice and curry. This distinction is gaining hold among tribals, as shown by the example of the Binjhar, a Dravidian tribe of Madhya Pradesh, among whom the more primitive section does not take cooked food from any other community, while tribesmen in contact with Hindus accept it when cooked without water (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/2: 335). The Baiga of Madhya Pradesh and the Santal of Bengal also seem to have adopted Hindu views, since the former accept milk and the latter puffed and flattened rice as well as molasses, while both refuse cooked food and water from all other tribes and castes (NAG 1958: 47; MUKHERJEE 1960: 304).

The semi-Hinduized Irula of Chingleput (THURSTON 1909/2: 384) and the Ao Naga (SMITH 1925: 33) are farthest removed from the original tribal exclusiveness, as they even eat leavings of high castes and of the white man respectively.

6. Food as a Factor of Distinction and Hierarchy

The eating or avoiding of certain foods is used to distinguish groups in many parts of the world. The whole institution of totemism has often been interpreted as a system of classification and totemic food rules fulfil an important function for this purpose. The eating or not eating of fowl, for instance, is the fundamental symbol distinguishing the two Tallensi subdivisions, the Namoo and the Talis of Ghana (FORTES 1945: 66-70). Even names or nicknames for certain communities may be derived from real or presumed eating habits (cf. Samoyedes, "maccaroni", "krauts").

In India, the sections of the Poroja of Orissa are distinguished as to the eating of beef, of buffalo meat or both (THURSTON 1909/6: 209) and the Rengma Naga make the eating of dog-meat at harvest time the hallmark

of descent from one of their moities (MILLS 1937: 14). Apart from being protective or dictated by reasons of purity, many specific prohibitions or lack of such for the young, the adult, the aged, women, etc. may also serve the purpose of classification. Frequently the carefreeness of youth and the new responsibilities of adult life are symbolized by different rules about food. Unmarried Baiga youths, for example, may eat what they like, but after marriage they must observe the community's food restrictions. The Dravidian Bhatra and the Austroasiatic Kol enforce rules about food acceptance only from a certain age (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/2: 271; 3: 517). The Saora's prohibition of pork to their women, motivated by a RABELAISIAN story, (ELWIN 1954: 399; 1955: 523) seems to have the purpose of stressing the different roles of the sexes and, perhaps, of reserving choice food for men. The dividing of the meat of animals hunted or sacrificed (apart from the reasons discussed above) also usually follows criteria of kinship, age and sex. The Bondo of Orissa during the lifetime of his father and elder brother may not eat the liver of animals taken in chase and should give it to them (ELWIN 1950: 52).

Acceptance and refusal of food also distinguishes the in-group from the out-group, as we have seen in the preceding chapter. Endogamous subdivisions of tribes frequently do not interdine, as among the Jenu and Betta Kurumba (IYER 1948: 15). Rules about interdining and intermarriage generally go together. Where there is divergence, the prohibition against intermarriage seems to be stronger, but it may also be the reverse. A Kharia man may marry a Munda woman without losing status, but if he ate food from his wife, he would be outcasted (ROY and ROY 1937: 182).

Apart from the social function of creating distinctions, the eating and avoiding of certain items, as well as the acceptance and refusal of food also establish hierarchy between eaters and avoiders and most of the above distinctions already contained an element of hierarchy. This hierarchical aspect, though not unknown elsewhere, seems to be developed to such an extent in India as to be typical for Indian culture, tribals included.

In Hindu India hierarchy of food and consequently also of eaters is well known. Vegetarians occupy the highest position, beef-eaters and eaters of leavings the lowest. Eaters of wild animals, of goat, of fowl, of fish and of pork have intermediate rank. In practice status is a resultant of various criteria and there may be contradictions in the above model, i. e. some groups with "defiling" food habits occupy a relatively high position. The Raj Gond, for instance, still eat beef, but are considered a respectable agricultural community (DUBE 1951: vi), due to their past ruling role. Another factor explaining inconsistencies between dietary habits and rank of a certain tribe may be that the community in question lives apart and the offensive practice does not catch the eye. If a tribe however enters Hindu society as a caste or moves nearer to Hindu settlements, it apparently either has to "reform" eating habits or must join the ranks of untouchables.

Indian tribals agree with Hindus that there is hierarchy in food and food acceptance and since the spectrum of animal foods eaten by tribals is

much wider than that eaten by caste Hindus, the avoidance of many more items can be used to substantiate claim to social superiority. The Reddi, for example, think themselves superior to the Koya, as they do not eat beef and buffalo meat (FÜRER-HAIMENDORF 1945: 96), which is a classical Hindu criterion. The Bundhrajia section of the Kamar, on the other hand, claim superiority to the Makadia section, since they do not eat snakes, crocodiles and monkeys (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 328); the Dubla of Gujarat think themselves superior to the neighbouring Gamit for not eating monkeys, larger rats and squirrels (ENTHOVEN 1920/1: 347) and the Assamese Hajong claim to be superior to the Koch as they do not drink rice-beer (BURLING 1960: 290).

Frequently a group's eating habits explain why other groups refuse food from it. Thus the Toda do not accept cooked food from Christian fellow tribesmen, as I observed, presumably because these eat meat, and Bhagats, a reformed Hindu sect, among the Dhanka of Gujarat, gave up eating with their families, probably for similar reasons (SHAN 1964: 88). The Santal of Sorai village in Bengal consider themselves to be Hindus and no longer inter-dine and intermarry with the Santals of Pargana, because the latter kill buffaloes and bullocks for meat, whereas they themselves eat beef only if the animal died of natural death (MUKHERJEE 1960: 306). The Muthuvar will not take food from eaters of white monkeys (NAMBIAR 1964: 11) and the Yanadi of Kerala will have nothing to do with frog-eaters (THURSTON 1909/7: 419).

Not only the food eaten at present, but also presumed eating habits in a mythological past are alleged to explain distinction, ascendancy and degradation. The Santal have a myth relating that they outcasted the Birhor for eating the Hanuman monkey (BODDING 1940: 484) and the Munda of Chota Nagpur affirm to look down upon the Khangar who once formed one tribe with them, because the Khangar's mythological ancestor unknowingly ate a human placenta (S. C. ROY 1912: 400). A Ho myth classifies all surrounding communities, both castes and tribes, according to the food eaten (RISLEY 1892/1: 322) and Kota myths ascribe different foods to three Nilgiri tribes: the Toda, the Kota and the Kurumba (THURSTON 1909/4: 13). While in the above myths Hindu ideas may be suspected, Hindu influence in a similar Sema Naga story is unlikely. Nevertheless, in the Sema myth about the origin of their two subdivisions there also emerges hierarchy and, what is more, the eaters of vegetables occupy a privileged position with respect to the eaters of beef (HUTTON 1968: 125).

7. Change

Change is evident in most food avoidances. In 1915 already S. C. ROY called totemism a dying institution except in relation to marriage (329), and in fact, there are many instances of disappearance and slackening of totemic prohibitions. The Khond now have no more totemic taboos (BAILEY

1960: 122) and the Hill Kharia, similar to a number of other tribes, often disregard the taboo on eating and harming the totem species (ROY and ROY 1937: 135). Before prohibitions disappear altogether, however, various excuses and accommodations are invented. The forbidden totem animal, for instance would have betrayed the ancestor and therefore is eaten in revenge (DUBE 1951: 71) or medical reasons are alleged for eating the totem species (HUTTON 1921: 395). Sometimes the clan still does not kill the animal, but has no qualms to eat it, after others have done the killing. The Gond of Bastar adopted the expedient of killing their goat-totem in a friend's house (RUSSEL and HIRALAL 1916/3: 67).

Magical beliefs in the transmittance of undesired qualities through food are becoming fewer. The Ao Naga who had an enormous number of prohibitions, colourfully express their decreased concern by saying: "We put in plenty of chillies and salt and let them fight with the tabu" (MILLS 1926: 144). Interestingly enough, however, they clothe their new lack of prejudice in an old magical form. Through analogical reasoning the preservative quality of salt and the burning quality of chillies probably are believed to have a protective effect against supernatural danger.

Typically tribal food avoidances, therefore, are decreasing, some of them, however, return under a new name. Descent groups having the monkey, the elephant or bovines as totems may now refrain from eating the representatives of *Hanuman*, *Ganesha* and the sacred cow. The tortoise may be revered as an incarnation of *Vishnu* and animals like the rat and the peacock may not be eaten because they are the vehicles of Hindu gods. On the other hand, many of the animals once avoided as dangerous now may not be eaten as impure. In food habits Hindu influence seems to be most profound and the eating of animals held to be sacred or defiling by Hindus like monkeys, carnivora, beef, pork, rodents, reptiles, insects, etc. is becoming an anomaly even among tribals. As there are no diachronical reports for all such foods in all tribes examined, no precise information can be given. The available evidence, however, points to a sharp decline in the use of these aberrant foods in the present, which I assumed to comprise the last 15 years. The number of communities still eating these items may have shrunk to less than half or less than one third. Besides, the eaters usually constitute only a small section of the tribes and various other factors further limit consumption. Thus among the Chenchu and the Birhor the black monkey (*Semnopithecus johni*) is eaten only as a pregnancy-craving (RAGHAVIAH 1962: 93) and the Gond of Eastern Mandla (Madhya Pradesh) use tiger's fat only as a medicine (FUCHS 1960a: 156). The eating of pork may be restricted to wild boar and the eating of beef may only refer to male animals, only to buffaloes or may be limited to rare ceremonial occasions. Among the Kuttia Khond (NIGGEMEYER 1964: 158) the sacrificial cow is no longer eaten by men due to Hindu influence, but only by unprejudiced young boys and by women, the guardians of tradition (quite in contrast to the usual greater restrictions for the weaker sex). In Assam resistance to Hindu ideas about food is greater than in other parts of India. The beef-eating Garo, for instance, are reported to be con-

temptuous, irritated or amused at the Hindu assumption of superiority (BURLING 1960: 284). Since Hindu influence, however, is noticeable in an incipient caste organization in the Garo Hills, it may only be a matter of time till refusal of beef will take hold.

Change in dietary patterns seems to be even more rapid and radical among tribes than among low caste Hindus, as the former apparently receive greater attention by Hindu reformers than the latter. In spite of the stigma placed on pork and liquor, I have seen more pigs in Tamil towns and villages than in pork-eating European villages and numerous signposts pointed to liquor shops even before the abolition of prohibition⁶. In tribal areas, however, campaigns are waged to eliminate the consumption of beef, pork, fowl and liquor, as among the Santal (GHURYE 1963: 13) and the Gond (FUCHS 1960a: 69-70). An attempt to raise the Lodha "to a higher level of mankind" has been less successful due to the untimely death of the reformer (BHOWMICK 1957: 179). The Bhagat movement among the Oraon (SACHCHIDANANDA 1964: 17) and the Bhil (AURORA 1968: 26) has transformed a large number of tribals into pure vegetarians and teetotallers. Even a branch of the Assamese Koch has given up rice-beer and no longer fully condones meat-eating (BURLING 1960: 290). Also boarding schools for the Gond, the Baiga, the Bhil, the Kanikkar and the Nilgiri and Anamalai tribes, I visited, provided only pure vegetarian fare and together with the alphabet taught "clean" food habits.

The widespread tribal prejudice against milk is giving way to the combined onslaught of Hindu reformers and Christian missionaries. In nearly one fourth of the tribes examined there was evidence of a negative attitude towards milk, but in most cases milk is now coming into use and total avoidances are rare. Again no diachronic reports are available in all cases. Recent information, which came to my knowledge, mentions often only partial avoidance of milk and milk products in less than half of the communities once doing without milk. Among the Aka of N.E.F.A. apparently only women refuse milk (SINHA 1962: 37). The Oraon of Sunderban and the Kora of West Bengal still only occasionally take milk (A. K. DAS and RAHA 1963: 55; A. K. DAS 1964: 34). Other tribes, like the Dubla, the Koya, the Asur and the Baiga rarely take fresh milk, but use milk products (SHAN 1964: 89; MOHAPATRA 1964: 86; LEUVA 1963: 36; NAG 1958: 46) and the Munda and Oraon of Bihar now drink tea with milk (SACHCHIDANANDA 1964: 18).

Concepts of ayurvedic medicine prohibiting hot food during pregnancy and cold food after delivery, which might have existed in germ among tribals, are now spreading to new items. Fruits of relatively recent introduction like papaya and pineapple may now also be forbidden to pregnant Kadar, Kani, Badaga and Malayali women due to their heating quality and pregnant Kota and Toda women sometimes avoid hot jaggery, the sweet flavouring of the plains, like many Hindu women (EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI 1973b: 263, 266).

Circumstantial avoidances prohibiting the handling of food during periods of pollution and resulting in the refusal of food polluted by various

⁶ In the meantime the abolition has been revoked.

agents are very resistant, since they have their counterpart or model among Hindus. Mongoloid tribes may even introduce new circumstantial restrictions. Rules about food transfer between groups originally expressing distinction are transforming themselves into a means of establishing hierarchy.

Thus change in tribal food avoidances rarely results in an increase in food eaten. The very liberalizing European influence has little practical effect, since the species which could now be eaten, have often become too rare to have any dietary importance or they may be continued to be avoided in deference to Hindus. The campaign which aims at introducing "clean" food habits among tribals even entails an increase in avoidances.

Summary and Conclusions

As we have seen there is no item of food or drink which cannot be temporarily avoided and nearly all types of food may be permanently avoided. The forbidden flesh food comprises about 260 specially mentioned species or groups of species ranging from monkeys to insects and snails. The plant food comprises about 130 specially mentioned species or groups of species including all types of vegetable food from cereals to spices and alcoholic beverages. In actual fact the avoided foods are many more due to global prohibitions like total fasts or refusal of all meat, etc. The list of food avoidances of Indian tribes also contains parts of animals, milk and milk products, culinary preparations, honey, salt and water. Furthermore, many foods may be forbidden due to the circumstances under which they present themselves, the majority of which are held to be polluting. While positive attitudes towards avoided food, i. e. respect for the species, may give rise to permanent abstention of only one or a limited number of items at a time, negative attitudes, i. e. fear, disgust or pollution beliefs, may result in the simultaneous abstention from large groups of foods. The more a tribe is Hinduized, the fewer are the animal foods it eats. This goes without saying and therefore we have the paradox, that the more different food avoidances are reported in a tribe, the wider is its range of diet, since the refusal usually only concerns part of the community and the other members eat the food.

All types of food avoidances in this study, as long as they are typically tribal, have parallels in other parts of the world. It would, in fact, be easier to enumerate the tribes who do not hold the following beliefs resulting in abstentions from food than those who do: belief in totem animals and plants as well as in animal gods and the necessity of abstaining from them; belief in contagious pollution making food unsuitable for consumption; belief in the advisability of temporarily abstaining from meat and vegetables until they have been offered to the gods. Completely universal and not limited to tribal communities is disgust for certain foods. Psychology has demonstrated the probably inborn aversion for bodily waste or for anything coming from the body and the fact that things may become repulsive through contact with disgusting material (ANGYAL 1941: 396). Analogical thinking establishing causal connections due to presumed similarities is one of the possible ways of

thinking in human beings all over the world. There seems to be no limit to analogical interpretations for the most varied phenomena; some analogies, however, apparently come to mind more readily than others. For this reason there may be exactly identical beliefs or, if you like, superstitions among peoples of totally different cultures. Examples would be the eating of double fruits causing the birth of twins, which may be found all over tribal as well as in Hindu India, in Africa, in Indonesia, etc.; the prohibition for pregnant women to eat fish caught in a net or trap, because the baby might similarly be caught in the womb, reported, for instance, from the Konyak Naga (FÜRER-HAIMENDORF 1969: 66) and from the Pala of New Ireland (NEUHAUS 1962: 291); or the avoidance of the green parrot for fear of having screaming children, reported from the Sema Naga (HUTTON 1968: 93) and from the Melanesians of the South-Eastern Solomon Islands (IVENS 1927: 276) etc.

Indian tribals, in addition to sharing certain traits with other tribals of the world, are also enclaves in Hindu India and (except for some communities of Assam) have never been isolated from the mainstream of Indian culture. The fact that many tribes have forgotten their own languages and now speak Aryan or Dravidian tongues proves how close and lasting these contacts must have been. Some originally tribal features, as the veneration of various animals and the concept of contagious pollution have been incorporated into Hinduism and given ethical and philosophical foundations. The old ideas in a modified form again exercise influence on tribals. The reinforcement through Hinduism of an originally tribal belief probably explains why pre-occupations with purity and pollution assume such an importance in tribal food avoidances. As a matter of fact, they apply to the bulk of the foods avoided for negative reasons, they enter into the abstentions due to ambivalent feelings and they cover nearly all circumstantial avoidances. Other food avoidances like the singling out of the cow for worship and protection as well as vegetarianism have non-tribal origins, but are now rapidly spreading among tribals.

This study lends support to the often affirmed cultural differences between Assam and the rest of India. On the other hand, a comparison between tribal food avoidances and similar practices among Hindus confirms the existence of a tribe-caste continuum and the transformation of tribes into castes. While at the beginning of the century tribal prohibitions were still characterized by a great diversity, they are now becoming more and more uniform as they merge into all-Indian culture.

Food avoidances may have positive and negative effects, the negative ones being, of course, nutritional. The majority of tribal food avoidances, however, seem to have little influence on the nutritional status of the observant, since the foods refused usually are optional items. Exceptionally there may even be totemic abstention from rice or millet without limiting accommodations. This may be inconvenient, but not tragic, since it is possible to live on only one of the two cereals as a staple.

The negative effects become more apparent during critical periods like pregnancy, lactation and illness. Extreme cases, as the prohibition of all

food and water for several days after delivery fortunately are rare and may also belong to the past. While typically tribal prohibitions of the meat of various wild animals have little nutritional importance during such periods, the restriction of vegetables and milk products, mostly due to concepts of ayurvedic medicine, may have nutritionally negative consequences. Children, another vulnerable group of society, on the contrary, seem to be little burdened by prohibitions of food in tribal communities of India.

Another nutritionally questionable type of avoidance is the abstention from all animal food. Vegetarianism, or rather lacto-vegetarianism, need not be nutritionally harmful, if the community or the individual have other resources like an abundance of dairy products, a flourishing agricultural production or financial means to buy a variety of other nutritious foods. The pure vegetarian Toda are an example to the point. They can boast of one of the highest protein intakes of the whole of Tamilnad higher than the recommended allowance, due to the amount of milk and milk products consumed (GOPALAN et al. 1969: 42-43, 59), second only to their not yet vegetarian neighbours, the Kota. Where, however, attempts are made to transform into vegetarians tribals not prepared for it, the nutritional consequences may be serious. The Kadar, a tribe of hunters and collectors, are in such a situation. A settled section of the tribe, I visited, was forbidden to hunt and had no domestic animals yet, so that they had become involuntary *de facto* vegetarians. Since their agriculture was minimal, it is no surprise that they showed clear signs of malnutrition. Similarly the Bhagats, a convinced vegetarian sect, among various tribes of North and Central India, hardly have the agricultural means to make up for the loss of proteins due to their new voluntary vegetarianism. Other changes in tribal economy dictated by a desire to rise in status, such as the abandoning of fishing and raising of fowls and pigs, must also be viewed negatively in this context.

While the negative effects of food avoidances reveal themselves in nutrition, the positive effects appear in other fields. They may bring psychological advantages and they may strengthen the order and cohesion of the community.

Many abstentions may be interpreted as a type of primitive preventive medicine. Certain foods, for instance, are refused by women during their whole fertile period or at least during pregnancy and lactation hoping thereby to save their baby from various diseases. Though the connection between consumption and disease may not be objectively true, the abstention serves to reassure the women and thus provides a psychological advantage to them. If food is avoided in order to prevent or cure the eater's own disease, he may at least benefit by the placebo-effect, which usually is better than taking no action.

Not only the individual, but also the whole community may derive psychological benefits from the avoidance of certain foods. The rise in status in other people's eyes and the improvement of the self-image by permanently adopting "clean" eating habits may more than compensate other disadvantages. Temporary avoidances, on the other hand, may serve to "affix social

value" as RADCLIFFE-BROWN (1965: 151) put it, either to the food or to the occasions when it is forbidden. The prohibition of "pure" dairy products during periods of pollution, no doubt, stresses the social importance of that food and one of the purposes of ritual austerities certainly is to mark the occasion as an important one for the community. As we have seen above (pp. 410-412) food is a very popular means of expressing distinction and hierarchy within the group and with respect to other groups. Since an orderly functioning society presupposes structure and segmentation, if food avoidances help in creating these, they fulfil a positive task.

In short, food avoidances have been shown to constitute an important element in tribal culture. They accompany the life cycle, they form an integral part of religion and they are interwoven in the social structure. Some abstentions are disappearing, but others in greater number are added, which proves how useful they are.

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