

NAHĀLĪ.

The Nahāls are mentioned in old documents as hill robbers. According to the Nimar Settlement Report, ‘“Nahal, Bheel, Kolee” is the phrase generally used in old documents for hill plunderers, who are also all included in the term “Mowassee.” The Raja of Jeetgurh and Mohkote has a long account in his genealogy of a treacherous massacre by his ancestor, in the time of Akbar, of a whole tribe of these Nahals, in reward for which he got Jeetgurh in Jageer. Indeed they seem to have been inveterate caterans, whom nothing but extermination could put down. They do not now exist as a tribe, but only in scattered families, who are mostly in the position of hereditary village watchmen.’

According to the same authority the Nahāls then, in 1870, spoke Kūr̄kū. It is probable that this is still the case with many Nahāls. Others, however, use a mixed form of speech, which will be dealt with in what follows. This latter dialect is the so-called Nahāli, *i.e.*, the language of the Nahāls. It is spoken by the Nahāls of Nimar, but no information is available as to the number of speakers, the Nahāls having been included under the head of Kūr̄kū in the local estimates and in the last Census reports.

Nahāli is different from the Nāhari dialect of Kanker, which is a broken Hal’bī, and also from Nahari, a Bhil dialect of Nasik and Sargana. Like both, however, it is strongly Aryanised, and probably on its way towards becoming an Aryan form of speech. The base of the dialect is probably a Muṇḍā language of the same kind as Kūr̄kū. Then there is an admixture of Dravidian, and finally an Aryan superstructure. It is of interest to note that Nahāli is spoken in a part of the country in which remnants of Muṇḍā and Aryan tribes still meet each other. To the north and west we find a continuous chain of dialects, *viz.*, the various Bhil dialects, which are now Aryan but are spoken by tribes who must have been of the same stock as the Nahāls.

A version of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and a list of Standard Words and Phrases in Nahāli have been received from Nimar and will be reproduced below. They are the basis for the remarks which follow, and which do not make any pretension to completeness.

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