

A STUDY ON CHANGING RELATIONSHIP- TRIBALS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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During the medieval period, efforts were made by the state to bring the tribal communities within the fold of agriculture to bring more land under cultivation. Trade and strategic routes passing through various forests came to acquire more significance as they provided opportunities for greater political and economic controls. The tribes such as the Bhils the Minas, the Kolis and the Gonds were recognized as dominant communities by the Mughal Empire Efforts were made especially by Akbar to appease various chieftains' kings of Gujarat to strengthen his power by grants of 'mansab'. Some of them were even granted the 'mansabs'. For example, the Rathod chief in 1600-01 of the Baglana region (area comprising largely of Dangs and the Khandesh region) was granted the man sab of 3000s. Though there were petty resistances also by the tribal chiefs on a larger scale the relation between the state and the tribes remained cordial.

Tracing the relationship of the tribal people the mainstream society and the state would help in understanding the scenario in pre modern times. It would also help in analysing the intervention of the British colonial state which led to the breach of relationship between the forests and its original users.

In the Indian context the Vedic society has been described as tribal. According to Romila Thapar, the word 'tribe' precisely refers to a community of people claiming descent from a common ancestor. In its application however it has been used to cover a variety of social and economic forms as well as claims to biological and racial identities. In the Rigveda, which is the earliest of the four Vedas, references have been made to the Dasas or Dasyus. These were the local tribes who after their defeat by the Aryans came to be regarded as alien and barbaric.

Thus the society came to be divided into two main groups, Arya-varna and Dasa varna. (Varna literally means color). The distinctions were made between the two groups also on the basis of the language and territory.

Later the aspects of ritual and purity were also added to the distinctions between the Arya and the dasa. In the later Vedic texts, the word 'mleccha' was used widely for denoting the lower castes. In the second half of the 1st millennium B C, there was extensive urbanization of the Gangetic valley by the Aryans. They assumed the role of the advanced urban civilization based on technological and economic sophistication. The Aryans therefore regarded with contempt the tribes living in the forests who had remained at the food-gathering and hunting stage. Such Technologically inferior tribes as e.g. Sahara, Pulinda, Mutiba and Kirata constituted yet another category which came to be included in the term mleccha. It is during the Mauryan period, that we get more information about various tribes, their participation in the administration and the role of Ashoka in dealing with them. Gerard Fussman through the use of the Greek accounts and the edicts of Ashoka, he concludes that the Mauryan Empire was made up of

1. Territories administered directly by the crown.

2. Kingdoms conquered or won over, and

3. Tribes and republics with some degree of internal freedom. These tribes existed before the Mauryan Empire and they survived its dissolution Asoka during his rule made a distinction between the tribal people and the forest tribes. The latter was wooed by his officers in the context of a paternalistic policy where he regards himself in the image of the father and his subjects as his children. It seems that the forest tribe did not easily reconcile themselves to the law and order state had framed strict laws regarding the control and subjugation of forest dwellers as they were viewed a danger to the state. The same problem is reflected in Arthashastra. Kautilya also distinguishes between the mleccha and the forest dwellers (aranyacarah, atavikah). The atavikas, were said to be well organized and brave. He recognizes the political advantages to be gained from keeping the forest tribes happy since they had their own strongholds and could be used effectively in campaigns which would also keep them off from time to time to prevent their resorting to plundering and pillaging. According to Kautilya, strong king could destroy the kingdom of a forest chieftain by winning him over with bribes. Megasthenes the writer of 'Indica', who was the ambassador of the Seleucid Empire to the Mauryan court, refers to India as surrounded by the barbarian tribes. This possibly refers to the arya-varta surrounded by the mleccha-desa. Megasthenes also adds that all these tribes were Indigenous but they differed in mind and disposition from Indians, during the pre-medieval period the tribes were able to assert their political authority owing to the political

turmoil. As early as the first century B.C. the Bhils of Malwa had established a small kingdom, which disintegrated very soon. The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh had established a kingdom called Gondwana till they were overthrown by the Marathas. "Walled towns and forts still remain a witness of the Gond power and civilization". The epigraphic records refer to a possible kingdom of the Bhils in the present, Panchmahals district of Gujarat, between the 8th and the 9th centuries! The Bhil kingdom in the Dangs was vast. To a lesser extent, the Kois and the Minas also had formed their kingdom.

During the medieval period, efforts were made by the state to bring the tribal communities within the fold of agriculture to bring more land under cultivation. Trade and strategic routes passing through various forests came to acquire more significance as they provided opportunities for greater political and economic controls. The tribes such as the Bhils, the Minas, the Kolis and the Gonds were recognized as dominant communities by the Mughal Empire. Efforts were made especially by Akbar to appease various chieftains' kings of Gujarat to strengthen his power by grants of 'mansab'. Some of them were even granted the 'mansabs'. For example, the Rathod chief in 1600-01 of the Baglana region (area comprising largely of Dangs and the Khandesh region) was granted the mansab of 3000s. Though there were petty resistances also by the tribal chiefs on a larger scale the relation between the state and the tribes remained cordial.

However the situation altered considerably during the British period. The following passage explicitly narrates the tale of small farmers and the tribals during the British Raj. "In the olden days small landholders who could not subsist on cultivation alone, used to eat wild fruits like figs and jamun and sell the leaves and flowers of the forest and the Mahowa tree. They could also depend on the village grazing ground to maintain one or two cows and two to four goats, thereby living happily in the (inown, ancestral) villages forever the cunning European employers of our motherly government have used their foreign brains to erect a great superstructure called the 'Forest Department'. With all the hills and undulating lands has also the fallow lands and grazing grounds brought under the control of the forest department the livestock of the poor farmers does not even have a place to breathe anywhere on the surface of the earth". Interventions of the Colonial State British colonial Forestry in the second half of the nineteenth century inherited along with the forest management ethos, the continental attitude to other forest resource users. Foresters in India and the rest of the empire during this period were like their continental ancestors in that they held a clear bias against such communities, whom they viewed as ignorant, environmental profligate and wasteful. The colonial

state in order to define the forests for the purpose of scientific management devised a system of curtailing traditional and customary rights of the forest dwellers. This in time developed a sub discipline of forestry-forest law.

So the import of the continental forest management in the British Empire resulted in Lewis Munford's terminology in the introduction of an authoritarian technique in the realm of forests. This bias of the colonial foresters stemmed from their perception that the claims of the local people were illegitimate because of their scientific and technological backwardness. Surprisingly this attitude of judging communities on the bases of their scientific and technological prowess, at least in the realm of forestry was developed far away from their first human contacts in the colonies. The history of the Forest Department has been the history of the displacement of the marginalized section of the society. During the pre-British era, the tribal and the forest dwellers were autonomous in their territory though they were subjected to the pressures of the agrarian Quote by Jyoti Rao Phulae a social reformer in the century, 1881, in this civilization from time to time. During the late 18th, 19th and the 20th centuries there is a gradual erosion of their autonomy which finally resulted in their complete marginalization from their territories. Earlier being marginalized from the mainstream society did not disrupt the relationship they shared with the forests, the latter providing those with food, fuel, fodder, medicines and shelter. It was only after the forests were commercialized and timber became a commodity the English to ensure a larger and the maximum share of benefits created a 'Forest Department' demarcating them as 'reserved' and 'protected' areas, thereby depriving the forest communities of their rights, which the latter had enjoyed since the earliest times. During the colonial period, emerged a perceptible change in the tribal state-forest relationship. During the early and formative years of their rule the British were quick to recognize the significance of the tribal chiefs in an attempt to establish their; rule. Various agencies were set up (one such agency was set up in the Dangs by James Outram) in the tribal areas for opening communication, building of roads and railways for exploiting jungles which led; to: development of the market economy. The forests were brought under the various forest Acts and thus began the process of diminishing the rights of the tribal people in the forests. The English in their effort to secure the rights over forests first honoured the tribal chiefs with robes and then gradually isolated them from the forests. Firstly, the land in the tribal area was incorporated into the system of land tenure. The tribal regions in Bihar, Bengal and eastern parts of the Central Provinces belonged to the Zamindari system

whereas those in Bombay, Gujarat and the western parts of the Central Provinces were under the Ryotwari system. One significant feature of this period was the breakdown of the communal mode of production (hunting, gathering, slash and burn cultivation, collective labour) and the introduction of private ownership of land. To facilitate the commercial exploitation of forests, 'swidden' (shifting) cultivation was banned and the concept of agricultural season and new crops were introduced in the tribal land. This gradually led to the emergence of peasant system and the infiltration of tribal economy by the market. By the process of peasantisation, a social change was also seen in the tribal society. The tribes were brought closer to the peasant class, which indicated their upward mobility in the caste hierarchy, thus the beginning of the process of 'Sanskritisation' besides various social and religious movements amongst the tribals also upheld this process of upward mobility. One such example was the Devi movement which had spread amongst the tribal areas of Bhils in the Dangs and the surrounding regions.

Tribal people in Gujarat. The tribal population of Western India is mostly concentrated around Vindhyanal, Satpura and Khandesh regions. In South Gujarat the tribal population is mainly concentrated in the Dangs, Valsad and Surat and in Central Gujarat, they reside in the talukas of Chotta Udepur (a part of the Rewakantha Agency) and Sankheda (situated on the right bank of the river Orsang).

South Gujarat comprising of Bharuch (hills; of Rajpipla), Surat, Navsari, Dangs and Valsad in the 19th and the early 20th centuries were thickly forested with tropical dry and moist deciduous, forests. The thick forests and hills made the region to be known as Ranipradesh. This word has been used by K.S. Singh in various books and articles dealing with the movements of the tribes. The word peasantisation means the inclusion of more people into the fold-of agriculture. Sanskritization is a process by which lower Windu caste of the tribal group tries to change their, customs, rituals, habits and (a way of life in tile direction of high castes, they do this to, elevate there, social position in the caste hierarchy. official category of scheduled tribes adivasis in South and Central Gujarat are:

- Bhils, further subdivided into Bhil Garasia, Dhofi Bhil, Dangi Bhil, Dungri Garasia, Mewari Bhil, Rawat Bhil, tadavi Bhil, Bhagalia, Pawara, Vasava, Vasave and Bhilala
- Dhodia
- Dublas (Talavia, Halpati),
- Gamit (Gamta, Gavit. Mavchi, Padvi),

- Kokna (Kukna, Kokari),
- Kunbis,
- Naikda,
- Pardhi,
- Varlis,
- Vitolia (Barodia),

Table 1.1: Tribal Population of Gujarat- 2001.18

Sr. No.	Districts	% Of Tribal Population
1	Dangs	93.96
2	Valsad	54.35
3	Panchmahals	47.19
4	Bharuch	45.53
5	Surat	36.05
6	Vadodara	26.60
7	Sabarkantha	18.41
8	Kachchh	6.95
9	Banaskantha	6.91
10	Gandhinagar	1.37
11	Kheda	1.19
12	Ahemadabad	0.89
13	Surendranagar	0.78
14	Jamnagar	0.46
15	Junagadh	0.46
16	Mehsana	0.37
17	Rajkot	0.19
18	Amreli	0.16

"Except among some of the wilder hill tribes, who perhaps are improperly ranked among Bhils, the Bhils have no trace of a language different from that of the country where they are settled. According to geographical positions, Bhils speak the cognate dialects of Marathi, Gujarati, Rangdi, Mevadi, Narmadi and Rajputani". The chief of the Bhils is known as 'Gafnit' or "Pater; The Panchayat (council of five) advised the chiefs, when consulted and also decides all matters relating to the cases of thefts, marriage disputes, and land disputes and altercations etc among the Bhils. The Bhils were animists (worshipping the forces of nature, trees and animals). They worship Vagh Deva. (tiger God), Nimaji Dev (plant God), Dungalrya Deo (mountain God) etc. Other minor deities worshipped by them are Kali, Hathi Pava, Gviva Deva, Shalupanda etc. Female deities are also worshipped by them. In general, their places of worship include some trees consecrated by a few long stones set up on a mud terraces built round the roots and some of their most sacred images are enclosed in open shades. They believe in witchcraft and demonical influence Therefore, the Bhils shared a symbiotic relationship with nature, which is a key element in the sustaining of any eco system. Sacredness attached to animals, tree in whole nature, helped in conservation and their minimal use in the fulfilling of the basic needs (not greed).

The, following excerpt elicits a contemptuous attitude of the colonialists towards the Bhils.

"Bhils are rarely met except in the retinues of the chiefs, they are ugly and stunted, very black, wild arid almost naked. Living like Kunbis in cone shaped huts made of tree boughs they burn them on the slightest mishap, and seldom stay in one place for more than a fortnight. Though nominally Hindus, they know very little of the Brahamanical religion and unless he is a beggar, hold a Brahmin in no particular respect. Hanuman, the monkey God, is occasionally seen in their villages. But their chief object of worship is the boundary God, Simaria Dev, the snake God and the tiger God- Wagh Dev, in whom they say the souls of their ancestors become incarnate. They believe in omens and greatly dread the power of witches and of the evil eye. Considering the member of chiefs, family, they hold all the labour, except fieldwork, a degrading work. They neither work as woodcutters nor pilfer wood. But during the rains, they meet near Kunbi villages and hire themselves as field labourers receiving payments in grains. Polygamy though allowed is practiced by the chiefs only some of whom have a dozen wives. Except that they are more industrious, making bamboo baskets and mats the varlis are much the same as Bhils. They speak a mixture of Gujarati, Hindustani and Marathi of which Gujarati is a chief element. The first few lines (in italics); show the colonial attitude towards the native tribes. The English always believed the natives as the noble savages who according to them need to be reformed in their habits and manners. The last three lines of the above quotation (in italics), show the relative adaptability and the necessity of the tribal people as they were proficient in three languages. The Vasavas form no separate castes, but it is a sub division of the Bhils. They are found primarily in the Vadodara district. Their main occupation is cultivation where they work as agricultural labourers. They mainly worship Lord Shiva. The Kunbis: According to, the Khandesh Gazetteer, "Kunbis are weak and miserable looking. Every man carries a sickle, shaped knife fastened to a string tied round his waist. Their cane shaped huts have wattle walls and Toots thatched with bundles of hay. They supplement the scanty crops of coarse rice and nagli by fruit and produce of their bow and arrows. They are excessively fond of moha spirits and from their scanty food and drinking habits, are subjected to chest and lung complaints. As a rule, they are extremely shy and timid, but civil and obliging. They are only half settled. A death, an outbreak of cattle disease, or the working of a witch is enough to drive them away from their huts.

The Kunbis, though inferior to the Bhils in the social hierarchy are now economically better off. They have adopted new tools and better techniques of agriculture under the impact of the community

development programme, what is astonishing is that, though they attend Bhil's marriages, they do not dine with them and even do not drink water from the Bhil's place.

Dublas: The Dublas numbering 100,775 in 1901 were found chiefly in Bharuch, Surat and Valsad district. They are classed among the Kaliparaj Le. dark races; a common term used for the tribals in Gujarat.

They claim to be a race of the Rajputs, and try to show their lineage to the Rathods. They are, primarily animists and believe in witchcraft sorcery and magic. They worship the images of their ancestors prepared of the sandalwood called khatruns. They are divided into various subgroups like Kathodias, Talavias etc.

Varlis: According to Dr Wilson, 'Varlis' mean uplanders, the name given in the older times to denote the residents of Varalat, the sixth of the seventh Konkans. The northern part of konkan was known as 'varalat' because Varlis originally lived there. Many Varlis in Gujarat claim that their original home is in Ramnagar (Dharampur) or nagar Haveli-a union territory. Varlis are supposed to be a subdivision of the Bhils, since they have many traits regarding their culture, religion etc. common with them. Their religion is animistic as it is based on the spirit worship, though they also follow Hindu pattern of worship. They do not nurture any respect for a Brahmin and do not subscribe to any sacred books.

Dhodias: According to Enthoven, Dhodias numbering 94,381 in 1901 were chiefly settled in Surat, Thane and southern parts of Gujarat. The Dhodias are a part of the Baroda State too, and according to Baroda State Gazetteer, "Dhodia is a primitive tribe found in the Navsari district".

They are in religion and their main deities of worship are Behram Dev, Iria Dev, Mooli Mata, Kakabalia, etc. These deities are worshipped so that they may protect their followers from the evil influence of the witches, ghosts, Smallpox, cholera! and other such epidemic diseases. In most of the Dhodia villages the post of headman or Naik is hereditary, and social disputes are; decided by the tribal meetings. Breaches of rule are punished by payments or expulsion from the tribes.

Naikdas: They are one of the important tribes of Gujarat. They are found chiefly in Baroda, Surat and Bharuch district. According to the British sources, Naikdas and savage'cruelty were synonymous Oust because they revolted against the unjust policies of the British?). In 1826, they were said to "exceed the Bhils in their predatory and lawless habits in their cruelty blood thirstiness life of independence and in total disregard of all the customs and lusage of the social life" In 1868, they were stirred up to rebellion by one of their holy men or the Bhagats. What is important to be noticed is that in this tribe

women occupy a position of superiority in several aspects of social life of the communities 28 During marriages the girls are given more freedom of opinion and the groom's family has to pay a fixed price, before marrying her. The system of the residential son- in law is another privilege of the Naikda women. Naikdas are generally engaged in settled agriculture but some may wander from place to place in search of an employment during the fair weather. In rainy season they generally perform agricultural labour.

Rathwas: Rathwas are one of the leading tribe of the Vadodara district. As they call themselves Kolis, they are known as the Rathwa Kolis. They are mainly found in Chotta Udepur. Eabh Rathwa village has its headman known as patel or pujari who deals with all matters of village.

The Rathwa tribe lives mainly near the river and forest sources. The palm trees are most respected, as it is a resourceful tree for the Rathwas. Their main occupation is agriculture and the most important economic activity besides agriculture is animal husbandry. The liquor preferred by them is Mahowa and toddy. Their religion is basically animistic. From the above description of the tribes it is clear that almost all the people belonging to the tribes are settled in the forests which are the chief provider of food, fodder, fuel and fiber to them. Nature is the chief form of worship. Many tribals engage themselves in agriculture on a small scale, entirely, depended upon the rainfall, which is the example of subsidiary and subsisting living. In case of the failure of rainfall, they collect flowers, fruits and woods and sell them in the markets to earn their livelihood. This is the reason that forests are extremely precious and sacred to them. It would be relevant here to throw some light on the concept of 'Sacred Groves'. Sacred Groves are Rhodes for protection of forest adopted by the forest dwellers especially by the tribal. In other words, they can also be explained as traditional management of protection of forests. Most tribal and rural communities give evidence of holding certain patches of forestland as special and thus not to be axed: Most communities along the west coast had some preserved forests. They were called, Devaranya (God's Grove) in Maharashtra, Nagaranya (serpent's Grove) in Karnataka and Serpajkkadu (serpent inhabited jungle) in Kerala. These were considered sacred. As such, no sickle or axe could be used in them. Only fruits that could be plucked or dry twigs that could be broken with one's hands and use dry leaves and other; material, that had fallen down were used. Thus; sacred Groves are one example of the conservation of nature. When the forests are reserved by the government (for commercial and industrial use and not for subsistence economy), the worst affected are the tribals and small peasants. It affects their economy, religion and culture or

rather their very existence.

British tried to gain control of the forests in the late 19th century through the Acts of 1865 and 1878. In the very initial stages of the British rule in the-16th and the early 19th century commercial exploitation of forest produce was largely restricted to commodities such as pepper, cardamom and ivory. It was the emergence of timber as an important commodity that led to a qualitative change in the pattern of harvesting and utilization of forests. Thus when the colonial state tried to assert its control over the woodlands earlier controlled by the local communities, the rights of the people were first taken away and then completely denied. The state aggressively redefined the property and the grazing rights adversely affecting the customary rights of the tribal people and the petty peasants that had been in existence since the time immemorial. Dangs is one such example, which shows the complete alteration of the utility forests and its products from that of economic use to the industrial use.

The Dangs consisted of a series of foothills between the flat alluvial plains of South Gujarat and the high mountains of the Sahayadris. It was thickly forested country broken by deep ravines through which the Rivers Ambica, Purna and Kapri rivers flowed in a south-westerly direction towards Surat. Due to the thick forests the valleys were almost impenetrable by the armies of the outside states. During the pre-colonial period it was conquered by troops under the command of James Outram. The entire Dangs was brought under the British rule with the chiefs being allowed a certain degree of freedom, so long they abide by the rule of the British. Dangs was a tribal region, the major tribes were Bhils (sub divided into Rajas and Bahuband- their relatives), Koknis and Varlis. In 1872, the first census of the Dangs was taken in which 7,427 were Bhils and 9,310 were Gavifs. The Gavifs were further divided into 6,517 Konkans, 2,491 Varlis and 302 Gamits.³⁰ By the mid-19th century, the demand for timber was rising due to the increasing needs of the Navy and later the expansion of the railways. "The forests of Central and South India had begun to show signs of exhaustion. Then attention was turned towards the forests of Gujarat. The first forest leases were entered into with the tribal chiefs in 1842 (discussed in chapter 2). 466 villages were leased for 16 years, with the option of renewal for an annual subsidy of Rs.11, 230.³¹ The British had made a huge deal with the minimum expenditures.

CONCLUSION

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