CHAPTER II

THE BACKWARD CLASSES AT ATHANI

The Land and People

Athani, a small town in northern Karnataka, is situated in the north-eastern part of the Belgaum district, at an altitude of 594.14 meters. It is also the headquarters of the taluka (subdistrict) of that name. It is 38.6 kilometres east of Miraj, a city in southern Maharashtra. The town is well connected by road, the nearest rail-head being Shedtal on the Miraj-Belgaum section of the meter-gauge rail route. The town can be easily reached by road from the Bijapur town as well—a distance of 75 kilometres. Its present population is 27,549.* The climate is generally dry and considered healthy. The town receives an average rainfall of 55.88 cms. annually.

The Athani taluka is situated in the north-eastern corner of the Belgaum district at a distance of 150 kilometres from the

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Male: 14,004, Female: 13,545. Of this the scheduled castes constitute 4,611: Male 2,249 and Female 2,362; and the scheduled tribes 280: Male 140 and Female 140.
district headquarters on the longitude of 175°-04' and latitude of 16°-44' consisting of 89 revenue villages and 27 hamlets.

The Athani taluka is bounded by Miraj taluka in the north-west, Jath taluka in the north-east (Maharashtra), Raibag taluka and Chikkodi taluka in the south and south-west; and Jamakhadi and Bijapur talukas in the south-east and east. It occupies a total land area of 2070-90 sq. kms. It is inhabited by 3,27,613 people.* The density of population of the taluka stands at 157 per sq. km.

The river Krishna flows along the southern boundary of the taluka. The Miraj-Bijapur road — the state highway that passes through the area — divides the taluka into two geographical zones. The northern zone is a dry area. The crops raised in this zone are: Jowar, Rajra, groundnut, horse-gram etc. It is a confirmed scarcity area and often the inhabitants have to face drought conditions. In contrast with this the southern zone consists of fertile black soil. Sugarcane, cotton, chilli, maize, wheat, sunflower etc. are grown here. The


Population table: Of the total population 1,67,670 are males and 1,59,943 are females. The scheduled castes segment is 46,244 people: Males 23,210 and Females 23,034; and the scheduled tribes segment is 4,225: Males 2,153 and Females 2,072.
southern zone has ample irrigation facilities — unlike the northern zone — which has made the area economically prosperous. Varieties of cash crops are raised by using lift irrigation on the river banks. The people of this sector appear to be prosperous.

The towns and villages of the taluka are provided with a good network of roads and public transport system. Today, 517 kilometres of roads are maintained by the public works department of the state government. Besides this, other roads are laid and maintained by the taluka development board and the village panchayats. There are in all 91 post offices and setting up of a few more is planned. The telephone network is fairly good. There are over 260 telephones in use.

In spite of a large number of educational institutions in the taluka the percentage of literates in the taluka stands at 30.12%. The area is served by 135 lower and 119 higher primary schools, 23 high schools and 4 junior colleges. The two first grade colleges located at Athani and Kagwad offer courses in Arts, Science and Commerce leading to a baccalaureate degree of Karnatak University. One leather artisan training centre imparts practical training in leather craft.
The entire taluka is served by 39 cooperative and commercial banks. There are in all 170 cooperative societies with a membership of 58,477 persons. The 64 agricultural cooperative societies alone account for 37,332 members.

**History of Athani**

Athani has a history of several centuries. The name recorded in travellers' accounts and other historical records is variously spelt as: Atteny, Attany, Hattany, Huttany, Atony and Atani.

The word Dhani in Kannada means lord/owner and the prefix 'A' means without. Hence the word 'A-dhani' means ownerless. It probably meant that the town was not possessed by any ruler at a certain point of history. The word 'A-dhani,' when pronounced spontaneously, sounds like Athani. It is also speculated that the name Athani is derived from the word Hastani which in Kannada (and also in Sanskrit) means an elephant. It is recalled here that the rulers of the area, especially of the Bijapur Sultanate, used to station their unit of army equipped with elephants at this place. Hence the name Athani is believed to have been derived over a long-time usage of the word 'Hastani.' Another unconfirmed account refers to the colloquial word 'uthani' as the original name of this place.
For centuries the town was recognised as a prominent trading centre. The French traveller Mandelslo* is said to have noticed 'Atteny City' in 1639 A.D. and referred to it as one of the chief markets situated between Bijapur and Goa. The English geographer Ogilby** mentions 'Attany in about 1670 A.D. as a great trading town 'two days from Bijapur.' In 1675 A.D. the English traveller Prayor*** records 'Hattany' as a mart town in Bijapur. In 1679 A.D. the Moghal General Dilawar Khan**** captured it from Shivaji and sacked it. At this time the English factory at Karwar which had large dealings with Athani ceased its contacts due to local disturbances. In about 1720 A.D. Athani was taken over by Nizam-ul-Mulk,***** the Deccan Viceroy. In 1730 A.D. the town was handed over to

Shahu of Satara.* In 1774 A.D. the governor of Bijapur, Basalat Jang, is mentioned as levying taxes on this place and as far as Miraj. In 1788 A.D. Rennie* mentions this as Atoni or Huttany, with an English factory in the heart of Viviapur. In 1792 A.D. captain Moore* calls it Atoni — a large town well peopled and thriving. By 1839 A.D., * on the death (without heir) of the Nippani chief, the town lapsed to the British crown.

The town municipality was established in 1853 A.D. The remnants of an old mud fort adjoining the municipal vegetable market still survive. There is a huge mansion (Vada) in which the local Desai's family lives to this day. The temples of Siddheshwar and Amruteshwar are the other old structures besides a mosque. The surviving northern and eastern gates of the town too were built several centuries ago.

The Athani taluka is situated on the border of Karnataka with Maharashtra. In terms of language groups, one can find here Marathi as well as Kannada speaking people. This is true of Athani also. Like any other taluka in the state, the taluka and the town have a large proportion of Hindus with a small percentage of Muslims.

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In the Athani town, there are Kuelira as well as Hindu castes. They comprise Brahmins, a number of middle level castes, bulk of whom fall under the category of the 'other backward classes.' The remaining come under the category of scheduled castes who are also called 'backward classes.'

**Backward Classes**

The scheduled castes constitute 10.49 per cent of the total population of the Belgaum district of which Athani taluka is a part. There seems to be an increase in their population over a period of years, i.e., in 1961 - 8.7%; 1971 - 9.20%; 1981 - 10.49%. This is also reflected in the scheduled castes population of the taluka. The number of the scheduled castes people in the taluka was 46,244. Of these 4,611 live in the Athani town.

In the Athani town, the following castes are classified as scheduled castes:

1. Bhandari* : Messengers.
2. Bhungi : Scavengers.
3. Bhajantri* : Local musicians (players of musical organs).

* These are peripheral groups living in the locality of the Harijankeri area. It is difficult to classify them precisely as scheduled castes.
5. Dor  : Tanners.
6. Haralayya Samaj (a segment of Samagars)  : Cobblers.
7. Holer  : Menial workers (mostly agricultural labourers; also flayers of dead animals for hide).
8. Kakkayya Samaj (a segment of Dhors)  : Tanners.
9. Konchikorava Korava  : Usually manage local music bands and piggery. Also prepare and sell:
   a. Broom stick bundles.
   b. Coarse baskets for agriculturists and construction workers.
   c. Baskets of palm tree leaves used by country liquor vendors.
   d. And Rangoli.
14. Madar (Madig) (Nacigaru)  : Rope making, Footwear mending and flaying of dead animals for hide.
15. Madar Buruda  : Cane and Bamboo work.
17. Pinjara (Hindu) (Pendara, Pindari)  : Cotton cleaning, also dealing in grass (cattle fodder) and working as day labourers.

* These are peripheral groups living in the locality of Harijaner area. It is difficult to classify them precisely as scheduled castes.
These 19 castes who form the category of scheduled castes are not a homogenous category; there is a hierarchy within them depending on the occupations they pursue. Take for example the caste of Holeyas and Madigas, who are both classified as untouchables. But the Holeyas are treated as superior to the Madigas. The Holeyas work as agricultural labourers and eat all kinds of meat except beef. The Madigas do leather work which is a very low occupation and eat carrion of all kinds. The difference in their ways of life and the occupations they pursue is reflected in the differential rate of development. The higher groups among the scheduled castes are better utilising the opportunities provided by the state and the lower ones among them have still to catch up. But the leather-workers (Samagars in particular) of Athani seem to be an exception to this.

Of the 19 scheduled castes found in Athani town, six pursue interrelated occupations. They are the Chambers, Holers, Madars, Samagars, Dhors and Machigars. The Chambers and the Samagars follow the same occupation, of the Cobbler, but the Samagars are predominant and speak Kannada while the Chambers are of
Maharashtrian origin. Because of the linguistic difference even though they are of the same status, they form two different communities. It must be noted that in this area the Samagars are also sometimes called cobblers — the term which is used to refer to the Madars also. Another distinction is that the Madars are indigenous leather-workers who do not do fine work while this is the monopoly of the Samagars. Thus it can be said that the Samagars are skilled workers whereas the Chambars and Madars are not. Both the Holers and the Madars do the skinning work. However the Holers have not taken to this occupation to the extent the Madars have. This is because the Madars, unlike the Holers, as a community, used to eat the flesh of dead animals. The other community, the Dhors, has specialised in tanning; the Dhors operate in close cooperation with the Samagars.

The Samagars, being skilled workers, use the opportunities provided by the state for development of their community and have succeeded in improving their living conditions. To a lesser extent the Dhors have also benefited, since both these communities are occupationally inter-linked. The prosperity of one community leads to the prosperity of the other community.

The Samagars occupy a prominent position in our study as they have taken to their traditional occupation fully and are
utilising the opportunities provided to them to the maximum extent. The other communities involved in leather-work have also been taken into consideration for the examination of the process of modernisation under the impact of the development agencies.

In the last three decades the leather-workers have come under the influence of the various agencies devoted to the welfare and uplift of the scheduled castes. In the last decade, they came under the influence of the developmental agencies devoted especially to the uplift and welfare of the groups engaged in leather-work. A field office of the KVIC located in Athani has been responsible for a number of programmes intended to cover solely these social groups. An evaluation of these two groups' past experiences and their present status and the emotional content (image) is likely to throw much light on the impact of developmental agencies, the feelings of the members of these groups, the reactions of the other downtrodden occupational groups living in the neighbourhood, the reactions of the general public at large. These may help to build successful models for the emancipation of the downtrodden in the country. The leather-workers of Athani fall into three distinct social groups. All are classified as scheduled castes. The group working in leather craft is known as Samagars or Chamagars. The group working in
tanning hides and skins is called Bhors. The Madars have specialised in the supply of raw skins.

For the purpose of this study only two castes, Samagars and Bhors, who have specialised in leather-work, are selected. Although there are the other communities among the scheduled castes who are associated with leather-work, they are not fully involved in the process of leather-work, not to the extent of Samagars and Bhors who fully depend on leather-work for their living. In addition, these are the only two communities which have been making use of the development agencies although one may find a few cases belonging to the other communities using the development agencies.

There are 263 Samagar families and 37 Dhor families in the Athani town.

**Leather-Workers at Athani: A Profile**

**The Samagars**

The Samagars live in three localities — Paragaon galli, Samagar galli and Haralayya road 1 and 2 in the Harijan keri. All these areas are in the eastern periphery of the town. The
Samagars look healthy and can easily be distinguished from the other members of the scheduled castes. The women of this community are fair and attractive. Nearly all families are bilingual. They speak both Kannada and Marathi.

Regarding the origin of the Samagars as an occupational group working in leather, leather craft, several traditional views are current. One such view refers to Harali, a devotee and page of God Shiva, from whom this group is believed to have descended. Another account refers to sage Markanda as their original ancestor. It is difficult to trace precisely their origin or descent. It is equally difficult to determine whether they are of Aryan or non-Aryan descent.*

Social Organisation

The Family

The family is the basic social unit among the Samagars. It consists of the father, the mother and the children. There are a few joint families where several brothers with their families live together.

All these families are patriarchal. Though the father is the head of the family, the authority the mother wields is enormous. In the joint families the eldest male member dominates and his wife generally supervises the household activities. The joint families are becoming extinct these days. Yet when the families of brothers live separately as independent units, the eldest among the brothers is revered and consulted by the younger brothers and the members of their families. It is in a way obligatory on the part of the eldest male member and his family to provide leadership and offer services especially for social events like the celebration of marriages etc.

One of the reasons to establish independent households is to qualify for the economic and other assistance extended by the government to the backward classes from time to time.

Habitation

Many families of Samagars live in one or two room tenements. Very few are living in thatched huts. Their living habits are by and large clean, good when compared to those of the other groups in the locality. Since these people work with leather, they are segregated and are in a way compelled to live outside the main sections of human settlement in the town.
These localities lack proper sanitary arrangements. Of late the municipality has extended the other civic amenities to these localities. There is adequate lighting and water supply. But the roads are irregular in direction, shape, size and certain stretches are in a very bad shape. There is hardly any drainage worth the name. However efforts are on way to provide the services lacking in the locality.

Food Habits

The Samagar family's food habits are simple. Their principal food consists of jowar bhakri or wheat chapati and cooked rice. They eat non-vegetarian food once a week. It consists of cooked mutton or fowl or fish. They do not eat beef or pork. They also do not eat the flesh of dead animals.

Men folk drink liquor freely. The prohibition on the consumption of beef and pork seems to be due to the impact of Lord Basaveshwara's movement of social reform which was started in the 12th century A.D. and the influence of the Muslim rulers of the Bijapur Sultanate.

It is of interest to note that some of the affluent Samagar families have turned vegetarian and no member of these families consumes liquor. It is very significant to note that
the process of Sanskritisation is taking root among the untouchable castes.

Religion

In general, the community professes Hinduism and follows the Hindu law of inheritance. These people worship a number of Gods and Goddesses – in the main Shiva, Ganapati, Hanuman and Nag or Cobra. They observe Shivaratri, Yugadi, Nagpanchami, Dusshara and Diwali. Their priests are either the Havyaka Brahmins or those of the Lingayats. Their worship of Yellamma (Jagadamba) appears to be of recent origin. Women of affluent families and their neighbours worship the tulsi plant.

Virashaivism appears to have had a great influence on this community. In a recent enumerative survey of 263 families, 201 families declared themselves as Samagars and 62 families as belonging to Haralayya Samaj. Few families of the Haralayya Samaj wear lingam on their body but nearly all profess Virashaivism. They call themselves Lingayats and worship both Lord Basaveshwara and saint Haralayya besides worshipping Shiva. Yet the difference between the Lingayats and these people persists. There is neither intermingling nor any trace of interdining. Relations between several subsects of Lingayats and the followers.
of the Haralayya Samaj; among the Samagar community, if any, are superficial. However the relations between the Samagars and the members of the Haralayya Samaj are very cordial and friendly. There is no segregation. They mingle well and there is no prohibition either of interdining or establishment of marriage alliances. Both the groups are covered and served by one and the same community Panchayat.

The dead are generally buried. But the affluent families prefer to cremate,* probably emulating the practices of some higher castes. The mourning in either case lasts for eleven days.

Marriage

The marriage ceremony is simple. Like in the other Hindu communities, certain immediate relatives are prohibited to marry one another. Girls are usually married before they attain puberty and boys when they are around 20. Infant marriages, once reported to be common, are on the decline.

Polygamy or bigamy, though not encouraged, is permitted, if the first wife is barren. Often the longing for a son in the

* Our field investigation reveals that firewood is expensive. Hence those who want to cremate their dead should be well off enough to afford the costly firewood. Hence the relationship between affluence and cremation.
family circles justifies search for a second wife. Polyandry is totally unknown.

Widowers can remarry. Similarly, widows are permitted to remarry if the caste headman agrees. Divorce is permitted in case of permanent misunderstanding between the couple, the cause may be adultery in case of woman and impotence in case of man. As reported by the community's elders, all these serve more as a provision than as a rule.

The offer of marriage is initiated by the boy's father. When a match is settled, the representatives of the boy and the girl's families approach a Brahmin priest or a Lingayat priest and request him to find an auspicious day and time for solemnising the marriage. A small ceremony is held to announce the marriage date, time and sometimes even the conditions of sharing the expenses etc. In the presence of a few relatives, invitees, friends and the community's elders (Pancha) betel leaves and nuts are exchanged and the boy and the girl are betrothed to be married at a future, mutually convenient date. The day may end with a big feast arranged at the girl's place for a limited number of people.

On the appointed day, the bridegroom is led to the bride's place in a procession. The bridegroom and his party are received
with dignity and led into the pandal specially erected for the purpose and made to stand on a basket of rice or other corn. The bride is also led into the pandal and made to stand opposite the bridegroom. A temporary curtain is held by hand between the boy and the girl by some elderly relatives. Amidst the chanting of sacred hymns and announcement by the head of the caste, the curtain is pulled aside and the couple are allowed to exchange flower garlands. The parents of the bride and the bridegroom join the hands of the couple and pour some holy water to pronounce the boy and the girl man and wife. This is familiarly known as 'Dhare.' This signifies the girl being given away by her parents to another family as daughter-in-law. The bridegroom then ties around the neck of the bride a gold bead fastened in turmeric-smeared cotton thread symbolising the acceptance of the girl he has received as his wife. The bead or jewel is called 'Tali' or 'Mangala Sutra.' The couple then is paraded around and made to sit on a bench or platform. Guests and relatives by turn bless the couple by sprinkling on them turmeric-smeared rice; and some take this opportunity to offer gifts in kind or cash. The day ends with a feast for all guests.

The practice of paying a nominal price for the bride still persists. The girl's father is to be paid by the boy's father a nominal sum of money. This practice in a way amounts to
selling of the girl by her parents to the bridegroom's family. But in recent years, it is reported that the boys of the affluent families have begun to receive money from the girls' parents as an incentive for marrying in those families. This is similar to the prevailing dowry system in other higher castes.

The poor families have the option to pay a small fee to the community association to escape the unbearable expense on community lunch/dinner. In this case the members of the caste participate to solemnise the wedding but return home to eat their lunch/dinner and thus save the poor family of the expenses.

The consummation ceremony is arranged months after the wedding. This occasion too is celebrated by the families and considerable expenses are incurred.

Relation Between the Members in the Family

Being patriarchal in character, the male members as a rule dominate. The head of the family is the father. In the absence of the adult member, the mother becomes the head of the household. But if the children have come of age, the eldest boy stands next to the father in authority and yields considerable influence in the family. The role of the father is usually to oversee the upbringing of the children and earn for them. The role of the
mother is confined to cooking for the family and the upkeep of the house.

But the Samagars are a toiling occupational group. The roles of the mother and the father stretch beyond the normal responsibilities of parents. Both work in close understanding and, besides upbringing children, they see that children are given the skills of the traditional occupation. Boys, often, are encouraged to keep company with the father to pick up the hard and coarse work of the trade and girls are encouraged to assist the mother with the household work and the finer details of the traditional leather craft. These days, children go to school and also learn at home the family trade simultaneously. To discipline the children, the mothers often insist that the children turn out a definite volume of work each day besides their normal school learning. Those who do not turn out the desired volume of work are denied food. It is a punishment which even the youngest in the family cannot escape.

Since all members of the family, irrespective of their age, participate in the work and help the family earn its livelihood, healthy relations prevail.
Class Structure

The community by and large has a single class structure. It appears to be homogeneous. The Samagars are primarily an occupation oriented toiling class. All families are involved in the production of footwear. Some have performed better. Those who have accumulated their earnings and invested their talents wisely are better off. In the wake of the government and other institutional patronage received by the members of this group a wealth oriented class seems to be emerging. But it is not posing any serious problems to the community. The position oriented (government employee) influential stock is yet to emerge in the community. Their members in the government service or in politics are too few.

The Samagars do highly skilled leather work. This is what makes them well off. The footwear which is called 'Kolhapuri' chappals has a wide market throughout the country. Although at one time the product had only a local market, some of the enterprising Samagars introduced this variety into the Bombay and Calcutta markets and this resulted in a greater demand for the goods. As the market widened, the quality had to be improved and new designs had to be introduced. The government, being aware of the potentialities of these skilled workers, came
forward to help them through the development agencies, which provide economic assistance, help them with the use of modern technology in the process of production and secure market for them.

The Samagars are concentrated in the Athani and Nippani talukas and they are also found in the Kolhapur and Sangli districts of Maharashtra. The Karnataka government is taking greater interest in the Samagars through its organ — Lidkar. In Maharashtra, now the state government is planning to take measures to improve the living conditions of Samagars on the lines of the Karnataka government.

Community Panchayat

A community Panchayat, as the very name indicates, is supposed to be composed of five elderly members of the community. But the present Samagar community Panchayat at Athani consists of nine members. It is no more traditional either in its composition or working. It is functioning under the title of "Charmakar Seva Sangha." Its office is located in the residence of its present chairman who lives in Sant Haralayya road, Athani.

This Charmakar Seva Sangha came into existence a little before the municipal elections were planned to be held in 1983.
It is said that before 1983, the Panchayat functioned more informally. It is also reported that the former organisation lacked dynamism required to serve the community. It existed only as a continuity from the past. Today it is quite active and the authority it wields is enormous.

The Sangha normally meets twice a month to discuss and transact business relating to the activities and welfare of the community.

The Panchayat does not have as yet a place of its own. The meetings are held in the houses of the members or the Charmalaya premises if prior arrangements are made. Whenever the Panchs are required to settle disputes, only five members (out of nine mentioned earlier) sit in the traditional manner and give their verdict. It is always an ad hoc arrangement. If the issue in question requires persons other than the original nine, their presence is secured. Blood relations and others connected in the dispute are excluded from this panel. It is done in keeping with the principle of natural justice. This speaks of the level of maturity the community as a whole has achieved.

* 'Charmalaya' is the name of the local office of Khadi and Village Industries Commission. The office arranges to procure the footwear produced by the local cobblers and markets them all over India and abroad. Hence the local cobblers community is intimately connected with this office.
It is reported that the purpose of floating this Seva Sengha was to claim various benefits from the government. The executive committee members state that their sources of information are newspapers, radio commentaries and to an extent the upper caste Lingayat community members whom they often contact on matters of interest to the Samagar community. They confirm meeting as frequently as necessary, both formally as well as informally, to take note of the various government policies and developments relating to leather and footwear industry and trade etc.

The Seva Sangha is a registered body. It plans to build a Kalyanamantapa, a Samaja Mandir and a Palavadi for the benefit of the community as also the locality. In this connection the Sangha members have approached the state government for allotment of land and funds. The community members are ready to raise contributions for the projects.

In the recent months the Sangha members have also approached the Public Works Department and police officials with a request to regulate traffic on the Bijapur road which passes through their locality. This is done in order to ensure the safety of children, the aged and deaf pedestrians in the locality.
In the traditional Panchayat system only the eldest male members of the community enjoy the prerogative of shouldering and discharging the responsibilities. But now this privilege of the eldest five members has ceased to impress the members of the community. The old power is now exercised by the new leadership the Sangha has offered to the community.

Dhore

The other community which figures in this study and which is closely associated with the Samagars in their occupation in the Dhore community. They have the same status as the Samagars in the caste hierarchy. There are 37 families living in two clusters on the eastern periphery of the Athani town. The main occupation of this community is leather tanning. The name of the community is probably derived from "Dhor" which means cattle in the Marathi (language) as these people tan the cattle skins.

There are three endogamous divisions among the Dhores which are based on linguistic differences. They are the Kannada speaking Dhore, the Marathi speaking Dhore and the Hindustani

speaking Dhors. These groups neither have commensal relationship nor give and take girls from each other. The Dhors in Athani are distributed among Kannada and Marathi speaking groups. Now both are integrated well; dine in each other's place on occasions and also establish family alliances through marriage.

Social Organisation

The Family

The family constitutes the basic social unit in the community. It consists of the husband, the wife and the children. Often many brothers with their families are seen living together as one unit. Many a time widows, unmarried sisters and crippled or handicapped individuals are considered dependent members of the family. They are cared for and maintained with compassion.

A Dhor family is a patriarchal family. The father is the head and commands obedience from all members of the family. Yet the authority of the mother in the family is high as menfolk mostly work outdoors and entertain themselves with liquor and come home late at night. Women mostly stay indoors and are responsible for the upkeep of the house and bringing up children.
Religion

The Dhors are Hindus. Their family deities are: Bahiroba, Bhavani, Khandoba, Mahadeva and Vithoba. They observe all the Hindu festivals and local feasts. They observe Navarathri in September/October and Shivarathri in February/March. Besides they also worship deceased ancestors and offer goats and fowls as sacrifice. At times when epidemics break out, they worship deities like Mari and Sitala.

Some of the Dhors have come under the influence of Virashnavism. These followers claim to belong to the Kakkayya Samaj. In a recent enumerative survey some families have insisted that they be addressed as members of the Kakkayya Samaj instead of Dhors.

The dead are buried. If death occurs during child birth or if the deceased has suffered from T.B. or leucoderma, the body disposal as a rule is by cremation. If the cause of death is unnatural (like suicide), the body is cremated. The mourning lasts for five days. A Lingayat Jangama is invited and five people are fed in the ceremony.

Food

The food habits are simple. The principal food items are
the jowar bhakri or wheat chapatis and cooked rice. The Bhors also eat meat of goats, sheep and fowl. However they do not eat beef or pork. They also do not generally eat the flesh of dead animals.

Marriage

The marriage among Bhors takes place more or less like in other scheduled castes social groups. The initiative for the marriage rests with the boy's parents. When a match is settled, the community elders are formally approached and are requested to give permission to celebrate the marriage. The marriage takes place at the boy's place.

It is customary to pay a price for the bride. However in recent years a reversal of this practice is reported. Instead of the girl's parents receiving the price, they have begun to pay the boy's parents, 'a sum' which can be termed as 'dowry.'

Generally, the community council of elders decides on the expenses to be incurred by the two families during the marriage celebration. The community for its participation is supposed to receive a lavish lunch. But in recent years, due to the pressures of modern living and the costs involved, the community has come forward to forgo this lunch and save the expense for the
marriage parties, if they happen to be poor families. In place of lunch, the parties have to pay a nominal sum of money to the community Panchayat fund. The community members participate in the wedding function but go back to their homes to eat and thus spare the poor family the trouble of feeding all those who attend the wedding. In lieu of the wedding dinner the sum realised by the community is Rs. 5/- from the boy's family and Rs. 14/- from the girl's family. This payment to the community fund in lieu of the lunch/dinner to all the members of the community is accepted and appreciated by one and all. The poor now feel secure and the traditional practice stands revised.

This indicates that the community is giving up outmoded practices and rational thinking and action are replacing the traditional beliefs and practices.

The interesting facts about these two communities are that while the Samagars have utilised the opportunities provided for them for their advancement in society, the Dhors, though some of them have improved their status, have not advanced to the extent of the Samagars. This is attributed to the fact that, unlike the Samagars, the Dhors have not given up their traditional style of life and are much addicted to liquor.
In addition, the children are employed for work at the point of salt treatment of raw leather and they get attractive remuneration for this job. Thus one can see the low level of education amongst the Bhors.