CHAPTER VI

Some Questions Regarding Thieves and Robbers

1. Recruitment

Thieving and robbery had never been the monopoly of any particular caste or tribe. Indeed the profession was open to everybody. Besides the poor and the destitute, princes, sons of noblemen and even Brahmanes resorted to it. We have already referred to the Brahman thief, Servilaka. On encountering a strange-looking Brahman in the Vindhyas forest, prince Rajavahana requested him to disclose his identity. The Brahman said, 'In this forest dwell many nominal Brahmanes, men who abandon scriptural and other learning, spurn the duties of their order, put away truth, purity and all the virtues; who seek after sin, following the lead of savages and eating their food. Of one of these I was the reprobate son, and my name is Matanga. With a barbarous hand, I would enter settlements, seize wealthy villagers with their wives and children, imprison them in the forest, plunder all their property, and destroy them. So I lived, a stranger to pity.' (1) Though robbers sometimes drew to their ranks men of upper castes, robbery in an organized way was generally practised by low-class people and wild tribes so much so that from the Vedic times onwards, such people have always been disparagingly described as thieves and robbers in literature and folk-tales.

In fiction, at least, the names of the wild tribes, such as Seberes, Pulindas, Niseda, Kiratas and the like, have lost every trace of the ethnic or geographic meaning which they bore in an older time. (2) In fiction the entire list is synonymous with organized
brigands and their names are used without any sign of differentia-
tion. (3)

2. Habitat

Thieves generally lived in desolate places like the outskirts of villages, towns, in underground caverns near deserted temples or cemeteries. Sometimes they also lived in villages, hills and forests. The cave of a thief was luxuriously furnished and illuminated by blazing lamps. (5) King Virabahu entered a thief's cave where there were beautiful women adorned with many jewels full of ever new delights and looking like the city of snakes. (6) Numerous families of thieves lived in the caves, which, shut in by bamboo network, were in the recesses of the mountain Vaibhara. (7) Thieves generally frequented public roads, bathing places, places of pilgrimage, temples, wine-shops, gambling houses, brothels and the like which will be described in detail in a subsequent chapter.

Robbers generally lived in forests, hills, borders of kingdoms, and in villages of their own. A few names of the forests haunted by robbers have been preserved in literature and folktales though it is difficult to say whether all of them were real or fictitious names. These are the Vindhya, Raudra, on the Durgatilaka mountain, Sadurgadri, Kademberi, Dantarektikag, Hintala, the jungles of the Vaibhara mountain near Rajagrha, etc. (8) There were certainly dense forests haunted by robbers on or near important trade-routes connecting great cities and ports like Sravasti, Pratiśthana, Rajagrha, Taksasila, Tamralipta, Vidisa, etc. (9) As pointed out earlier, the Vedabbha Jētaka speaks of a forest which lay on
the road that connected the Varanasi and Cedi countries as being infested by two gangs of 500 robbers each. As already mentioned, Huen-Tsang speaks of forests in the Punjab, on the bank of the Ganges and also in many parts of India which were haunted by ferocious robbers. The Vindhyas forests, notorious for brigandage, have been described thus: 'Here hundreds of lions are killed by the mountain-tribe chiefs who are eager to possess pearlbeads of the frontal globes of elephants clinging to the tips of their claws. The forest looks like the city of the God of Death, because it is as fearful as the haunt of death. Like an army ready for battle with arrows fixed to bows, and with the raising of the war-cries, it has been resting on bang and asana trees and dimming with the roars of lions, Khadga trees (or with roaming rhinoceroses) and is adorned with red sandal trees and thus resembles the Goddess Durga who is frightful with the brandishing of her sword and who has anointed her body with red sandal paste. It has in its vicinity huge mountains.'

Another description of the same forest: 'through grief at being overrun with many robbers, it made its cry heard day and night in the shrill screams of animals which were being slain in it by lions and other noisome beasts... its space seemed ever to extend before the traveller as fast as he crossed it.'

Near Rajegryha there was 'the mountain Vaibhāra, delightful with its plateaux, which was ever a place of repose for both thieves and ascetics. The mountain where thousands of lions and
tigers roared by day, while \( ^{-} \) by night \( ^{-} \) it was terrifying with the howls of jackals and the bootings of owls, was resplendent with \textit{vanaspati} measured by eighteen \textit{bharas} (load) and with cascades like marvellous ropes of pearls. \(^{(12)}\) Robber-settlements were generally known as \textit{corapelli}, \textit{coragrounded}, \textit{pakkana}, \textit{etc.} Some of the names of the robber-settlements \(^{(16)}\) were \textit{simhasana}, \textit{Bhistha}, \textit{Girikurungika}, \textit{Karbhagriva}, \textit{etc.}

In the \textit{Vivagasuya}, there is a vivid description of a robber-settlement named \textit{Saladavi} which was situated in a forest in the north of Purimat\(\_\)ila. It was located in an unsizable mountain-ravine, guarded by a wall and bamboo hedges and encircled by a trench formed by inaccessible waterfalls of the mountain. It had one gate, many secret passages and a water-supply of its own. Even an army could not capture it. The owner of this settlement, Vijaya gave asylum to all bad characters like thieves, debauches, cut-purses (\textit{ganthibheya}), burglars (\textit{sandhiccheya}), wearers of rags (gamblers and thieves who cannot get proper clothes to put on), persons whose hands and noses have been cut off, men who have been cut off, men who have been exiled or declared undesirables for grave crimes and the like. Secure in his stronghold, this robber Vijaya raided towns and villages, lifted cattle, took captives (who were released on ransom), committed highway robberies, terrorised people by breaking open their walls, torturing them, destroying their property, beating them, ousting them, etc., and even by exacting taxes from them at pleasure. He even demanded taxes from king Mahasala himself. After him, his son Abhagasesana
harassed the country like him. The chief of a Bhilla village, lived with many other bandits 'terrible as Yama's servants, vastly cruel, like Rakşasás (ogres) that infest the night.' The Mallināthasara refers to a village "turbulent with the hallisaka dances of the robbers' women." A robber-village, called Simhaguha, was 'a gathering place for harlots.' The stronghold of the robber-chief, Durgeśasasa, was situated on a table-land of the Vindhyas which was tangled and inaccessible. The walls of the palace of the Bhilla chief, Ekaikkesarin, were covered with the tusks of elephants and adorned with tiger-skins. Here is a description of a barbarian settlement in the Adambari: 'I beheld the barbarian settlement, a very market place of evil deeds. It was surrounded on all sides by boys engaged in the chase, un-leasing their hounds, teaching their falcons, mending snares, carrying weapons and fishing, horrible in their attire like demonic. Here and there the entrance to their dwelling hidden by thick bamboo forests, was to be inferred, from the rising of smoke of orpiment. On all sides the enclosures were made with skulls, the dust heaps in the roads were filled with bones; the yards of the huts were miry with blood, fat and meat chopped up. The life there consisted of hunting; the food, of flesh; the ointment, of fat; the garments, of coarse silk, the coaches, of dried skins; dogs as household attendants; cows for riding; wine and women men's only employment; blood as oblation to gods; cattle as sacrifice. The place was the image of all hells.' References to robber-villages are numerous. The criminal activities of the robber 'persisted
till quite recent times. G.F. Whiteworth says that there were dacoits who were robbers by profession and brought up their children to the same occupation. They were banditti with strongholds to retire to and often committed raids on a large scale, a gang in some cases numbering several hundreds. Robbers always kept strict vigil over their settlements and their spies carefully collected information regarding the plans and measures of the kings against their settlements.

3. Guilds

Thieves and robbers formed guilds of their own and lived under their chieftains known as pellisa, pallipati, choraletthaka, coresenavai, etc. According to Bloomfield, entire communities or guilds of thieves and robbers operated under the tutelage of the goddess Durga (Kali, Devi, etc.) who is also the tutelary divinity of the thugs. The wild tribes of Bhillas, Sabras, Pulindas, Kirates, etc., who infest forests, especially the Vindhyas forests, especially the Vindhya forest, have a continuous organization under regular chieftains (pellisa) and kings; they in addition to robbing, also offer human sacrifices to Durga. The Jataka stories often refer to robber-guilds generally consisting of 500 robbers (500 is certainly a conventional number). There are also references to robber-bands of 900, 499, 400, 50, etc. As occupation often determined the caste in ancient India, robbers being of the same caste grouped themselves together, lived in the same village, framed some laws binding upon every member of their guild and for livelihood, attacked caravans and
travellers under their leader who was generally the oldest man
in their guild or the strongest and boldest robber of their settle­
ment. The Ṛgveda, Atharvaveda, Vajasaneyi Samhita, Pāñcaviṃśa
Bṛahmense, etc., refer to the Ṛṭaṭa which means 'troop'. According
to Roth, it means, a 'guild'. The word 'Ṛṭaṭa-pati' (lord of
troops) mentioned in the Yajurveda Samhitas probably means,
according to Zimmer, 'the chief of a band of robbers.'(32)
Panini(33) refers to the ayudhaśālivins. Of them, the Ṛṭatas
followed violent pursuits. They lived by plunder and violence.

The Ṛṭatas were bands of war-like roving aboriginal tribes with
whom the Aryans came into conflict. The Ṛgveda refers to the Aryan
heroes as Ṛṭatasah (VI. 75. 9). From Panini it appears that the
Ṛṭatas lived at an elementary stage of saṅgha government. The
Ṛṭatas were probably the same as the vṛatas.(34) Most probably
they were degraded Aryans and did not observe the rules that
regulated Aryan life. (35) The Vṛatas are mentioned in the Yajur­
veda, Atharvaveda, Pāñcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa and the Sūtras. (36) It is
difficult to determine the locality where these people lived. Their
nomad life (Ṛṭaṭa = Vagrant) however, suggests that they were the
western tribes of the lands beyond the Sarasvati. (37) Probably
most of these people were Yaudhas (warriors). Since Panini's
time up to now, the predatory habits (ūtṣedha) of these tribes
have continued. For example, the Zikkakkel clan of the Afridis are
notorious as the most active bands of thieves on the frontier.'(38)
According to Kautilya, (39) the Kambojas, the Surastras, the
Ksatrīyas, the Srenīs and others lived by economic vocation and
the profession of arms. These guilds maintained armed bands from which the king recruited soldiers. Sometimes a sreni, which was a guild of fighting men who normally carried on peaceful occupation or just a guild of artisans or merchants which supplied soldiers to the royal army and protected itself with armed men -- the men being its brave members, consisted of many men and caused oppression by theft and violence. Kautilya also refers to the coregana (guilds of robbers) from which soldiers might be recruited by a weak king. According to Justin, Chandragupta Maurya collected a band of robbers and overthrew the Greeks with its help. Some hold that these robbers were the republican peoples of the Punjab. It may be contended that Chandragupta recruited his soldiers from some robber-guilds of that area. The Rigveda refers to the troops of the Maruts by the terms, Sardha, Vrata, and Sana. Does Vrata refer to the contingent supplied by the robber-guild called Vrata? According to Brhaspati, robbers should settle their disputes according to their own laws. Does this refer to the laws of the robber-guilds? The rules to be followed by robbers regarding the distribution of the booty have been mentioned earlier.

According to the Vinayapitaka, a woman-thief should not be ordained as a nun without the sanction of the authorities concerned. The sanction of her guild was necessary in such cases. The robber-chiefs often became so powerful as to defy the kings and emperors. In strength and wealth some of them could be compared with kings and cases of alliance on almost equal footing between Aryan kings and heads of non-Aryan tribes with plundering
habits were rare. Before describing their dress, appearance, strength, etc., a few samples of their names may be given. The names generally symbolize, as expected, cruelty or ruffianism: Candasiha, Simhacanda, Simhaparakrama, Durgapisesa, Bhiima, Bhimsala, Drdhespaharin and the like. Probably most of these names were fictitious.

4. Dress, appearance, strength, etc.

The clothes generally worn by thieves at the time of thieving have been referred to earlier. The dress of robbers and chiefs of criminal tribes were, however, different. The leader of the Vrtyes, a nomadic criminal tribe, wore a turban (usnisa), carried a whip (pratoda) a kind of bow (iyahroda), was clothed in a black (krsnasa) garment and two skins (ajina), black and white (krsna-valaksa) .... The others, subordinate to the leader, had garments with fringes of red (valukantani damatahena), two fringes on each, skins folded double (dvvisahitani ajinani), and sandals (uranh). The leader wore also an ornament (niska) of silver. (50)

The Sahara leader, Matanga in the Kadambari, wore a silk dress red with cochineal. Some of his followers wore crows' feathers and others 'like the days of the rainy season, had garments dark as clouds.' (51) A follower of the robber-chief Vindhyaketu is described as having a 'bow in hand, with his hair tied up in a knot behind with a creeper, black himself and wearing a loin-cincture of Bilva leaves. (52) The men of the Sahara King Mayavatu were adorned with peacocks' feathers, elephants' teeth,
and clothed in tigers’ skins. (53) The Sebara women used the tails of peacocks as garments, strings of sunja fruit and pearls as ornaments, and the ichor that flowed from the forehead of elephants and musk as perfumes. (54)

Thieves and robbers were generally very strong and stout. Agaladatta saw a thief in the guise of a religious mendicant having firm calves and long legs. The staff-like arms of another thief resembled the trunk of an elephant, spacious was his chest, shaggy his hair; he was endowed with the fresh bloom of youth, fierce, red-eyed and long-legged. (55) Sarvilaka boasted that in strength, he was a lion and a wolf to rend and tear. The thief Purnabhadra was very tall having arms massive like a long iron bar. (57) Wayward princes and profligate sons of the rich who often took to thieving were often extremely handsome and numerous stories about beautiful women’s infatuation for thieves and robbers clearly indicate the latter’s manly appearance and bewitching beauty.

Bahuineya’s body ‘shone with an intense light as if he were made of gold; it was difficult to look at him because of his splendour, like the sun when it has risen on the earth. He astonished the multitude by his face that resembled the autumnal full-moon; his nose was like a sesame blossom and his eyes were like those of a wagtail. He was resplendent with a serpent-like braid of hair that hung down near his mouth which was like a jar of speech-nectar . . . . he shone resplendent with his sectarian mark (pundra) and with beauteous locks of hair. The rows of his teeth were like seeds of the pomegranate fruit; his voice was pleasant; his neck was shell-like; his shoulders broad; he was full-chested and courageous.
His arms were like a yoke; both his hands were marked with the conch and the disc (signs); his waist was shaped like an axe; his disposition was gracious; his ankles were delicate; his legs were like a deer's; his feet were lotus-shaped; his nails glistened with the great brilliance of a mass of the coral-bead plant. He was handsomely costumed, erect, calm, very gracious, well-formed, proud, bold, brave, powerful, fearless in battle, familiar with love, handsome, a house of love for charming young women. Rauhineye could jump from house to house like a monkey and get over the wall with a leap like lightning. It was impossible to catch him. 'While we follow his track by the road, he disappears. Varily, lost by one step, he is lost by a hundred.' The thief Lohakhura 'was a terrible man and like quicksilver personified.' A notorious thief displayed extraordinary bravery in battle against the army of King Viraketu. Sarvileka freed his friend by breaking the jail and organized a revolt against the King Palska. Prince Apaheravaranman, who often resorted to thieving, was extremely handsome, very strong and capable of wounding and killing several armed police even in a drunken state.

The robber-chieftain Durgepisâce 'seemed like a second Vindhya range, for his body was firm as a rocky peak, his hue was black as tâmela, and Pulindas lay at his foot. His face was rendered terrible by a natural three-furrowed frown, and so he appeared as if Durgeś, the dweller in the Vindhya range, had marked him with the trident, to claim him as her own.' He was young, black and crouched to none. 'Like a fresh cloud, he displayed the peacock-tail and the gay-coloured bow; like Hiranyakṣa, his body
was scarred by the furious boar; like Ghatotkaca, he was mighty
and possessed a haughty and terrible shape; like the Kaliyuga
he allowed those born under his sway to take pleasure in wicked-
ness and break through the bonds of rule. And the mass of his
host came filling the earth like the stream of the Narmada, when
let loose from the embrace of Arjuna. And so the aggregated army
of the Candalas moved on, blackening all the horizon with a dark
hue.

Here is a vivid description of a Sebars-chief: 'He
was yet in his early youth; from his great hardness, he seemed
made of iron; . . . . from his growing beard he was like a young
royal elephant with its temples encircled by its first line of
ichor; he filled the wood with beauty that streamed from him
sombre as dark lotuses, like the waters of Yamuna; he had thick
locks curled at the ends and hanging on his shoulders . . . .
his brow was broad; his nose was stern and aquiline; his left
side shone reddened by the pink reys of a jewelled snake's hood
that was made the ornament for one of his ears, . . . . he was
perfumed with fragrant ichor . . . . he seemed to tinge space
by his eye, somewhat pink, as if it were bloodshot . . . . he
had mighty arms reaching to his knees, . . . . and his shoulders
were rough with scars from keen weapons often used to make an
offering of blood to Kali; the space round his eyes was bright
and broad.' His chest was scarred, waist slender and there was
a frown on his brow. He was a good hunter. He had a sword, a bow
'bright as peacock's tail', and a weapon called cakra. He was
'adorned with the eyes in the peacock's tails'. He was proud,
wicked, 'the essence of the Iron Age', 'the partial avatara of death'. By reason of his natural greatness and horrible form, he always inspired awe. He was surrounded by hounds, captives and his countless followers. The Sbara army is thus described: 'The Sbara army came out from the wood like the stream of Narmada tossed by Arjuna's thousand arms; like a wood of tamalas stirred by the wind; like all the nights of the dark fortnight rolled into one . . . . like a crowd of evil deeds come together; like a caravan of curses of the many hermits dwelling in the Dandaka forest . . . it darkened the wood; it numbered many thousands; it inspired great dread; it was like a multitude of demons portending disasters.' Bana describes the appearance of a Sbara, the nephew of Bhukampa, the lord of the Vindhyas range and the leader of the village-chiefs, thus: He had his hair tied into a crest above his forehead with a band of the sampasa creeper, dark like lampblack. On his forehead was an involuntary frown which branched in three lines; his ear had an ear-ring of glass-like crystal fastened in it, and it assumed a green hue from a parrot's wing which ornamented it, while his somewhat bleared eye, with its scanty lashes, seemed by its native colouring to distil hyena's blood which had been applied as a medicine, -- his nose was flat, his lower lip thick, his chin low, his jaws full, his forehead and cheek-bones projecting, his neck a little bent down while one half of his shoulders stood up, -- he seemed to mock the broad rocks of the Vindhyas side with his brawny chest, which was broadened by exercise and hardened by incessantly bending his bow,
while his arms, which were more solid than a boa-constrictor,
made light of the tallest sale-trees of the Himalaya, he wore a
tin armlet, decorated with white godanta beads, which was placed
on his fore-arm, the back of which was covered with a bundle of
rootlets of Naradamara (a plant used as an antidote against poison)
fastered together by the bristles of boars; he had a thin belly
but a prominent navel; his huge broad loins were rendered formidable
by a sword, the end of which was anointed with quick silver
and its handle was made of polished horn, it was wrapped in a
short black antelope skin as in a woven covering, and its sheath
was adorned with the spotted skin of a citraka snake, placed
between two strips of the skin of an shireni snake. His brawny
thighs were covered with the flesh that had as it were fallen down
from his waist which had grown thin and spare in his early youth;
his dark body seemed as it were to blossom with a leathern quiver
on his back, made of a bear's skin, wrapped round with a spotted
leopard's skin, its woolly hair black with the bees that clustered
on it, and filled with arrows bearing mostly crescent-shaped heads.'
His 'stout bamboo-like arm bore a bow resting on his left shoulder
and which was adorned with a profuse pigment of peacock's gall,
and was full of fierce vigour and with its sinews fashioned of
Khadira roots, while the top of the arm was gay with a blue jay's
tail fastened on the upper part. His right hand seemed busily
engaged with a Vikarne arrow having its point dipped in a potent
poison . . . He was like a moving dark tamala tree on the side of
a mountain or a pillar of solid stone artificially wrought, or a
pillar of solid stone artificially wrought, or a moving mass of
black collyrium or a melting block of iron from the Vindhya', an expert hunter, 'the personified essence of destruction, the embodied fruit of sin, the cause of the Kali age, the lover of doom's night. {56} Rajavāhana saw a robber 'covered with scars of wounds inflicted by weapons, whose body was as hard as iron, whose Brāhmanhood was inferable from his sacred thread (but) who clearly displayed the valour of a Kirāta and who was hideous to look at.' (67) A robber named Satya (68) was as strong as an elephant. The robber Angulimala (69) possessed the strength of seven elephants and was cruel and given to killing. He killed men after men and hung round his shoulders, a garland made of their fingers. He made the forest-path, villages and towns deserted and created a great panic. He could kill forty men at a time and could overtake and catch elephants, horses, chariots, deer even when running. The robber-chief Kayasya (70) could defeat many hundreds of soldiers. (70) The bandit Abhagasesa (71) inflicted a crushing defeat upon a king. The brigand-chief Vijaya was 'full of valour, giver of hard blows, hitter of an object at its sound, a champion-wielder of the sword, exercising sway over four hundred robbers.' (72) The King of the Kirātas, Sektiraksita joined Mrgankedatta with ten hundred thousand footmen, two hundred thousand horses a myriad of furious elephants on which heroes were mounted and eighty-eight thousand chariots. His banners and umbrellas darkened the heaven. (73) Durgepisaca, (74) the King of the Mātangas was of terrible valour. No king could conquer him and he commanded 'a hundred thousand bowmen of that tribe, everyone of whom is followed by five hundred warriors.' With their help he plundered caravans and destroyed his enemies. (74) A Hills chief was king over six lakha. (75) According to
the Mahâbhârata, the Kirâtes came from the northern hills, 'ridden
by fierce robbers of strong limbs, the foremost of warriors,
encased in steel coats of mail; among them are persons born of the
cow or of the ape, or of various other creatures, and also born of
men. That division of the assembled Mlecchas, who are all sinful
and come from the fastness of Himavat, seem at a distance to be of
a smoky colour. They have elephants with impenetrable skins, well-
trained ... adorned with armour of solid gold, and resembling
Airavata'.\(^\text{76}\) According to the Mahâbhârata, the progenitor of
the Nisadas and Mlecchas was a deformed, black-haired, red-eyed
dwarf. In short, most of the robbers and members of the criminal
tribes were ugly, cruel but bold and strong.

5. Thieves and the Fair Sex

Though paradoxical, thieves and robbers were fortunate
in captivating the hearts of ladies who staked everything to have
them as husbands. Even married women could not resist the temptation of their rough beauty and often eloped with them. This strange infatuation of ladies for these outlaws may be explained by their robust health and manly bearing. The cruel tortures generally inflicted upon them while being led to the place of execution might have also moved the soft hearts of these women to pity. It should also be remembered that the criminals with whom they fell in love were often sons of beautiful prostitutes, or adventure-loving princes, or reprobate sons of rich people. They therefore, inherited attractive physical beauty. Rich prostitutes had generally
fascination for these law-breakers. Ratnavati, daughter of a rich merchant, became suddenly distracted with love as she saw a thief being led by policemen to the place of execution. At her earnest request, her father offered his entire wealth as the thief's ransom but the king refused to set him free. The girl then went near the stake upon which her beloved was impaled, had his body brought down and then lay in the funeral pyre with the corpse. In a similar tale, a girl forced her father to bribe a police officer to get a thief released from bonds. Such romantic tales are numerous. The thief, Karpasa having entered the bed chamber of a princess, succeeded in winning her love. Another thief secretly married a princess in a lonely island. The wife of a young man felt a strong passion for a robber-chief who was concerned in a fight by her husband and when her husband asked her to give him the sword, she put it in the robber's hand and he lost no time in killing the husband. Another married women went out at night to visit her paramour who was a thief. Dharena's wife eloped with a thief, leaving her husband who was asleep in a temple. Numerous are the cases of elopement of licentious wives with thieves and robbers.

A rich courtezan sent one thousand gold coins to a police officer to purchase the freedom of a condemned robber of god-like appearance with whom she fell in love while he was being led to the place of execution. As the officer demanded a man to be the criminal's substitute, sent one of her lovers to the officer and got her beloved released. The town-belle, Suleka, out of sympathy for a condemned robber with whom she was formerly
acquainted, sent him some sweetmeats and water with a request to
the town-watchman to allow him to eat and drink. Beautiful prostitu-
tes like Rāgāmējari and Madanīka deeply loved the thieves,
Apehāravarsman and Servilaka respectively, though, it must be said,
they were not at first aware of their activities. Apehāravarsman
also captivated the heart of a princess. Robber-women, too,
sometimes fell in love with handsome kings and princes and saved
them from being killed by their masters. A female slave of a thief
secretly told King Virakētu who went to the cave of that thief to
flee at once as it was dangerous to stay there. In another story,
the sister of a thief signalled a beautiful king to leave their
cave immediately. Sridatta was saved from being sacrificed
to Candika by the daughter of a robber-chief, who fell in love
with him and made him her husband.

6. Patron-Deities of Thieves

While commenting on the influence of religion on the
Thugs, Sleemen writes: 'Never did the strength of religious faith
or the extraordinary domination which religion exercises over men's
moral nature, find clearer illustration.' This remark is also
applicable to the thieves and robbers of ancient India. They rarely
showed any compunction of conscience for committing crimes which they
regarded as their birthright, believed to be sanctioned by their
gods, Śkanda, Kali and others.

Thieves and robbers punctiliously performed all the reli-
gious rites, had the names of their gods and goddesses always on
the lips and sometimes even released men from bonds if captured on
the day they worshipped their deity. (94) Surya, Rudra and Skanda were probably the three important patron-deities of the thieves. The Rgveda refers to a sleeper-charm who put men to sleep through putting men to sleep. (95) The irresistible might of the bull with a thousand horns who rises out of the ocean. (95) According to Wilson, the bull with the thousand-horns' mean, 'the sun with a thousand-rays', who was formerly the patron of the house-breakers but at a later date, Kumāra (i.e. Skanda) replaced him. (96) Indra also might have been one of the patron-deities of the thieves. Thus in the Rgveda, a person who is a worshipper of Indra lulls men and women to sleep with a charm with a view to stealing or stealthily raping the sleeping women. In the Atharvaveda, (98) too, a person, probably a secret lover regards Indra as the strengthener of a soporific plant or other charm with which he wants to lull some people to sleep. As pointed out before, Indra is said to have put his enemies to sleep by his magic power in order to free his followers from their bondage. He pointed out before, sleeper-charms were often used by thieves and robbers. Rudra was regarded as the 'patron god of all sorts of evil-doers'. (99) He was the lord of thieves (stena), pickpockets (stena) and stealers (mushent). Like Skanda, Rudra is also called Dhārta. Himself a mighty general, and an expert thief, Skanda is deservedly regarded as the patron-deity of thieves. He is said to have transferred the foetus of Mahāvīra from Bṛhmati Devananda to Kṣatriya Trisala. (102) According to the Mahābhārata, (103) and Vayu Purāṇa, (104) Skanda's followers kidnap children. It is said in the Mahābhārata that when Skanda was struck with the thunderbolt, a number of male children were
were produced who steal children. (105) The oldest Tamil hymns (106) regard Skanda as the deity of hilly regions, the god of the tribes of hunters. Hence he is called (107) Kurinciikki laven, the lord of Kurinci (hilly regions). In South India, Skanda is also known as Murukan and his temples are found on hill-tops. As mentioned earlier, some forest-robbers belonging to a criminal tribe also worshipped Skanda. (108) As Skanda is traditionally (109) regarded as the son of Siva, most probably a Nonaryan god, and the peacock, (110) the favourite bird of the foresters with the feathers of which they generally decorate themselves as his vehicle, he was probably a Nonaryan deity, probably the war god of the tribal people holding in his hand a spear (vel). (111) It is also interesting to note that Vayu gave him a Kukkuta (cock) which became his banner. He is also the overlord of a heroic and valourous Rakshsa clan, called Nairpita. (113) Probably the tribals worshipped Skanda, the heroic fighter, before setting out on plundering raids and regarded him as the giver of success and protection. As thieves and robbers generally belonged to the lower classes, it is quite possible that they selected Skanda, a Nonaryan valiant god as their patron deity. As these criminals regarded themselves as heroes, (114) a heroic fighter like Skanda was the fittest god to be their overlord. The tradition describing Skanda as the general of the gods in the war against the demons was probably of later origin. It is not unlikely that the very name 'Skanda' was attributed to this god by the Brähmanas when he was adopted in the Hindu pantheon. If the Nonaryan origin of Skanda is not satisfactory, it is difficult to say how the
general of the gods came to be looked upon as the patron-deity of thieves. The chiefs and rulers who used to train spies, desperadoes and forest people in the art of theft and robbery with a view to robbing their neighbours secretly or openly, might have selected or popularised Skanda, the mighty generalissimo of the gods as the patron-deity of those rough people who were brave soldiers engaged in the Kuts-yuddha and as such quite eligible to claim the divine hero as their lord—a claim also made later on by ordinary burglars to rise in the estimation of the people and also to gratify their own vanity. To a thief, the sakti in Skanda’s hand might have appeared to be the phanimukha (snake’s mouth) and the cock, was probably imagined by him to be the god’s instrument to warn his devotees of the approaching dawn. Skanda was also known as Šanmukha, Karttikeya, Guha, Kanakasakti, Kharapāta, Subrahmāya, etc. The name Brahmanya suggests that there was a Brahmanical element in Skanda. From the Šanmukhasākṣa, it appears that Šanmukha was also the patron deity of the magic science. Sarvileka described the thieves as Skandaputra (sons or followers of Skanda). He, as said before, paid homage to Karttikeya before breaking into a house. (116) The thief Sajjaleka bowed to Kharapāta (a name of Skanda) and to the gods that roam by night at the time of burglary. (117) On the eighth day of a certain month, brigands worshipped Karttikeya. (118) According to the Atharvavedasūtras (119) which elaborately describes the Skandra ritual, the worship of Skanda was to be performed in the early half of the month of Pṛṣṇaguna, Asadha
and Karttika. Skanda was also worshipped by the people for the recovery of stolen articles. According to Kale, it was 'for this reason perhaps that thieves paid homage to him.'

Tuesday was supposed to be specially auspicious for practising the art of stealing. This art came to be 'associated at least in later days in Bengal with the goddess Kali.' Thus before setting out on his secret mission, Coracakravartin, a master thief worshipped goddess Kali. According to the Dharma-mangala, Indra learnt theft from this goddess.

7. Patron-Deities of Robbers,

Indra, Rudra, Skanda, Candika (Kali), and others were worshipped by the robbers. Both in the Rgveda and the Atharvaveda, Indra's help is sought in battles against foes especially in cattle-raids or in conflicts to recover cattle from the enemy. A Rgvedic verse runs thus: 'Thou shoukest Indra, in this glorious and arduous conflict and assistest us to the acquirement of spoil in this battle where cows are won and men overpowered, wherein the weapons descend on every side upon the fierce and courageous combatants.'

Another verse says that Indra is no longer the impetuous despoiler of the cattle of the enemy, nor of their hundredfold riches. It appears from these two stanzas that Indra was at first a valiant cattle-raider who was deified later on and came to be regarded as the patron-deity of the Aryans who often fought against the non-Aryans to loot their cattle and wealth. A verse in the Atharvaveda says about Indra: 'Him verily, we invocate in battles whether great or small:
be he our aid in fights for spoil.' (127) Thus Indra became the god of war and war in those days was often waged to grab cattle. As pointed out before, these wars were nothing but political robberies and the soldiers engaged in them were no better than organized brigands fighting under a leader for a common purpose.

Rudra is called the lord of robbers (teskara) in the Satarudriya litanies of the Vajasaneyi Samhita. (128) Rudra (129) is also called Vatapati and Janapati which probably mean, the chief of a band of robbers.

Reference has already been made to Skanda as the patron primarily of thieves. Amongst the patron-deities of robbers, Candiaka (130) or Keli occupies the foremost position. Her terrible appearance and blood-thirsty nature marks her out as the most suitable goddess for the ruthless bandits. She was worshipped under various names: Durga, Bhedrekali, Keli, Bhavani, Keshmercelvi, Kirati, etc. Robbers, especially forest-robbers used to offer human beings having auspicious marks and perfect limbs to the goddess to keep her in good humour. The man to be sacrificed was asked to utter his last wish and anyone who failed to do so in fright, was regarded as unfit for sacrifice. (135) A characteristic human sacrifice is described in the Dasakumara-cerita, where some Kiretas were preparing to sacrifice a fair child to Candiaka. They were saying among themselves -- 'we shall kill him with a sword by suspending him by the branch of a tree, or by means of a number of sharp arrows aimed at him after fixing his feet by digging a hole in the surface of sand, or by
causing young dogs to kill him as he will he running on all fours. From another tale, it appears that robbers killed a man by an implement or with a sword first and then the body was thrown into fire. The robbers and foresters often kidnapped men to offer them in sacrifice to their goddess.

A brigand-chief took his captives to the temple of Durga for sacrificing them to the goddess on the fourteenth day of a certain month. A Sabara-chief used to offer his own blood to the goddess, Kali.

Nothing can be said with certainty regarding the origin of the idea of Durga or Kali. The Mother-goddess of the Indus Valley civilization may have some connection with it. The association of robbers, especially forest-robbers with the worship of Durga may be explained by men's fear of dense forests full of dangers which possibly led to the idea of a forest-deity, at once terrible and benign (benign towards robbers), deceitful and blood-thirsty. In the Rgveda, Aranyani is referred to as a female forest-deity. In the Atharvaveda, it means a forest-spirit. According to the Tamils, Katu and Palsei mean forest and wilderness respectively. The mistresses of these are known as Katukilal and Palsekilatti.

In the Tamil lexicons, these goddesses are regarded as the manifestations of Durga. According to Rvedic and Tamil evidence, these goddesses are 'mockingly deceitful as the forest itself.' 'Men are afraid of the Lady of the forest but take consolation from the knowledge that she will not kill them if they do not come too near.' Korri, another name of Durga probably comes from the root 'Kol',
to Kill. (145) In the Rgveda, Aranyani is also known to kill. (146) It seems possibly that Durga or Kali was originally a Nonaryan goddess worshipped by foresters and later on the Aryans admitted her into their pantheon. It is curious to note that Siva (Rudra), his son Skanda and wife Candika were all regarded as the patrons of thieves and robbers.

Forests, mountainous regions and desolate places like the cremation grounds were dotted with the temples of Durga or Kali. The Vindhyesvari temple in the Vindhya (147) was haunted by forest-robbers. Frequent references to this temple, close to Mirzapur 'are probably accounted for by the proximity of the regions peopled by forest tribes such as Bhillas, Sabaras and Pulindas. These references also indicate that one of the main routes between the Gangetic valley and the Deccan must have been in those days, as it is now, from Mirzapur by a ford over the Narmada above Jabalpur and through the forest districts to Pratisthana on the Godavari'. (148)

Here is a description of a Durga temple where human beings were sacrificed by robbers: 'It seemed like the mouth of Death, the flame of the lamp being its lolling tongue, the range of bells being its row of teeth to which the heads of men clung'. (149)

In another description, the temple was terrible 'with a long waving banner of red silk like the tongue of Death eager to devour the lives of animals.' The sound of gongs was also terrible. (150) In these temples various animals were also offered day and night and sometimes people voluntarily offered themselves
upto the goddess. In the Kadambari there is a lurid description of a Durga temple located in the Deccan and also of its priest.

Thieves and robbers, as said earlier, often used charms and spells to put men to sleep, break open doors, move invisibly, etc. Now the mantras to be recited for these purposes contained the names of various gods and demons. Kautilya mentions several names, viz. Bali, son of Virocana, Sambha of hundred guiles, Bhandirsaka, Naraka, Nikumbha, Kumbha, Devala, Nerada, Svarnigaleva, Manu, Aliti, Paliti, Suvarnepugi, Brahmeni, Brahman, Kusetdhwa, Amila, Kimila, Vayucera, Prayog, Phakke, Vihaele, Dentskeleska, Tentukscche, Armour, Premila, Mendoleska, Chatodbela, Kansa, Kamsa, Pausomi, Agni and others. The magic science (maya) is also called Sambari Vidyav from Sambara?.

The famous Muladeva is called Kamsa in the lexicons. Avinodara, before ascending the king's palace stealthily at midnight in the guise of a thief to meet his beloved, prayed for the longer duration of the night and deep slumber of the guards and inmates of the palace and in this connection paid homage to Prajapati, all the Siddhas, Bali, Sambara, Mahakala, Padma and Bhagavati Katyayani. The Senmukhakelpe also refers to various deities, viz. Bhagavati, Sivasa, Skanda, Kumbha, Nikumbha, Kumbhakarna, Mahakali, Anjenskali, Bhadrekali, Vali Virocana, Harini, and others in connection with spells for breaking fetters, opening doors, knowing things buried under a wall, putting the inmates of a house to sleep, changing one's appearance, etc.
8. Conversion of Thieves and Robbers

As pointed out earlier, thieves and robbers are sometimes described to be possessed of extraordinary nobility which often led them to eschew violence and become converted to monkhood. Besides this latent nobility, several other factors also led criminals to change their mode of life, viz. kindness shown to them by others, influence of great men like the Buddha, astounding good qualities of their victims, eagerness to escape capital punishment, etc. The Buddhist and Jain writers whose stories abound in conversion tales of notorious thieves and robbers may have, however, overdrawn the picture to magnify the influence of their religions. The thief, Mahabala having learnt about his tragic fate, gave up thieving, took the diksa and began to preach religion in the forest. (158)

The thief, Pingala having been saved by Davadanti from capital punishment, took vows, placed himself in the Kayotsarga posture, meditated on religion, remembered the formula of the Five Chiefs of the Faith, reprobated his former sins and died. (159) Another thief, Pabhave listened to the pious householder Jambū's description of the uselessness of earthly power and pleasure and became his disciple. (160) Rauhineya once overheard a fragment of the Vīra's sermon: 'The gods do not touch the earth with their feet; their eyes are unwinking; their wreaths do not wither; they do not perspire; and their bodies are free from disease.' This enabled him to see through the clever plot of a minister who tried to elicit a confession regarding the crimes committed by
him by placing him in an unconscious state among beautiful damsels who posed as goddesses and told him when he regained consciousness that he was in heaven and could enjoy them only after narrating all his past deeds. As the characteristics of a divine being as described by the Vīra were not present in those women, Rauhineya did not confess anything and was consequently released. He then thought that if only a part of the Vīra's instructions was so effective, his full teaching must be of great use to him. So he confessed his guilt to the Vīra and the king, distributed all his hidden treasures among the people and became a monk. The cruel thief, Drā播报orin was converted by Jaina monks. The robber, Nātanga, influenced by a Brāhmaṇa, gave up robbery, studied scriptures and became a worshipper of Siva. Vassana, Catura and Purnabhadra gave up thieving when they were offered good jobs. A young monk once promised not to tell anybody about the place where some robbers lay in ambush. To keep his promise, he did not even prevent his parents from going there and consequently they were mercilessly beaten up by the robbers. This wonderful regard for promise deeply impressed the bandits and they became his disciples. Once at night, five hundred thieves came to a forest and placed their bags of spoil upon the body of a monk, who was then in a state of trance, mistaking it for the trunk of a tree. In the morning they realised their mistake, and became converted by that hermit. A thief who destroyed several times out of malice, the property of the treasurer, Sumangala, was forced to beg his
pardon when he came to know that the treasurer, forgetting all his unpardonable offences had made over to him, his religious merit acquired by alms-giving. A lady made elaborate defences to guard her treasures against thieves and foiled all their attempts to burgle into her house. One night, leaving the house in the care of a maid servant, she went to listen to the preaching of the Law. Inspite of being repeatedly informed by her maid of the entrance of thieves into her house, she sternly refused to leave that place and rebuked her servant for disturbing her. This extraordinary devotion to religious instructions changed the hearts of the thieves who restored to her all the stolen wealth, apologized and became monks. A Buddhist monk stood fearless when assailed by some robbers. Being asked by them to explain this unusual boldness, he said that the Buddha's teachings gave him this strength. This led the robbers to renounce the world. The great Buddha once greatly surprised the quick-footed robber, Angulimala as the latter failed to overtake him though he (the robber) was running at top speed. When he asked the Buddha to stand still, he replied, 'I stand still! Stand still yourself!' Being requested by the robber to clarify this, he said that he stood firm because he was kind to all living beings but the robber did not stand still as he was merciless. At this, the robber expressed his deep regard for the great teacher and became a monk. When some robbers were preparing to sacrifice the famous pilgrim, Hiu-fen-Tsang to their goddess somewhere on the bank of the Ganges, suddenly a severe storm arose. To the superstitious robbers, it seemed to indicate
the wrath of the gods and in fright they freed him at once and became his disciples.\(^{(173)}\) A female slave who used to steal a few coins everyday from the money given to her by her mistress to purchase flowers, gave up this bad habit after hearing one day the preaching of the Law. She then preached the Law herself to five hundred women.\(^{(174)}\) According to Hiuen-Tsang, an image of the Buddha erected by Kaniska, near a stupa left its pedestal to prevent some robbers from stealing from that stupa. This miracle induced those robbers to live a pious life. A robber-chief struck a Buddhist monk with his sword but it bent in two and another stroke resulted in its separation from the hilt. This miracle induced him and his five hundred followers to be his disciples.\(^{(176)}\) Sariputta converted a cruel robber by preaching the law to him.\(^{(177)}\) A robber broke out of a jail and became a monk for he knew that the king would not punish a Buddhist monk.\(^{(178)}\)

Having been attacked by royal soldiers, some robbers\(^{(179)}\) became monks to avoid detection and the consequent punishment.\(^{(179)}\) This type of conversion became so common that it evoked strong popular protest and Buddha had to lean it.\(^{(180)}\) Generally the converted robbers did not transgress the Moral Law. A renegade monk, reconverted by an elder at the time of his execution by the king's men, did not betray any fear or perturbation when the executioners raised their weapons to kill him.\(^{(182)}\) After his conversion, Angulimala calmly allowed the people to hit him with clods of earth, sticks and stones.\(^{(183)}\)
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9. T.W.Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, p. 44; Mahavikāgnimitra, Act V.
11. J.N.S. Chakravarty, Kedembari Kethemukha of Bhānabatta, pp. 26ff.; Kathās., op.cit., Vol. II, p. 188.
15. Desakumaracarita, ed. Kale, p.16. The residence of the Sakaras who plundered travellers and others was called Pakkana.
17. J.C.Jain, loc.cit.


23. Ibid., Vol. IX, pp. 45ff.


33. V. S. Agrawala, *Indus as known to Panini*, pp. 434, 439ff.;
Panini, V. 3.113 and V. 2. 21. Kasika also says that the Vrata comprised of people belonging to different castes having no
definite means of livelihood. According to Katyayana, 'Vrata
is said to be an assembly of people having various, weapons
in their hands.' R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*,
pp. 222-23.


41. R. K. Mookerji, *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times*, p. 32;
R. C. Majumder, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 57.
44. Brhaspati, I. 26 cited by R. K. Mookerji, *Local Government in
Ancient India*, p. 122.
45. R. C. Majumder, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, p. 25.
46. Kali Pada Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 81; *Buddhist Legends*, *op. cit.*,
Vol. XXX, pp. 7ff.

50. Macdonell and Keith, op.cit., pp. 343-44.
53. Ibid., pp. 163ff.
54. Ibid., Vol. IX, pp. 45ff.
57. Desākumāracerita, ed. Kale, trans., p. 84.
61. Mrochakatika, Acts IV and VI.
66. E.B. Cowell and F.W. Thomas, The Harsacerita of Bama, Chap.VIII.
70. Mahābhārata, XII. 135.
74. Ibid., loc.cit.
75. Prabendhecintämeni, trans., Tawney, p. 80. Nevaghana, the King of Abhires was also very powerful (p. 95).

76. Mahabharata, VII. 112. See S. Sørensen's An Index to the Names in the Mahabharata, p. 408.

77. Ibid., Vol. XLIV, pp. 222ff.


79. Ibid., p. 207.

80. Ibid., p. 208.


83. Ibid., p. 128.

84. Ibid., p. 222.


90. Ibid., Vol. XLIV, p. 195.

91. Ibid., p. 197.

92. Ibid., Vol. XLVII, p. 222.


95. Rgveda, VII. 5. 55.
97. Rgveda, VII. 5. 55.
100. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 303.
101. Atharvaveda Parasishta, Chap. XX.
103. Mahabharata, Vana Parva, Chap. 28, V. 50.
104. D.R. Patil, Cultural History from the Vayu Purana, p. 63.
105. Sorensen, op. cit., p. 466.
109. Matsya Purana, 159. 1ff.
110. Ibid., 159. 16.
112. Vayu Purana, 72. 45.
113. Ibid., 84. 14.
114. Mrochakatika, III. 10. The thief, Sarvilaka (jokingly?) calls himself a supremely brave person bent upon burgling the houses of others.
119. Atharvaveda Perišiśca, Chap. XX.
121. Āryāvarta, op.cit., Notes, p. 66.
123. Ibid., p.e. cit.
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133. C.G. Diehl, op.cit., Vol. X1, No. 4.
134. According to the Hariśamśa, Kirātī (Durgā) was worshipped by a host of robbers; Bloomfield, loc.cit.
146. *Rgveda*, IX. 146. 5.
165. *Loc. cit.*
166. Dasakumaracarita, trans. Ryder, pp. 100ff.
168. Ibid., p. 246.
169. Ibid., p. 301.
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177. Ibid., pp. 218ff.
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