

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE

VARIATIONS IN POPULATION

WHEN the first census was taken in 1872, the population of the district as now constituted was 1,500,397. During the succeeding nine years, there was an increase of 10·8 per cent., the figures for the 1881 census showing a population of 1,662,795. There has been very little variation since then, a slight decrease of 1·1 per cent. found at the census of 1891, having been rather more than made up by the increase of 1·4 per cent., which the census of 1901 showed. At this last census the population was returned at 1,667,491. At the censuses of 1872 and 1881, the district included the Subdivision of Bangaon, which was transferred to the Jessore district between 1881 and 1891, but the effect of this change upon the population of the district has been taken into account, and the figures have been adjusted accordingly. The net variation in the period from 1872 till 1901 was an increase in the population of 167,094 persons, which is equivalent to 11·1 per cent. This was considerably less than the percentage of increase in all other districts in the Presidency Division, with the exception of Murshidabad, which showed an increase of 9·8 per cent.

CENSUS OF 1901

In the Bengal Census Report for the census of 1901 it is remarked that, what with the terrible outbreak of epidemic fever between 1880 and 1885, and two destructive floods in 1885 and 1890, it was small wonder that at the census

of 1891 a decrease of rather more than one per cent. should have been recorded. The report continues :—

“The decade which has just passed has witnessed no such widespread calamities as that which preceded it, but the conditions have not been favourable to the growth of the population. Fever has been very prevalent in the south of the districts especially in the Krishnagar town and in the old jungle-smothered villages of the Ranaghat Subdivision. In the extreme north-east of the district also, obstructed drainage has favoured the spread of a virulent form of malarial fever which has caused a very heavy mortality. Cholera also was very prevalent, especially in 1891, 1892 and 1896. The only two healthy years of the decade were 1897 and 1898. The seasons were, on the whole, unfavourable to the crops, especially those of 1895 and 1896, in which years the early rice crop was a little more than a half and a third, respectively, of the normal outturn. The winter rice suffered even more, yielding less than half of an average crop in 1895 and barely a seventh in 1896. Distress was severe throughout the district and deepened into famine in the tracts where late rice is the staple crop. The relief afforded by Government was eminently successful in preventing loss of life, and the deaths reported in the years 1896, 1897 and 1898 were less numerous by nearly 50 per cent. than those of the preceding triennium. The statistics were tested, but the results showed that the reporting was quite as accurate as usual, and the fact that during the same period the reported births exceeded by 7 per cent. those of the previous three years points to the same conclusion.

“The net result of the present census is an increase of 23,383 persons, or 1·4 per cent. The Ranaghat Subdivision in the south of the district shows a loss of 5·6 per cent., or 1 per cent. more than that recorded ten years ago. The Krishnagar thana, in the head-quarters subdivision which joins this tract, has also lost ground, though not quite to the same extent as in the previous decade. The

whole of this tract is, as has been already noted, malarious and unhealthy, and its continuous decline must be ascribed mainly to this cause. The decadent condition of the weaving industry of Santipur may also have contributed to the falling off in that direction. Calcutta and the mills in the neighbourhood attract immigrants from this neighbourhood, but the total number of Nadia-born settlers in Calcutta and the 24-Parganas was less in 1901 than it had been ten years previously. The district has lost by migration during the decade to the extent probably of about 1 per cent.

“The two eastern thanas of the head-quarters subdivision, Hanskhali and Kissengunge, show the greatest increase of any in the district. These thanas lie in the hollow across which the floods of the Bhagirathi sweep whenever the great Lalitakuri embankment in the Murshidabad district gives way, and they suffered severely in the floods of 1885 and 1890. The population of Kissengunge was stationary in 1891, while that of Hanskhali showed a great decrease. In the two thanas together the present figures represent a very slight improvement on the population recorded twenty years ago. The only other part of the district that shows a satisfactory rate of progress is the line of thanas stretching through the centre of the district from Kaliganj to Kushtia, which corresponds very closely to the area in which famine relief operations were found necessary. This area, taken as a whole, is probably at the present time the healthiest part of the district. The decrease in Kumarkhali, in the north-east, is due to malaria which, as will be seen further on, has caused an even greater loss of population in the adjoining parts of Jessore and Faridpur. The falling off in Karimpur to the north-west is less easy to explain.”¹

1. The Drainage Committee of 1907 came to the conclusion that the falling off in Karimpur was due to malarious fever.

The following table shows the salient statistics of the census of 1901 :—

Subdivision	Area in square miles	NUMBER OF		Population	Population per square mile	Percentage of variation in population between 1891 and 1901
		Towns	Villages			
Krishnagar	701	2	740	361,333	515	+ 3.53
Ranaghat	427	4	568	217,077	508	- 5.63
Kushtia	596	2	1,011	486,368	816	+ 0.71
Meherpur	632	1	607	348,124	551	+ 3.39
Chuadanga	437	...	485	254,589	583	+ 3.74
District Total ...	2,793	9	3,411	1,667,491	597	+ 1.42

DENSITY OF POPULATION

The Kushtia Subdivision is by far the most populous portion of the district. Kumarkhali is the most densely populated thana within the subdivision, notwithstanding that it lost 4.65 per cent. of its population during the ten years ending with 1901. It now supports 947 persons to the square mile, and this though it only contains one small town with a population of 5,330 only. The density of the population decreases towards the west, being 923 in Kushtia, 813 in Naopara and 588 only in Daulatpur, which is on the extreme west and borders upon the northern part of the Meherpur Subdivision. The subdivision which shows the least density is Ranaghat, notwithstanding that it contains a larger urban population than any other subdivision. Ranaghat lost 4.6 per cent. of its population between 1881 and 1891, and 5.63 during the following ten years, and its density in 1901 was only 508 persons to the square mile. The falling off was most marked in Santipur and Chakdaha thanas. The low density is primarily due to the continued unhealthiness of the tract, which in its turn is caused mainly by lack of drainage

to carry off surplus water. In the Krishnagar Subdivision the density varies from 661 persons to the square mile in the Kissengunge thana, to 411 in Hanskhali; in Meherpur, from 631 in the Gangni thana to 521 in the Tehata thana; and in Chuadanga, from 691 in the Alamdanga thana to 477 in the Jibannagar thana. During the decade ending with 1901 the greatest loss in density occurred in the Santipur thana, and the greatest gain in the Kissengunge thana.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES

The district has nine towns, viz., Krishnagar, Santipur, Ranaghat, Chakdaha, Birnagar, Nabadwip, Meherpur, Kushtia and Kumarkhali. The average population of these towns is 10,595, and their inhabitants represent 5 per cent. of the total population of the district. This percentage is far greater than the corresponding percentage in the sister districts of Jessore and Khulna. Fifty-four per cent. of the urban population is contained in towns inhabited by 20,000 persons or over. The rural population is contained in 3,411 villages, each of which, on an average, has 461 inhabitants. The average population of the villages is higher than that in any other district in the Presidency Division.

The following remarks on the towns of the district are taken from Mr. Gait's report on the Census of Bengal, 1901 :—"Nadia has nine towns, but only one, Ranaghat, can boast of an increase. The apparent loss of population in Kushtia and Kumarkhali is due to the exclusion of a considerable area from municipal limits; Kushtia at least, on its present area, has gained rather than lost ground. Santipur was once the centre of a flourishing weaving industry, and its muslins had a European reputation; but the modern machine-made article has driven them out of the market; the weavers are no longer prosperous, and in many cases they have been driven to supplement the earnings from their looms by agricultural pursuits. There was also at one time a considerable trade in date-

sugar, but this too is becoming less profitable. The earthquake of 1897 destroyed many of the largest buildings, and these the impoverished owners have been unable to replace. The result of these adverse conditions is a decline of $11\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Krishnagar, the district head-quarters, is also decadent, chiefly on account of malarial fever which is very prevalent in the older part of the town. The decline in Nabadwip is, to a great extent, fictitious. It is celebrated amongst Vaishnavas as the birth-place of Chaitanya, and is a favourite place of pilgrimage. There happened to be very few pilgrims on the date of the present census, whereas in 1891 and 1881 a great number were present, especially in the former year, when the *Dhulut* ceremony was in progress at the time when the census was taken."

IMMIGRATION

The total number of residents of other districts who were found in Nadia at the census of 1901 was 59,010, representing 3·5 per cent. of the total population. The great majority of these, viz., 44,233, came from contiguous districts. In 1891 72,945 immigrants were found in the district. The excess over the number found in 1901 is probably due to the fact that the *Dhulut* ceremony was in progress in Nabadwip when the census was being taken in 1891, and was attended by 15,000 persons from neighbouring districts.

EMIGRATION

The total number of residents in Nadia who were enumerated in other districts at the census of 1901, was 123,737, which represents 7·4 per cent. of the total population of the district. This is a far larger percentage of emigration than is shown by any other district in the Presidency Division. Mr. Gait remarks, "Nadia loses population to all the districts that adjoin it, even to unhealthy Jessore." One reason which may account to

some extent for the large excess of emigration over immigration is the fact that the demand for labour in Nadia is slack during the cold weather when the census is taken; the main crop of the district is the *aus* or early rice crop, and when the reaping of that is finished, it is probable that a large number of agricultural labourers betake themselves to other districts where there is a demand for labour to cut the winter rice; many of these would no doubt remain away until the time for reaping the *rabi* crop, and later for preparing the land for the *bhadoi* crop, afforded them the prospect of regular employment in their native district. It is also not improbable that the continued unhealthiness of the district has a tendency to drive away to more congenial districts those who are not too much tied down to their own villages.

LANGUAGE

The language commonly used is the dialect of Bengali called "Central Bengali." It is the same dialect which is employed in the districts of 24-Parganas, Murshidabad, Midnapore, Hooghly and Howrah, and, as spoken by the higher classes, is claimed to be the most pure form of Bengali. Ninety-nine per cent. of the people of the district use this language, and of the remainder, about three-quarters use Hindi, and the rest other languages. The number of persons speaking Hindi rose from 9,098 in 1881 to 12,319 in 1901.

RELIGIONS

The population of the district is almost entirely made up of Hindus and Muhammadans; the former number 676,391, or 40·56 per cent. of the total population, and the latter 982,987, or 58·95 per cent.; there are 8,091 Christians; but no other religion has even 20 adherents in the district. In 1872 Hindus formed 45·3 per cent. of the total population, and the Muhammadans 54·3; in 1881 the corresponding

figures were 42·85 and 56·82; in 1891 they were 41·9 and 57·0. It will thus be seen that the proportion of Hindus to Muhammadans in the district has been steadily declining during the last 40 years. A similar and nearly equal decline has taken place in the Jessore district, while in Khulna the reverse tendency is to be observed, though not to a marked degree. It is a curious circumstance that in these three adjoining districts the Muhammadans are overtaking the Hindus in the two most unhealthy districts, while in the comparatively healthy district of Khulna, the Hindus are very slowly overtaking the Muhammadans. In the province, as a whole, Muhammadans are increasing more rapidly than Hindus, and at the 1901 census Mr. Gait made an enquiry as to why this should be so, and he came to the conclusion that in the province as a whole the main explanation of the relatively more rapid growth of the Muhammadan population must be its greater fecundity, one reason for which is that the Muhammadan widow remarries more readily than her Hindu sister, and another that the Muhammadan has a more nutritious dietary than the Hindu.

HINDUS

The most remarkable fact in connection with Hindus disclosed at the census of 1901 was that the decline in their numbers was almost entirely among females; the total loss was 12,833, and of these only 162 were males. This disparity is not to be observed in the sister districts of the Presidency Division. Hindus out-number Muhammadans in the Krishnagar and Ranaghat Subdivisions, but by only about 4 per cent. in the former and 16 per cent. in the latter; in the other three subdivisions Muhammadans largely predominate, Hindus forming considerably less than a third of the population in the Kushtia Subdivision and only slightly over a third in the Meherpur Subdivision. One reason for the preponderance of the Hindus in the two southern subdivisions is that in them are situated the large municipal

towns, and it is a curious circumstance that although Muhammadans form the majority of the whole population, they are in a very considerable minority in the towns, where they form only 26·3 per cent. of the population. A further reason is that these two subdivisions lie along the most sacred part of the Bhagirathi, and are therefore specially attractive to Hindus. A third reason may be that Krishnagar has for many years been the head-quarters of the Hindu Nadia Raj.

HINDU CASTES

The Kaibarttas are the most numerous represented caste in the district; they were returned at nearly 111,000 at the 1901 census. There are seven other castes with more than 25,000 representatives each, namely, in numerical order, Ahirs or Goalas, Brahmans, Bagdis, Muchis, Namasudras (Chandals), Kayasthas and Malos. Nadia is, in this respect, differentiated from the sister districts of Jessore and Khulna chiefly by the relative importance of the Kaibarttas and the unimportance of the Namasudras and Pods.

KAIBARTTAS

The Kaibarttas are mainly agriculturists and occasionally fishermen. They have representatives in every thana in the district, but are most numerous in Tehata, Daulatpur and Damurhuda. In the Tehata thana they form about 20 per cent. of the population. They are nearly all classed as *Chasi Kaibarttas*. At the time of the census they urged that they should be treated as entirely different from the *Jaliya Kaibarttas*, and many of them entered their caste as Mahishya, an ancient caste of much respectability which is said to be descended from a Kshatriya father and Vaisya mother. They were permitted to enter themselves as Mahishyas, as this is a name which is assumed by no modern caste, and it was not likely to

lead to confusion ; but in the course of tabulation all the so-called Mahishyas were classed as *Chasi Kaibarttas*. There seems to be no room for doubt that the two sections of Kaibarttas are of common origin, and in remote tracts inter-marriage is still permitted between them ; at the same time the process of differentiation has proceeded so far in the more advanced portions of the Province, that they constitute practically separate communities.

AHIR AND GOALA

The census of 1901 showed 71,380 Ahirs and Goalas in the district. In Bihar the two terms are interchangeable ; in Bengal the term Ahir is used only by persons of the Bihar caste, but doubtless many of these also showed themselves as Goalas ; it was not therefore found practicable to differentiate them in the course of tabulation.

BRAHMANS

This community numbered 47,002 at the 1901 census. They are divided into two classes, Rarhi and Barendra, so called according to the names of the different divisions of the country assigned to the Brahmans by Ballal Sen, King of Bengal, in the twelfth century. The Rarhi Brahmans originally came from the districts west of the Bhagirathi, and the Barendra Brahmans from the country north of the Padma. The Brahmans form, by themselves, the first group in caste precedence in Bengal proper.

BAGDIS

The number of Bagdis in the district is steadily increasing ; in 1872, with the Bangaon Subdivision included, there were 35,576, whereas in 1901 there were 46,435. They are fishermen, cultivators, palanquin-bearers, etc., and, in caste precedence, they rank very low, being in the last group but one. Mr. Gait remarks of them, "This caste gave its name to, or received it from, the old division of

Ballal Sen's kingdom known as Bagri, or South Bengal. Mr. Oldham is of opinion that they are the section of the Mal who accepted life and civilization in the cultivated country as serfs and co-religionists of the Aryans." The distribution of the Bagdis is very local, their habitat being practically confined to the Bardwan Division and two of the adjoining districts of the Presidency Division.

MUCHIS

Muchis numbered 40,113 at the 1901 census. This caste is on the decline in the district.

NAMASUDRAS, CHANDALS

The Namasudras were returned at 37,695 at the census of 1901. The main habitat of this caste is in the more eastern districts, and Nadia is the most westerly district in which they form an important item in the sum total of the population. It is only within comparatively recent years that they have assumed the name of Namasudra ; formerly they were known as Chandals. The following story as to the origin of the Pods and Chandals is current in Khulna :—A beautiful girl succumbed to the blandishments of a low caste lover and gave birth to a son. The intrigue and its result were kept secret, and in due course the girl was married to a man of her own rank in life. She had several other sons, who were brought up in comfort, while her first-born shifted for himself as best he could. When the legitimate children grew up they learnt the story of their mother's frailty, and persecuted their half-brother in all possible ways. Once when he was away from home they pulled up his paddy seedlings and planted them upside down. This was more than the bastard could bear, and he was about to commit suicide when the goddess Lakshmi appeared and caused the plants to bear a crop of golden grain. The bastard is said to be the ancestor of the Pods, while the legitimate sons were the forebears of the Chandals.

The Namasudras show considerable aptitude for organization, and it was at much pains that they succeeded in getting their present designation recognized, in place of the term Chandal, to which they objected. They appear to have a genuine desire to raise themselves as a class, and in March 1908, they held a very largely attended meeting at which the following resolutions were passed :—

“(1) That the Namasudra conference be made permanent by yearly meetings to be held in the different districts for the discussion of social matters and the spread of education ; (2) that a village committee be formed in every Namasudra village, and unions of 15 such villages, and a district committee in every district ; (3) that for acquiring funds for a Namasudra contribution fund, village communities, unions and district committees be authorised to collect subscriptions. A handful of rice should be set apart before meals in every family, and collected weekly by the village committee. Every member of village committee will pay a monthly subscription of one anna, of unions two annas, and district committees four annas. Three per cent. of the expenses incurred in *sraddha*, marriages and other occasions must be reserved for this fund ; (4) that as some active measure should be adopted towards social reform, it is resolved that any Namasudra marrying his son under 20 or daughter under 10 will be excommunicated. The committees and unions must be specially careful about strict compliance with these resolutions.”

KAYASTHAS

There were 30,578 Kayasthas in 1901. This caste appears to be somewhat on the decline. They are to be found all over the district, but are most numerous in the Kaliganj, Krishnagar, Nakasipara and Kumarkhali thanas.

MALOS

The Malos numbered 26,049. They are of low caste and are chiefly fishermen, boatmen and labourers.

HINDU SECTS

KARTABHAJAS

There are only two Hindu sects which call for special remark ; these are the Kartabhajas and Vaishnavas.

The Kartabhaja sect was founded about the middle of the eighteenth century, and took its origin at the village of Ghoshpara, in the Chakdaha thana. The name of the founder was Ram Saran Pal, who was by birth a Sadgop and by profession a cultivator. With him was associated a religious mendicant who was known as Fakir Thakur. A local legend relates how, while Ram Saran was tending his flock, Fakir Thakur suddenly appeared before him and asked for a cup of milk. While he was drinking it, a messenger came up and said that Ram Saran's wife had been taken seriously ill and was at the point of death. Fakir Thakur offered to go and cure her, and taking some mud from the nearest tank, he anointed the body of the dying woman with it and restored her instantly to full health and strength. He then said that he must himself be born of the woman whose life he had saved, and, miraculously disappearing, was in due time born as Ram Saran's son, and received the name of Ram Dulal.

According to another account Ram Saran was born in Jagdispur near Chakdaha ; he caused dissensions in his family owing to the fact that he gave himself up entirely to religious exercises and neglected temporal affairs ; not caring to remain with his family under such circumstances, he left them and went to Ghoshpara where he found favour with one of the leading residents, and was allowed to settle there and marry the daughter of one Gobinda Ghosh. Not long after his marriage he was visited by a strange Fakir, who informed him that he had just been beaten by some soldiers of the Nawab of Bengal, and had had to make his escape by miraculous means ; he had in his hand a small vessel, and he said that he had gathered the water of the Ganges in it, in order that he might pass over dry shod. Ram Saran

comforted him, and before he took his departure persuaded him to leave behind the miraculous vessel, which is still preserved as a valuable relic in the family of Babu Gopal Krishna Pal. The Fakir settled in his own village in the Bangaon Subdivision of Jessore, and there established a band of Fakirs, who performed many miracles, and propagated many tenets of the new faith over all the districts of the Presidency Division.

Ram Saran Pal is believed to have died in the year 1783, and his place as head of the sect was taken by his son Ram Dulal, or Dulal Chand. He appears to have been a man of marked personality and considerable power of proselytism. He impressed a number of leading men of his time with his teaching, and had added very largely to the numbers of sect by the time of his death, which took place in 1833. He was succeeded as Karta (which was the name given to the head of the faith) by his son Iswar Chandra, but since the death of the latter, there has been no generally recognized Karta; at present each of the four surviving members of the family of the founder heads a separate church, which is attended by his special adherents and admirers. Under these circumstances the popularity of the sect is naturally declining.

The census of 1901 furnishes no reliable indication as the number of the sect. The great majority entered their religion as Hindu or Muhammadan, as the case might be, and in compiling the returns it was not found possible to differentiate the sect.

The following account of the tenets of the sect is taken from a note furnished by Babu Gopal Krishna Pal: "The Kartabhaja sect, or as the members themselves call it, the "Satya Dharma," or the "Sahaj Dharma" (the true religion, or the easy religion) is, if I may be permitted to say so, a man-worshipping sect, and its object is to call forth and develop the latent divinity in man. This it seeks to accomplish, not by renouncing the world and its cares as something transitory and illusive, but by going through life's struggles manfully and heroically, sustained

throughout with love for mankind and reverence for nature. Far from being atheists, as some writers have described us to be, we believe in the existence of a personal God, whom we can love and adore, but the *Mukti*, or salvation, we seek to attain is not one of annihilation, or of absorption, but one in which we shall live in subordinate co-operation with the supreme Godhead.

"We have no outward characteristic that would mark us out, no marks on the forehead or elsewhere, no special garb, no particular ornament or instrument. Neither have we any secret signs, nor any secret rites and ceremonies. Ours is not a guruworshipping sect, as some have taken it to be. In fact as a safeguard against any possible misconception as to the rights and obligations of a religious preceptor, and the consequent misuse of his privileges, the terms 'guru' and 'sisya' are never employed among us; on the contrary the words used are "mahashay" and "varati". It will thus be seen that the "mahashay" is merely a teacher and has no right to exact any divine homage from his 'varatis'.

"The duties enjoined upon the members are, *inter alia*, the following:—

- (1) Never to utter any untruth. *N.B.*—This injunction is so strictly observed by the majority of the members, that our sect has come to be called the 'Satya Dharma' sect.
- (2) Every day to repeat the mantra in the prescribed manner for at least three times on each of these five occasions, early in the morning when rising from bed, then again after morning ablutions, in noon after bath and before dinner, in the evening, and lastly in the night when retiring to bed.
- (3) Fridays to be held as sacred, and to be observed with fast and religious meditation and discourses, and, where practicable, to hold or attend in the evening religious meetings of the sect.

- (4) Always to abstain from meat and intoxicating liquors. To the above may be added.
- (5) To attend diligently the festivals held at Ghospara, and to pay or remit something to the *gadi* in recognition of the spiritual headship of the Karta.

“One of the most important points to be noticed in connection with our sect is the complete separation that has been made both in theory and practice between social and spiritual matters. In respect of the former the members are at perfect liberty to follow the customary rules and usages of their families and communities, and it is only in matters purely spiritual that they are amenable to the control of the sect. From the spiritual point of view all members stand upon the same footing, and no distinctions based on caste, wealth, etc., are recognized, so that a person of however low a social status he may be, provided that he has sufficiently advanced in spirituality and in the development of his psychical powers, is unhesitatingly accepted as the spiritual guide by those who are socially his superiors.

“Thus persons who would otherwise have practically no status in the Hindu society, do find that by being admitted into our sect, vast opportunities open before them of being useful to others and thereby incidentally of distinguishing themselves. It is this highly liberal and democratic character of our sect, coupled with proofs positive of its utility in the shape, for instance, of a rapid development of psychical powers, which chiefly induces outsiders to join our ranks. And however much one may differ from the founder as regards his tenets and similar other matters, one certainly cannot deny that he who has laid the foundation of this all-comprehensive system of spiritual co-operation, in which degraded humanity finds a cordial welcome and ready recognition, is simply for this, if for nothing else, entitled to the everlasting respect and gratitude of the whole mankind.”

The sect is, of course, anathema-maranatha to all the followers of pure and orthodox Brahminism, and this

accounts, to a great extent, for the unfavourable comments upon it which have occasionally appeared in print, and also for the fact that it does not appear to bear a very high repute amongst Hindus generally.

VAISHNAVAS

The following extract is taken from Mr. Gait's report on the census of 1901:—“Modern Vaishnavism, as preached by Chaitanya, represents a revulsion against the gross and debasing religion of the Tantras. Chaitanya was a Baidik Brahman and was born in Nabadwip in 1484. He preached mainly in Central Bengal and Orissa, and his doctrines found ready acceptance amongst large numbers of people especially among those who were still, or had only recently been, Buddhists. This was due mainly to the fact that he ignored caste and drew his followers from all sources, so much so that even Muhammadans followed him. He preached vehemently against the immolation of animals in sacrifice and the use of animal food and stimulants, and taught that the true road to salvation lay in Bhakti, or fervent devotion to God. He recommended Radha worship, and taught that the love felt by her for Krishna was the best form of devotion. The acceptable offerings were flowers, money and the like, but the great form of worship was that of the Sankirtan, or procession of worshippers playing and singing. A peculiarity of Chaitanya's cult is that the post of spiritual guide or Gosain is not confined to Brahmans, and several of those best known belong to the Baidya caste. They are all of them descended from the leading men of Chaitanya's immediate entourage. The holy places of the cult are Nabadwip, Chaitanya's birthplace, and in a still greater degree Brindaban, the scene of Krishna's sport with the milk-maids, which Chaitanya and his disciples rescued from jungle, and where he personally identified the various sacred spots, on which great shrines have now been erected. At Nabadwip the most important shrines are in the keeping of Brahmans who are themselves staunch *Saktas*.

"In course of time the followers of Chaitanya split into two bodies, those who retained and those who rejected caste. The latter, who are also known as Jat Baishtams or Bairagi, consist of recruits from all castes, who profess to intermarry freely among themselves, and, except for the fact that outsiders are still admitted, they form a community very similar to the ordinary Hindu caste. Its reputation at the present day is tarnished by the fact that most of its new recruits have joined owing to love intrigues, or because they have been turned out of their own caste or for some other sordid motive. Those who have retained their caste and are merely Vaishnava by sect are, of course, in no way connected with the Jat Baishtams just described, and their religion is, on the whole, a far purer one than that of the *Saktas*. The stricter Vaishnava will have nothing to do with Saktism and are vegetarians, but amongst the Bagdis and other low classes many of the professed followers of the sect will freely eat animal food and follow in the Durga procession, though they will not on any account be present when the sacrifices are offered up."

MUHAMMADANS

The Muhammadan population of the district increased from 947,390 in 1891 to 982,987 in 1901. As noted above, the loss of the Hindu population was almost entirely among women; the same tendency is to be observed among the Muhammadans, though not to so marked an extent, for the increase in their numbers was made up mostly among males. The following remarks may be quoted from Hunter's Statistical account of Nadia: "The existence of a large Musulman population in the district is accounted for by wholesale forcible conversions at a period anterior to the Mughal Emperors, during the Afghan supremacy, and also to the circumstance that Nadia was the highway between the great Muhammadan settlements of Murshidabad and Dacca. The only form of sectarianism which Muhammadan religion has developed in the district is a rather powerful

Faraizi community. They are not actively disloyal, but cultivate their fields like the rest of the peasantry. Forty-two years ago the case was very different, and the fanatic leader, Titu Mian, found in Nadia a sufficient body of disaffected Faraizi husbandmen as to lead him to set up the standard of revolt and for a short time to defy the British Government." The Faraizi sect is not now of much importance.

The Kushtia Subdivision contains the largest Muhammadan population, and next to it the Meherpur Subdivision. Generally speaking, Muhammadans predominate in the eastern portion of the district, away from the Bhagirathi, sacred to the Hindus.

MUHAMMADAN CLASSES

The vast majority of Muhammadans returned themselves as Shekhs at the 1901 census, this class showing a total of 895,724. The number of Jolahas was 20,016, and of Atrafs 19,332. No other class returned even as many as 10,000. The higher classes were in a very small minority, only the Pathans (8,794) and Saiads (7,093) numbering over 1,000. There is a good deal of ambiguity in the term Shekh, and it is certain that most of those who have been returned as such are not true Shekhs.

CHRISTIANS

The total number of Christians enumerated in 1901 was 8,091, being 794 more than were enumerated in 1891, and 1,669 more than were enumerated in 1881. All but 179 of these are natives of India. The Church of England has 5,836 followers; next to this is the Roman Catholic Church with 2,172 followers; there are very few followers of other Churches or sects. Nadia has more Church of England converts than any other district in Bengal except Ranchi. For further information about the Christians in the district, a reference should be made to the chapter upon Christian Missions in this volume.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

FOOD

The ordinary food of the people consists of rice, fish, pulses (*dal*), vegetables and milk. Well-to-do Muhammadans indulge in animal food, generally the flesh of fowls or goats. There is a tendency among the more advanced of the Hindu community also to partake more freely of meat. The lowest classes of the Hindus eat pork, and Bunas are fond of the flesh of the flying-fox. All classes are partial to feathered game when they can get it.

The cultivator generally starts the day with a meal of cold rice, which has been kept over from the evening meal. About midday he usually partakes of a hot meal, which is brought out to him in the field by one of his household. The principal meal of the day is taken after sunset, generally at about 9 P.M. The consumption of tea and aerated waters is increasing among those who can afford these simple luxuries.

CLOTHING

The Collector reports that the condition of the people as regards dress and other comforts has improved greatly of recent years. A well-to-do man dresses during the hot weather in a *dhuti*, worn long and loose, and a shirt, worn outside the *dhuti*, or a loose coat. He also wears a *chadar*, or shawl, of silk or light cotton during the summer, and of wool or heavy material during the winter. The richer people use coats made of serge or flannel, and costly shawls. Some Muhammadans prefer their characteristic costume consisting of a long *chapkan* and *pyjamas*. The pandits and Brahmans who perform priestly duties wear plain borderless *dhutis*, and cover their bodies with a *chadar* of cotton or broadcloth. They generally wear slippers of Indian pattern, whereas the English pattern of shoe is preferred by all other classes who can afford it. The ordinary cultivator wears a short coarse *dhuti*, and carries a *gamcha* (towel) on his shoulders. In the

winter a woollen vest or jersey is frequently worn. By women the *sari* is universally worn; this is a single cloth about five yards long, half of which is worn below the waist, and the other half over the head and body. A bodice is also commonly used under the *sari*. Well-to-do ladies have rich silk *saris* worked with gold thread, and fine silk bodices trimmed with lace. Gold and silver ornaments are worn more or less by all women except widows.

HOUSES

As is the case in most of the Lower Bengal districts, the village is generally a loose agglomeration of *baris*, or homesteads, rather than a compact collection of houses. Except among the poorest classes, the ordinary *bari* contains at least three huts or houses, and is frequently surrounded by a fence made of grass or the dried stalks of jute. The principal house serves as a bedroom, another is used as a reception room and the third as a cow-shed. The dwelling house usually has a high plinth so that the floor may be well above flood level in the rains. The walls of the houses are generally made of mud; but in the Chuadanga and Kushtia Subdivisions split bamboos, or bamboo mats plastered with mud are frequently used. The doors and door-frames are as a rule made of wood, with wooden bolts or chain fastenings; the poorer classes use mat screens for doors. The roof is thatched with the long coarse grasses of various kinds which grow in the district, and in bazars corrugated iron sheets or flattened kerosine oil tins are frequently placed on top of the thatch as a protection against fire. In the old Hindu *baris* there is always to be found a *pujar dalan* or a *chandi mandap*. The former is a large brick-built structure with a certain amount of architectural decoration, in which the presiding deity of the house is installed and worshipped. The latter, which serves the same purpose, is a thatched house in the *bari* of humbler folk. These arrangements for worship are sometimes omitted in modern built *baris*. Every husbandman of means has in his *bari* a circular hut

built on a raised platform with bamboos and the leaves of the date palm, which is used as a granary. The thatch of the houses has to be repaired every year, and ought to be renewed every other year. Two-storied brick-built houses are gradually becoming more common, especially in the towns, For fuel the ordinary villager uses cakes of dried cow-dung, the stalks of jute and other plants, and the dried branches of trees.

The Collector reports that owing to the facilities of communication afforded by the railway, there is a marked tendency on the part of the rural population to settle in towns and seats of commerce. Many inhabitants of Santipur and Ranaghat are daily passengers to Calcutta, where they have their business. Some residents of the district live in Calcutta during the week, and go home for the week-end. Day labourers migrate in search of work to towns and into the neighbouring districts, but they always retain their connection with their native villages.

AMUSEMENTS

The principal amusements of the people consist of various theatrical and musical entertainments. The performance of what is called the *Mansar Bhasan* is very popular. In this a description is given of the strife between Chand Saudagar, a rich merchant, and Mansa, the snake goddess; the latter, having destroyed six of the merchant's sons, causes a snake to bite the seventh and last son on the day of his marriage. Behula, the bride, by her chastity and devotion to her husband, at last succeeds in arousing the compassion of the goddess, and she restores the husband to life. The legend is sung in verse to the accompaniment of music and dancing, the performers generally being either Muhammadans or Muchis.

Pirer gan is a popular entertainment among Muhammadans. It consists of a musical recitation of the supernatural powers and wonderful feats of a Muhammadan saint named Manik Pir. This saint is held in much esteem even by Hindus, especially those of the Goala caste.

The *kathakata* is a recital of the Ramayana or the Mahabharata by a Brahman to an audience consisting chiefly of illiterate females, who cannot read the sacred books. The recital goes on night after night for about three hours at a stretch.

The *jatra* is an entertainment of a higher class, consisting of the performance of a mythological piece, generally selected from the Ramayana or Mahabharata. There are many *jatra* parties in the district, but the chief among them is that which was conducted and managed by the late Moti Rai of Nabadwip, which is considered the best in Bengal. The usual charge for a single performance by this party is Rs. 150.

In the towns there are amateur dramatic societies which give public and private entertainments; in Ranaghat alone there are four such societies, each of which has its own stage and appurtenances.

In every large village, or group of villages, there is a place called the *barayaritala*, which is reserved for the worship of the village deity, and for the performance of *jatras* and other entertainments. There is usually a committee for the collection of subscriptions to pay the expenses of the *barayaris*, and though Hindus are generally the organizers, Muhammadans also subscribe willingly. A portion of the subscriptions is used on the worship of the local godling, but the greater part goes in defraying the expenses of the entertainments. The two *barayari melas* held in the Ranaghat bazar are the most popular in the district; people come in from all the country round to attend them, and a brisk trade is carried on by local and other shopkeepers and itinerant vendors.

Among the younger generation cricket, football, and even lawn tennis, are gradually replacing the indigenous games.

The chief indoor games which are indulged in are chess, draughts and card games.

FESTIVALS

In the statement below will be found a list of the chief festivals held in the district.

Serial No.	Month in which held	Name of festival	Duration in days	Number of shops	Daily average attendance of people	Name of village where held	Name of subdivision
1	Jan.	Mallikpur ...	3	20	700	Patuli ...	Ranaghat
2	"	Tehata ...	8	200	5,000	Tehata ...	Meherpur
3	"	Mian Sahiber	1	15	300	Raghobpur	Ranaghat
4	Feb.	Dhulat ...	15	80	1,000	Nabadwip ...	Sadar
5	"	Dharmatola ...	5	200	3,000	Chopra ...	"
6	"	Muragachha ...	7	100	1,500	Muragachha	"
7	"	Raita ...	25	9	150	Raita ...	Kushtia
8	"	Kali Puja ...	7	200	4,000	Khoksa ...	"
9	"	Maghi Purnima	4	300	2,000	Chakdaha ...	Ranaghat
10	"	Baidyanath-tola	15	60	500	Baidyanath-tola	Meherpur
11	"	Saraswati Puja ...	15	60	500	Bhawanipur	"
12	Mar.	Mahismardini	5	150	1,000	Bara Bazar Ranaghat	Ranaghat
13	"	Chandghar ...	14	150	4,000	Chandghar	Meherpur
14	"	Kali Puja ...	30	7	100	Bara Gangdi	Kushtia
15	"	Ghoshpara ...	3	250	10,000	Ghoshpara ...	Ranaghat
16	"	Dol Purnima	3	50	2,000	Birahi ...	"
17	"	Ram Navami	30	10	300	Bhairamara	Kushtia
18	Apr.	Annapura ...	30	15	200	Khalisakundi	"
19	"	Bara Dol ...	3	200	3,000	Krishnagar	Sadar
20	May	Jugal Kishor	30	25	200	Aranghata ...	Ranaghat
21	"	Ulat Chandi ...	5	200	2,000	Birnagar ...	"
22	June	Dashahara ...	2	48	4,000	Nabadwip ...	Sadar
23	"	Murutia ...	8	60	5,000	Murutia ...	Meherpur
24	July	Rath Jatra ...	1	5	100	Haludbaria	Kushtia
25	"	Ambubachi ...	5	100	4,000	Matiari ...	Sadar
26	"	Gazir ...	1	15	200	Sankarpur ...	Ranaghat
27	Aug.	Brahmanitola	4	50	500	Nakasipara	Sadar
28	Nov.	Rash ...	4	100	8,000	Nabadwip ...	"
29	"	" ...	3	300	10,000	Santipur ...	Ranaghat
30	"	" ...	20	25	2,000	Beldanga ...	Meherpur
31	"	" ...	10	30	300	Chandbilla	"
32	"	Dharma Thakur ...	1	15	300	Kayetpara ...	Ranaghat
33	Dec.	Ganga Puja ...	4	10	100	Gotpara ...	Sadar
34	"	Annapura ...	5	100	1,000	Chota Bazar Ranaghat	Ranaghat
35	"	Kulia ...	2	200	10,000	Kulia ...	"