

## Three Styles in the Architecture of Vārli Dwellings

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Introduction: Vārli tribes are found all over the mountains and forests of Thana District, Dharampur, Bansda, and Peint Talukas, and to the east and southeast of Surat (fig. 1 *a*). They are spread over an area of about 4,534 Sq. Miles<sup>1</sup>, and number about 207 051 (105 218 males and 101 833 females)<sup>2</sup>.

The Vārlis have lost all traditions concerning their origin, with the exception of a few songs and tales which relate in detail their mythical origin from birds and plants. They speak a language which is akin to Konkani. From the linguistic point of view Konkani and southern Maharashtra could probably be taken as their motherland.

The Vārlis are primarily plough agriculturists, but their primitive means of slash and burn cultivation leave no surplus for the summer months. They thus turn to food gathering and hunting. Some families wander considerable distances in search of factory labour. Forests and mountains restrict the size of their fields, which are only small terraces, where *dangar* (*Oryza sativa*-Linn.) and *nagli* (*Eleusine coracana*-Gaertn.) are cultivated.

The economy of the tribe has greatly influenced their architecture. The Vārlis of Thana District lead a settled agricultural life and thus their villages are large and their houses rectangular or square, while the Vārlis of Dharampur, Bansda, and Peint Talukas build oval or round huts.

In the present article I restrict myself to the description of Vārli architecture in the Dharampur Taluka (fig. 1 *b*).

The Vārlis live in small settlements or *pādās* of seven to ten huts. At times we come across a large village of many independent *pādās*. The *pādās* are usually on the lower slopes of the hills (pl., fig. *a*). In the centre of the *pādā*

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<sup>1</sup> "India 1961". The Publications Division, New Delhi, gives useful information in short.

<sup>2</sup> Census Report of India 1931. Bombay Presidency, Vol. 8, Part 1.