

and the Vāyu Purāṇa<sup>34</sup> refer to them as 'Dakṣiṇāpatha-vāsiṇaḥ' or dwelling in the Southern Country. The Bṛhat-saṁhitā<sup>35</sup> mentions them as being under the jurisdiction of Śani (Saturn).

The Jodhpur Inscription of Śaṁvat 918, records that the Ābhīra people of this area were a terror to their neighbours, because of their violent demeanour.<sup>36</sup> The Ābhīra robbers are also mentioned in the Skanda Purāṇa.<sup>37</sup> Epigraphic evidence indicates the existence of an Ābhīra kingdom in the 14th Century in Khandesh.<sup>38</sup>

In the Sāhitya Darpaṇa of Viśvanātha,<sup>39</sup> it is stated that Ābhīrī is the language of the Ābhīras and Caṇḍālī of the Caṇḍālas. Those who do woodwork can speak Ābhīrī or Śābarī, either of the two. Daṇḍin asserts that the speeches of the Ābhīras, etc., are termed as Apabhraṁśa in the Kāvya<sup>40</sup> on the basis of which probably Keith writes: "the Prakrit lyrics passed into Apabhraṁśa as a result of the activities of the Ābhīras and the Gurjaras.<sup>41</sup> We know from the Amarakośa<sup>42</sup> that 'Ābhīrī' was used to denote 'Ābhīra woman or the wife of a cowherd'.

The Amarakośa<sup>43</sup> mentions Gopa, Gopāla, Gosamkhya, Godhuk and Ballava as the synonyms for Ābhīra and says that the village or place where Ābhīras lived is named as Ghoṣa or Ābhīrapallī.<sup>44</sup>

In the Kashmirian recension of the Mahābhārata we get the readings 'Kābhīra' and 'Kabhīra' in place of Ābhīra.<sup>45</sup> These Kashmirian forms may have resulted from an attempt to record an initial glottal opening in the language of the Ābhīras. The Kasmiras probably knew the Ābhīras at an early date.<sup>46</sup>

Bhattacharya<sup>47</sup> describes the Ābhīrs or Ahīrs as a cowherd caste exceeding 8,000,000, and found almost everywhere in India north of the Narmadā. The Ābhīras are mentioned as foreigners in the Purāṇas.<sup>48</sup> Their kings were regarded as vrātya and mostly śūdras (black).<sup>49</sup> In the Mahābhārata the Ābhīras are called Mleccha.<sup>50</sup> According to Manu<sup>51</sup> they were the sons of a brāhmaṇa man and an ambaṣṭha woman, the Ambaṣṭhas being of mixed origin and known as the Ānava kṣatriyas.<sup>52</sup> The Bṛhatsaṁhitā<sup>53</sup> places the Ābhīras in the