APPENDIX C.

WRESTLING HOUSES.[1]

Appendix C.

WRESTLING HOUSES

AN interesting feature of Dhárwár life is its Wrestling-Houses or Gardimanis. The word comes from *gardi* (K.) athletic exercise, and *mani* (K.) house. It corresponds to the Sanskrit *malla-griha* and the Persian *tálimkhána*.

The sport-house is an old Hindu institution. In one of these, dressed in woman's clothes, Bhim, the giant Pándhav, wrestled to the death with Kichaka who had insulted the sister-wife Draupadi. The Purans also have many references to these wrestling pits and their exercises

In Dhárwár in the east, and to a less extent in the west, every town and large village has its sport-house, and large towns often have several. In the eastern plain from the outside the sport-house looks like a flat roofed building about seven feet high. In the wet west, where they are rare, a tiled roof is built over the flat roof. In all cases the outer walls are whitewashed and the corners picked out with red. In many colours and sizes are figures of huntsmen, on foot and on horse, with spears and guns, shooting tigers and other wild animals, and wrestlers in fierce struggle. There are no windows and only one doorway with a strong wooden door. The top of the doorway runs two or three feet above the line of the roof and is coloured red, green, yellow, and blue. Along the sport-house wall is a raised earthen bench about two feet high and two feet broad where visitors sit and sing and smoke.

In front of the sport-house is a space for open-air wrestling. A strong door, the only opening in the walls, about $2\frac{1}{2}' \times 3'$, opens on three narrow steps which lead about four feet down to the floor. The house, whose walls are daubed with red earth, is about ten feet broad, eighteen long, and ten high. It is divided into three rooms each about six feet broad and ten feet long. Except one dim lamp all is dark as during exercise the door is always carefully closed. On one side of the house, on a seat two feet broad and three feet high, are clubs weighted with lead, stone weights, and iron-chains fastened to a stout bar. In a niche in one of the walls are the guardians of the house a small figure of the monkey god Hanumán, and of the *Panja* or Ali's Hand. Before the guardians is a censer in which frankincense is burnt. Thursday is the Musalmán and Saturday the Hindu guardian's great day. On Thursday all athletes burn frankincense before the Hand or *Panja*, throw a flower garland over it, and offer red sugar. On Saturday all Hindu athletes bathe, go to the god Hanumán, throw themselves before the image, offer sandalwood paste and flowers, wave burning frankincense, and lay fruits or other eatables before the guardian. Some red earth called *kávi* (K.) is kept in a corner of the room and rubbed on the wrestlers' bodies when they perform.

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[1] Ráv Bahádur Tirmalráv Venkatesh.

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Youths who attend sport-houses are known as *gardimani hulagas* or sport-house boys. Except the depressed classes who have sport-houses of their own, boys of all castes Bráhmans, Vánis, Jains, Lingáyats, Maráthás, and Musalmáns attend the village sport-house. Boys begin to attend sport-houses about ten and go on till they are thirty or more. Athletes and boys when in training are well fed. Those whose caste rules allow it eat flesh. Those who cannot eat flesh take specially large quantities of sugar and clarified butter. Boys and men of all classes when in training are careful to drink a pint of milk every day, and soak overnight gram in water and eat it in the morning, and, if they can afford it, eat dates soaked overnight in clarified butter. Boys who are fond of athletic exercises do not marry till they are twenty-five and even then, if they are champions, they do not live with their wives. A champion who has been beaten once or twice generally gives up wrestling and begins to live with his wife. For a month before the yearly challenge meeting the champion lives on rich food. The winner generally gets a handsome prize, a bracelet, a turban, or a waistcloth. The usual yearly challenge meeting is held in October on the day before Dasara. On the day of the meeting one or two sheep are slain in front of the guardian Hand, and the heads and legs are buried under a stone slab in front of the Hand, and the rest is eaten by Musalmáns Maráthás and other flesh-eaters. Bráhmáns Lingáyats and Jains who may not touch flesh, feast on fruit and sweetmeat. Anything that is over is buried in a corner of the sport-house. When at exercise the athlete wears a tight pair of short drawers and a waistband tightly wrapped round the waist and one end passed between the legs and tightly tucked behind. When resting or before beginning a contest they sometimes cover themselves with a cloak. All articles worn by athletes are washed in red-earth water. The hours are four to six in the morning and eight to ten at night. As soon as a boy enters a gymnasium he takes off his head-dress, jacket, and other clothes except the tight drawers and the waistband. Eight to ten stand in one line and eight to ten in another line opposite to them. Each catches his right arm with his hollow left hand and smites it near the shoulder several times making a loud noise. This is called *shaddá hodiyona* or shoulder-smiting. They then touch the ground with their toes and palms and move their bodies backwards and forwards without bending the knees, if possible stretching so far that the nose can touch the ground. This is called by Hindus the *devarásám* or god's exercise and by Musalmáns *Maula Ali's sám* or the prophet Ali's exercise. While performing exercises at each motion of his body, the leader keeps shouting short unmeaning sentences in which the names of Bhim and the prophet Ali occur and the rest repeat the shout and copy the movement. The last words of every couplet or triplet are in rhyme. They also stand and walk on their hands and sit down and rise more than a hundred times. They jump and turn double somersaults. They perform with clubs, lift weights, and climb greasy poles, and generally end by wrestling in couples.

At the challenge meetings the champions rub their bodies with red earth, tie an amulet or evil-scarer to one of their arms, and hide themselves under a dirty robe or a blanket in case any sorcerer or evil-eye should sap their powers.

Girls of the prostitute class and professional athletes, learn athletic exercises in their homes, but do not go to public sport-houses. They wear tight drawers from the waist to the knee, and small bodices. When they are grown they perform in public but never wrestle. When a girl performs in public she wears a bodice and robe like an ordinary woman

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with one or two differences. She passes the skirt of the robe so tightly back between her feet that the leg is bare up to the knee, and, instead of drawing the other end of the robe over the chest and head, she binds it tightly round the waist. Besides the tight bodice over the breasts she passes a bright kerchief over the right and under the left shoulder and ties it tightly behind the neck, fastening the two lower ends of the tippet to the robe at the waist one at each side. As soon as the performance is over she unties the kerchief and draws the upper end of her robe over her shoulder and head. Girls perform the same exercises as men except that they never wrestle.