

Major tribes of Rajasthan and their costumes

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INTRODUCTION

India has the largest concentration of tribal population anywhere in the world except perhaps in Africa. According to the 2001 Census, population of the scheduled tribes in the country was 8.43 crores, consisting about 8.2 per cent of the total population, with approximately 1 tribesman for every 13 Indians. They occupy around 15 per cent of the total geographical area of the country, usually in difficult and inhospitable terrain in the hills and valleys. The scheduled tribes in India are broadly composed of 250 tribal groups speaking about 105 languages and 225 subsidiary dialects. The scheduled tribes in India have been specified, as per provisions contained in Article 342 of the constitution of India, in 30 states/ union territories (Meena, 2006).

The term "Scheduled Tribe" is came into existence by the constitution of India adopted on 26 January, 1950. Prior to that they were called by various names such as "Aboriginals", "Adiwasis", "Forest Tribes", "Hill Tribes" and "Primitive Tribe" (Ghurye, 1966). In 1931 Census the term "Primitive Tribes" was used to specify the tribal population of India who were called as "Forest tribes of Hill tribes". In 1941 Census, they were simply termed as "Tribe" but now a day in the constitution of Democratic India, the tribes are scheduled and popularly termed as "Scheduled Tribes" (Khan, 2000).

Each tribe has its own name viz, *Bhil*, *Sabar*, *Santhan*, *Gond* etc., and is endogamous, *i.e.*, there is no inter-tribal marriage, the area of habitation and pattern of residence vary in different tribes. Generally they live in forests or hills; and if they live in villages, they settle their colonies little away from the other communities of the village. Their economy is forest based. They do not have occupation divisions. Each tribe has its own patron deities, customs and rituals. There is no specialized role for different people in a tribe as in Hindus. A religious head can also be a *Panch* or tribal leader (Bairathi, 1991).

According to Vidhyarthi and Rai (1977) the tribal people of India lived in the forest hills

and naturally isolated regions. They were popularly known as vanyajati (castes of forests), vanvasi (inhabitants of forests), pahari (hill dwellers), adimjati (primitive people), anusuchit janjati (scheduled tribes) etc. Among all these terms Adivasi is know most extensively and Anusuchit Janjati or scheduled tribe (S.T.) is the constitutional name covering all of them. In the ancient history of India their name in sanskrit language appear to have been: (i) *Nishadas, Sabaras, Bhil* and *Kolas* (ii) *Kiratas* (iii) *Dasas, Dasyus, Surdas, Dramidas* and *Dravidas*. The ancient and epic literature of the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat* emphasize that India was inhabited by several types of tribes/people. The *Ramayana* endorses that there were only two types of people *Aryans* and *Non-Aryan*. *Rakshasas* and *Vanaras* were important tribes among non-aryans – both being aboriginal tribes of the Deccan. The other tribes were the *Nishadas*, the *Gradhrajs*, the *Sabaras*, the *Yakshas* and the *Nagas*.

As cited by Hasnain (1983) – B.S. Guha has classified Indian tribes into three zones – on the basis of geographical distribution –

- The North and North-Eastern zone consists tribal people of Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Eastern Kashmir, Eastern Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Northern Uttar Pradesh.
- The Central zone consists of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Southern Rajasthan, Northern Maharashtra, Bihar and Orissa.
- The Southern zone consists of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Cochin, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The Tribal population in Rajasthan exhibits a diversified cultural scenario. As regard the geographical distribution and an understanding of the demographic situation of the Tribes, the Rajasthan state may be classified into three regions on the basis of concentration of tribal population –

- Southern Region – has the maximum tribal concentration about 59.9 per cent of the total tribal population of the state.
- South-Eastern Region – with a 32.12 per cent of the total tribal population of the state.
- Western Region – with a minimum population, only 7.48 per cent of the total tribal population of the state (Joshi, 1998).

According to Census of 2001, the percentage of trible population of India was 8.02 per cent of the total population while in Rajasthan it was 12.56 per cent of the total state population. Total number of tribal population in Rajasthan was 70,97,706 persons out of which 36,50,982 were females and 34,46,724 males. According to the Census of 2001, Banswara district has 72.27%, Dungarpur district 65.14%, Udaipur district 70.71%, Chittorgarh district 55.04%, and Siroi 66.55% tribal population out of total population

Mehta (1998) reported that the Rajasthan is the fifth largest state in terms of tribal population after M.P., Orissa, Bihar and Gujarat. The state has enumerated five numerically major tribes *i.e.*, Mina (49.86%), Bhil (44.01%), Garasia (2.84%), Sahariya (0.98%) and Damore (0.5%) – 12.21% of the total population of Rajasthan belong to the ST. Doshi and Vyas (1992) pointed out that the major tribes of Rajasthan are Meena, Bhil, Garasia, Damore, Nayakda, Bhil-mina, Dhanka and Kathodi.

Tribes:

The tribes are an intrinsic part of our national life with their rich cultural heritage. In India more than five hundred tribal groups are residing in different parts of the country. The habit of isolation helps them to preserve their social customs, traditions and beliefs to a large extent. India is known for the diversity of her people, their culture, tribes, communities, caste and religion that has been judged by the costumes over the centuries. The primary objective of dress amongst the various aboriginal tribes generally appeared to be decoration of the body. This was more prominent among women's clothing than man's clothing.

Verrier (1957) stated that primitively associated clothes with some magical significance and attributes, such as strength, power and status, ornaments, identified the wearer with gods, heroes and other men, it imparted an anthropomorphic value.

Rajasthan tribes also having peculiar dressing pattern including costumes\ jewellery, body decoration etc. Accordingly each tribal group has its own identity by their dressing patterns.

Bhil:

The Bhil are widespread among the tribal of India. In western India, the Bhil populate the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tripura. Madhya Pradesh is known as homelands of Bhils as 95% of Bhil were found there (Mehta, 2004). In Rajasthan their main concentration is in Banswara, Dungarpur, and Udaipur and Chittorgarh district. The dress of a female mainly consisted by 'Ghaghra', 'Kapada' and a 'ladla'. Ghagra was made of real khadi fabric. There was a difference in ceremonial dress. Men covered their heads with a 'feta', shoulder cloth and a dhoti. But generally men only covered lower portion of the body and they had no social restriction like women.

Meena:

Rizvi (1987) says that Meena are one of the ancient tribes of India comprised of western Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Goa, Daman-Diu. Meena is the largest tribe of Rajasthan. Minas divided their 'Mindesh' into twelve territorial units called 'pals'. All the twelve 'pals' are distributed on the eastern border of Rajasthan in the districts of Alwar, Jaipur, Bharatpur, Chittorgarh, Banswara, Udaipur, Bhilwara, Bundi, Kota, Tonk and Sawaimadhopur.

Garasia :

According to Tribal Research Institute of Rajasthan (T.R.I.) the Garasia constitute the third largest tribal group of Rajasthan inhabiting in Abu Road tehsil of Sirohi, Kotra, Gogunda and Kherwara tehsil of Udaipur and Bali and Desuri tehsils of Pali districts. Their origin is in Abu in Sirohi district. Mehta (1998) pointed out that in the Garasias tribe female dress consists of a thick bright coloured veil called *odhni* or *loogra*, a *kanchli* or bodice and a long skirt, *ghaghra*. Married women wear bright coloured garment while widows use only black or deep blue *odhnis*. Garasias women get their face tattooed with small dots on cheeks and two rows of dots on chin. They wear coconut shell bangles.

Damor :

As stated by T.R.I. (Rajasthan) the Damor, also called Damaria are small tribal group, migrated from Gujarat and largely concentrated in Simalwara, Sagwara, Aspur block of district Dungarpur. The Damor trace their origin from the Rajputs.

Saharia:

The Saharia are only primitive tribal group in Rajasthan. They are concentrated in the Shahbad and Kishanganj Panchayat samities of Baran district. According to a theory the word 'Saharia' in its bifurcation is Sah+Arya, which means co-arya or in easy term we can call them the assistants of the Aryans (Khan, 2000).

The costume of Saharia men was a short length – '*dhoti*', *salook* (shirt) and *turban*. The saharia women wore *ghagra*, *lungra* and *choli* (bodice). Young boys wore *pancha* (small piece of dhoti) and *salook* and the girl were dressed in *ghaghria*, *palka* and *faria*. Very small children moved without any clothes and were seen nude.

Kathodi:

The Kathodi is a small and isolated tribal community mainly inhabiting in the village Padawali, Kukra-Khera and Samija of Kotda tehsil as well as village Bujah, Ambari, Ogha, Ambasa, Surimala, Guard and Panwara of Jhadol tehsil and some villages of Kherwara tehsil of Udaipur district and Abu Road tehsil of Sirohi district in Rajasthan.

Traditional costume means a typical and traditional dress of particular community worn by years and social, political and religious conditions having influence on that particular community. Thus costume was handed down from generation to generation and finally it becomes the traditional costume of that community. But various factors viz., technological advancement, opportunities for travel, radio, television and government programmes etc. helped to bring out change in traditional costume. Change in costume is a true representation of social change and community development (Brandshaw, 1959).

Mehta (2009) carried out "a study on changing trends in traditional tribal costumes since independence in southern Rajasthan." – The research revealed that there is a visible change in Bhil costumes, little change in Garasia and major change in Kathodi and Damore tribal's costumes.

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