CHAPTER 5

THE TRIBALS OF RAJPIPLA: A PROFILE

5.1 HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

5.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

5.3 ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

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A TRIBAL WOMAN OF RAJPIPLA DOING HER DOMESTIC WORK

A VIEW OF THE TRIBALS RETURNING TO THEIR HOMES AT SUNSET
SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE TRIBALS OF GUJARAT

5.1 HISTORY AND TRADITION

The total population of Gujarat state is 411.74 lakhs according to the Census 1991. The population of Bharuch district in Gujarat is 12.26 lakhs. "The tribal population is 13.35 percent of the total population of district Bharuch."^1

For administrative purposes district Bharuch is divided into two sub-divisions: Bharuch and Rajpipla.

Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) Rajpipla ranks fourth in the State of Gujarat.

Rajpipla is again divided into the five Talukas:^2

1. Dediapara
2. Sabgara
3. Valia
4. Nandod
5. Jhagadia

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These are grouped in ITDP’s (Integrated Tribal Development Projects) as a strategy of development. Rajpipla area with its Talukas is shown in the map on page 73. Maximum population of Tribals is consolidated along the Eastern border of the district Bharuch. Rajpipla hills are in South East of Bharuch district. Most of this area is characterised by hilly terrain, rocky soil, uncertain rainfall and presence of forests. Most of the tribal areas are situated deep in the forest. In some places, the forest is scanty. People are in the habit of undertaking shifting cultivation, though this practice is banned by the government under forest conservation rule. The climate in the South and South-West part is moist with rainfall as high as 1960 mm while in the North-Eastern portion the annual rainfall is as low as 630 mm. The northern part of the state being close to Rajasthan experiences extreme temperatures that may rise as high as 45°C, while in winter it varies between 23°C to 30°C.3

There are more than 30 tribes in Gujarat. Their density is different at different places. The Bhils are the largest tribe in Gujarat. Most of the Bhils reside at ITDP Rajpipla. They are known by various names such as Bhil, Garasia, Dungri Bhil, Bhilala, Vasava, Tadvi, Dungri Garasin. Together they constitute 39 percent of the tribal population of the State.

Since the present study is based on a sample survey, all tribes have not been covered by the sample. Sampling was random. Incidentally

all the informants in the study are Bhils and their subcastes. During the survey some non-tribals were also contacted in order to gather more information about the overall development of the tribals in comparison to non-tribal groups.

5.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Bhils were the original inhabitants of this area. At one time, they were organised under a powerful Chief. Under the system of Chiefdom, Bhils were not subjected to elaborate system of administration but they were socially, economically, and politically autonomous. They led a nomadic life and were dependent on hunting and agriculture. In the past, the forest of the area had a rich variety of animals. Till the recent past big game like tiger and bison were common, but now they have disappeared. This has been because of unchecked cutting of forests and indiscriminate hunting. Even the Panther, Sambhar, Wild Bear, Chital and deer may still be seen in the deep interior of the forest.

The researcher came to know from the elders of the Rajpipla villages that many families had settled down in the villages only two generations back. Most of the village communities are not older than three generations.

Due to poor condition of soil, small holding of land and underdeveloped methods of agriculture, their economy is not able to provide them regular income throughout the year and they have to depend on other sources of income. It has been observed during interviews that more and more tribals specially Bhils, want jobs in any
sector rather than stick to agriculture. Vimal P. Shah and Tara Patel in their findings, got only 4.1 percent preferences in favour of agriculture and 38.4 percent for service in government or private sector.

Tribal societies were shaped by their environment. Since tribal societies were isolated by hills and forests, tribal autonomy was a natural attribute. Tribals became generally lazy and extracted a livelihood from whatever their environment offered them. They shirked hardwork and could remain idle if they had provisions to last a few days. Gujarat tribals were surrounded by forests and used forest products as means of livelihood for centuries. They did not find it necessary to take up agriculture for their livelihood. Bhils used to sell honey, gum, tendu leaves and other forest products to traders and sahukars. In the field of occupation they became marginal men. Now the situation has changed. Generally they are no longer isolated though there are a few scattered isolated families near Rajpipla also. Most of the Bhil villages have schools. They have come in contact with non-tribals. In recent years their literacy rate has improved. They are politically conscious and well organised in political and social groups. The educated ones are joining government jobs though generally at the lower ranks.


2 Mishra K.K. "Tribal Turmoil in Gujarat" The Times of India (New Delhi, dated 21.07.85).
The researcher visited the tribals of Rajpipla and met numerous people of various age groups, with different level of education and occupation. The sample is analysed with reference to age groups as below:

**TABLE NO. 10**

**AGE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 and below</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 to 55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 55</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was a random sampling and the selected population belonged to the schools, construction workers and from employees of the forest department. It is clear from the sample that 30 percent people are in the age group of 36 to 45 years. Below 25 years there are only two. Though the researcher put many questions to high school students, yet they were hesitant to answer. About 18 percent population in the sample were above 55 years age.

It was observed that the Bhils live separately in villages
groups of 10-20 families and make their own FALIA (Society). Most of them live in huts and traditional houses. Their huts are scattered and they live in most primitive conditions. Their huts are built with bamboo sticks and wood with thatched roofs. Residence-wise analysis is presented below:

**TABLE NO. 11**

HOUSE TYPE ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Houses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Houses</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own huts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Pucca House</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The floor is made of mud mixed with cow dung and doors are made of bamboo. Generally, the Bhils have only one all-purpose room without any facility for ventilation. Some of them have huts having two rooms also. On an average 6-7 persons live in a house which therefore is always congested. It is interesting to note that same is the case with Canadian natives; they also live in small houses on the reserves. About 6-10 people live in one small house. The Bhils have very few possessions in their small houses.
THE RESEARCHER INTERVIEWING THE TRIBALS

COW SHED
5.3 ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

The following table shows the material possessions of the informants:

**TABLE NO. 12**

**MATERIAL POSSESSION OF THE SAMPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Possession</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio &amp; T.V.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scooter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sample 30 percent tribals have Radio, 14 percent have TV and Radio both and 2 percent have video, Radio and T.V. sets in their possession. Radio is quite common amongst tribal communities of Gujarat. T.V. sets are kept in schools and Panchayat Ghar (Community Centres) where tribals get information about the outside world. These electronic gadgets provide information on agricultural
practices, discovery of new methods and innovations in farming. It is one way of dissemination of information useful for them and broadening of their outlook. Under the community development programme, block development officer arrange film shows on new agricultural practices, documentary films on eradication of infections, disease and mal-nutrition to educate the village people.

The table on material possession shows that in the sample 26 percent have cycle and 4 percent have scooters. Percentage of people with personal conveyance is very small. Government transport system is poor and ineffective in carrying tribals from one village to another or to Rajpipla proper. All these factors affect the educability of the tribals.

Following table shows income level of tribals of Rajpipla.

**TABLE NO. 13**

**INCOME-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 500</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upto 1500</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upto 2500</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2500-5000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 5000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not revealed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Income mentioned in the table is approximate as additional income from agricultural produce cannot be measured exactly. The forest also adds to their income since it provides food, fodder, fuel, and number of other small necessary items like gum, resin, flower, honey, fruit, bark roots and bamboos. Tribals still use wood for cooking. They get many medicines from forest products.

Case Study

One respondent Dadu Bhai has two wives, one of whom works in an Ashramshala and the other is a housewife. Both wives are staying together. Dadu Bhai has 6 children. One is illiterate and five studying in school.

It is evident that illiterate people too realise the importance of education when they get in touch with the educated community.

The percentage distribution showing occupation of the heads of the household is given in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher &amp; other white collar jobs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; labour</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver (skilled worker)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not doing any job (old)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher in her survey noted that 10 percent tribals are doing purely agricultural work. Their main crops are pulses, oil, seeds, cotton, jowar, paddy and sugarcane. 48 percent do both agriculture as well as labour work on construction site or at Narmada Dam Project.

Case Study

Nandi Bhai who is 60 years old has been educated upto 5th standard. He has 5 acres of land and ten cows, one plough and one pair of bullocks. He works on his own land. He cannot do much work but has a big family with five grown-up sons. Two sons are well educated of whom one is an employed engineer the other is doing graduation; one son is deaf and dumb and is engaged in agriculture. Two daughters are married, and the youngest daughter is doing PTC (Course for Primary Teacher). All members are earning and have a good income. The son who is an engineer is staying in Nandod proper and the rest of the family live in the village of Rajpipla. They have a T.V. and a radio, scooter and other item of comfort.

In another case the researcher put a few questions about the educational pattern in the family of Nandabhai and found that Nandabhai himself was literate, but he had realised the value of education because his elder son, after obtaining education, got a good job. Nandabhai felt that it was better if children get education, for then they could earn their livelihood. He owned very little land which was not sufficient for such a big family.

Case Study

The researcher met another respondent Kanti Bhai who has...
studied up to 7th standard, owns 2-1/2 acres of land and practices agriculture. His wife Swamiben is illiterate, work as a cook at an Ashramshala (Residential school) at Dediapara (Rajpipla). Although she gets Rs.1100/- per month, she is unable to count her salary because of complete lack of education. However, she feels that education is a must for children if they are to earn well. She got this motivation from teachers of the school where she is working. She has two little daughters and wants to see them become teachers.

Case Study

Another respondent Dinesh Bhai is a school teacher. Both husband and wife are working. They have three daughters and one son. All are studying. Two of the daughters are doing graduation at a Rajpipla College. They are confident of getting good jobs. Dinesh Bhai is living at Rajpipla because his daughters are studying there. His wife Kalaben is staying at an Ashramshala in a village where she is working.

There are considerable differences in attainment of education among the different groups of tribes and their social class level. The researcher kept in mind age group and sex while examining the social class differences in the educational attainment of the tribal community though the table below shows only the educational attainment.
TABLE NO. 15

EDUCATION-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below primary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matric</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above matric &amp; graduates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher undertook a random survey and found that 42 percent population of the sample was illiterate (Table No.15). Still 58 percent are literate. This is significantly higher than the national Indian level. It has been observed that illiteracy rate among 5-17 year old boys and girls is the lowest. Percentage of boys and girls attending primary and middle schools is the highest.

Generally those engaged in physical labour and poor cultivators show lower rate of literacy than the rich cultivators and skilled workers. It was observed that educated people who are working in nearby cities take less pain for agriculture. According to state education policy, children of 6-12 years of age are expected to attend at least primary schools. The researcher noticed very interesting cases about the
education of girls. Generally, children at the age of 5 are put in Ashramshalas (Residential schools) which are co-educational, while many boys who attain the age of 12 years are taken out from the school by parents and employed as labour at Narmada Dam Project. The girls are allowed to continue their studies since they are unable to do labour at this age. This paradoxical situation may result in number of well educated girls exceeding the number of such boys in the community. The researcher met many girls doing Basic Training Course at Rajpipla but there was not a single boy in this course.

The drop out rate among boys at primary level is quite alarming at Rajpipla village though some girls also opt out of education. Following may be the possible reasons for students drop out in schools at primary level:

1) Economic reason - Demand on children to help their family in earning livelihood;

2) Enabling their parents to afford the family expenses;

3) Illiterate parents;

4) Lack of motivation;

5) Frequent failure in examinations.

Many school teachers are of the opinion that many children do not attend school regularly. As pointed out earlier while in India failure in examination provides discontinuance of educational process, the Canadian school system does not have this problem. Indifferent attitude of the parents towards schooling is common in both - the
BHIL TRIBALS OF RAJPIPLA

FEMALE KIDS SHARING DOMESTIC WORK
natives of Canada and tribals of Gujarat. One more point which is common in drop out cases in India and Canada is the desire of parents and students for occupation-oriented education.

**Case Study**

In the sample collected by the researcher there was not a single case of illiteracy among the 5-17 years old. Every child in this group knew how to read and write. It has been noted that most of the tribals with a respective level of education have educated parents. A case in point is retired government servant. He has a degree in B.Sc. Agriculture. His monthly income is Rs.5000/- including Rs.2000/- pension. He has 20 acres of land and has all material possessions such as Radio, T.V., Scooter, Video, Fan and Cycle. He is the President of the District Panchayat, and is advisor of the Bhil Community. His wife is illiterate; one son is doctor; another is doing L.L.B., still another is studying in 12th standard. Of course, there are many other cases where parents are illiterate but children are educated and are in white collar jobs.

The spread of education is not evenly distributed among all tribes and in all social classes. Literacy rate is different in different districts of Gujarat and it is different in every village of Rajpipla. Level of education is different in different social economic strata of the tribal society of Gujarat. Middle class and rich farmers have taken greater advantage of educational facilities for their children as they are compelled to put them to employment for economic reasons. The State Government lays special emphasis on provision of free and universal education for children upto the age of 14 years for all tribals and non-
tribals. Education for tribals is totally free up to any level, though attainment of education by the tribals is a slow process. "Many tribals are unaware of the available facilities and special programmes of assistance provided by the state and central government of India." In the coming generations it will definitely get a momentum both in the case of the tribals of Rajpipla and the Stoneys of Morley (Canada).

5.4 CULTURE

Customs and Rituals

Tribals of Gujarat also have their fairs where they go in colourful dresses. They dance in the fair or melas and some of them even find life partners at these fairs. Bhils retain their traditional custom of drinking liquor by brewing their own stuff and chewing tobacco. Bhil Tribals did practice polygamy at one time. However, when asked for an opinion, educated tribals today were against polygamy. The father of the bridegroom pays price for bride, may be according to income and social status of the family of the bridegroom. If the couple is not happy, divorce may be sought by refunding amount. The boys have to pay to get a wife. Still this system is there but educated class of tribes discourage this system of bride price. Educated girls of Rajpipla dislike this system which lowers the prestige and honour of the female. Non-tribals of the area condemn this practice of Bhils. The age of marriage among Bhils in the past was about 20 years for a boy i.e. the time when he began to earn his livelihood.

Bhils are superstitious. Feuds and crimes are settled by Naiks (Panchayats). The Bhil women have much influence in the society.
They know bamboo work and other crafts. They never accompany men on hunting expeditions. Though Bhils have many sub-classes they eat almost the same food. They inter-marry among sub-cultures. They are quite rough in temperament. They worship Hindu deities but sometimes they have special gods and goddess like the Goddess of small-pox. Some of the Bhils have embraced Christianity. But in the sample there were only two Christian families.

Bhils have a rough system of justice. Their Chiefs punish more or less according to their whim. It often happens that several lives are lost to avenge a single murder or fifty heads of cattle plundered in lieu of the one stolen. But elders of the tribe often solves most of the feuds and quarrels by a system of fines. The Bhil Panchayat never gives a death sentence.

The language of the Bhils is known as Bhili, but the researcher never came across a person in the sample who could speak Bhili. Now it is almost an obsolete language.

There is special celebration on the birth of a male child. Among Hindus, surrounding tribal areas, ritual feast is essential and is observed at the time of death, but there is no such ritual feast among isolated tribals. Infact, it is a moral obligation to bring raw or cooked food for the family members of the dead.

The tribals of Gujarat worship local deities for curing diseases. There is the traditional practice of witchcraft. Earlier some traditional methods of using herbs in curing diseases were prevalent among the Rajpipla tribals and Natives of Canada but now when the tribals are exposed to modern system of medicine, they have accepted the new system without suspicion. However, since allopathic medicines are very expensive, very poor tribals still depend on herbs for cures. Long distances to be covered to reach a doctor is another problem which lets isolated tribals to depend on herbs.

Marriages

Marriage celebrations are announced and accompanied with drum beating, drums being beaten at the dead of the night, girls and boys dance to festive moods. While dancing, both men and women shout and yell under intoxication, gradually grow wilder and wilder till dawn. This is how they celebrate marriage. In tribal culture of Rajpipla, drum beating is an art which even a small boy of ten years of age knows. There are different kinds of drum beatings on different occasions. One respondent told that there were about 39 kinds of drum beatings.

The researcher asked many educated respondents whether they could beat the drum or would sing traditional songs or could play on a folk music instrument, no one came forward to play the traditional music. It shows that their sympathy for indigenous culture is only lip sympathy.

The organisation of fairs at different places is an exclusive
attribute of the tribals. When asked from a tribal man who is an Engineer whether he participates in such tribal festivals, he answered in negative. But there were many respondents who hold jobs in towns and cities and come to their village to be a part of such tribal festivals.

5.5 WINDS OF CHANGE

The change taking place in the field of Science and Technology are affecting the Indian Society and also the Rajpipla Tribals. The educated community leaders of Bhils are seriously concerned about the educational and economic development of their community. If we closely analyse functioning of educated tribals, we notice two traits of transformation. One group of the educated people argues that the tribals should reform themselves for assimilation with the mainstream of the society. The educational programmes and programmes of economic growth should be considered to be the main objectives before them.

The other group of the tribals want to maintain its tribal identity. Now it is upto the educated class of the tribals to think and decide whether they want their society to get more and more education and move away from tribalism or have their restricted involvement in the mainstream. Recently, the tribals of Rajpipla have shown a lot of change in their outlook to cherish the educational development programmes carried out in their areas. Their children definitely get encouraged to join; the boarding schools. The girls are doing much better in the field of education.