

## **Cultural Study of The Bhil Community in Nandurbar District of Maharashtra**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Years ago, the man had been living in the jungle. Hunting was the only business he used to do for a living. In the due course of time, the wheels of development roll down and the man drastically changed his life. He started farming using forest land; develop a sense of family, gathering food for a difficult time and many more new techniques he acquired. The man started living in a group on the banks of rivers. The process of development now reached to the formation of smart cities all over the world. However, some tribes of human beings did not leave the forest and even in modern time prefer to be in the company of nature only. Of the tribes, the Bhil community is a major one that lives in the forests and mountains. Nature is everything to the Bills. They are away from the mainstream of development and are not completely aware of the post modern techniques and living style. Hence, it is important to study the tribal culture of the Bhil community in Nandurbar district. Culture is an umbrella term. It consists of language, food, gender sensitization, Gods, rituals, traditions, festivals and

historical background. This research paper is an attempt to focus on the cultural aspects of the Bhil community.

**Key Words:** Culture, Bhil community, tribe, language, traditions and festivals.

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There are many mythical stories of the origins of tribal communities. One thing is certain that the tribal communities are one of the oldest communities. "When Lord Rama reached to 'Dandaranya', he met 'Shabari', a Bhill woman. The Bhill is also known as 'Shabar', 'Kirat' and 'Nishad'. These people are none other than else but the Bhill community" (Govind Gore 1). Way back to history, there are references of tribal communities in the age of 'Trugved'. It is generally said that the Aryan people came to India and they fought with the local 'non-Aryan'. In the battle, the local people were defeated by the hands of Aryan. In order to save a life, the defeated local shifted to forests and mountains. They deliberately started living in scattered ways, so that the enemy may not attack again. Though the battle was over, the local people preferred to stay in forests.

There are references of tribal communities in the 'Smrutigranth'. In some Tamil poems, there are words like 'Billuva' (archer). It underlines that the tribal communities made their presence in the nation years back. Mr. Vijay Patil says, "Aryan and Dravid are in majority in the nation, however, before these two races the tribal communities made their presence" (qtd. in Mahajan and Badge, 71). The details show that the Bhil community lives in the company of forests and mountains. They prefer to live in huts scattered all over the mountains and forests. In the present context, the tribal people

live in the scattered form. In the ranges of Satpuda, the tribal live either in small villages known as 'Padas' or in isolation. These communities are well known as tribal communities. Among the various tribes of India, The Bhil community is one of the prime communities.

Being in an isolated area, the Bhil community preserves its culture. Language is the most important artifacts of any culture. To share thoughts and feelings, the Bhil community use local dialects of Adivasi language. They generally use Bhilori dialect. Being away from the rest of the world, the community does not have any influence of other languages. Bhil people cannot speak even Marathi or any dialect of Marathi language very fluently. In addition, those who are educated have a great influence on their mother tongue. Even when they try to speak any other language, they speak in the tone of Bhilori dialect. Language reflects the culture of the community and hence language becomes a sensitive issue for each one. The Bhilori dialect is not available in the written form. It is transmitted orally from one generation to another.

The Bhilori dialect is completely different from the rest of the languages. There are many Adivasi dialects in use. There are slight variations within the dialect of one particular group of community. As the six tehsils (Navapur, Nandurbar, Taloda, Shahada, Akkalkuwa and Dhadgaon) are situated on the borders of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, there is an influence of Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi languages on the local dialects of Adivasi. One can easily notice the words of other languages in their daily communication. However, each dialect has its own spacious

place within its culture. It is a high time to preserve the dialects that are about to extinct. The changing scenario of education keeps aside the tribal languages. “The tribal languages are on the verge of extinct. Preserving the indigenous languages and making the record is one of the prime objectives of national policy” (Devgaonkar 169).

Bhiloni is the prime dialect of Adivasi language. It has some influences of Hindi and Gujarati language. The government of Maharashtra took a good initiative to preserve the beauty of the Adivasi languages. State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) is set to introduce textbooks in Bhiloni languages and that that would enable tribal students to take lessons in their colloquial dialects. “Students from tribal belts often find it difficult to understand Marathi, which can discourage them from pursuing their studies further. Hence, the drafting of bilingual textbooks will enable teachers to use words from the tribal dialect while explaining lessons to students,” said Shivaji Pandhare, Joint Director, and SCERT. (The Hindu online)

The Bhil community lives in the forest and hence the influence of nature on their culture is visible. In terms of food, the Bhil community is completely away from junk and fast food. Bhil people still believe in their traditional food items. Many times, the ground roots of various trees are used as the food. They drink homemade wine made of Maoo’s flowers. Being different from the rest of world cultures, the Bhil community does not believe in the maximum storage of the food.

The Bhil community has a great sense of gender equality. The first place is given to man, but it does not cost a woman anything to women of the family. Women participate in the decision-making process regarding family issues. Dowry is presented

to the bride rather than the groom. The person who is unable to give dowry prefers to live at the home of his father-in-law and participates in every routine work. Men and women are considered equal in Bhil community hence feticide is not observed.

Though Bhil woman has the second place within the family but she is not a victim as women of the different communities. It can be said that the tribal woman is not exploited at the hands of a man. The condition of women varies from one tribal community to another. Prof. Sainath Bansode observed, "Each caste of Adivasi has different rituals, tradition and customs and hence it is important to study each caste to understand women's condition" (qtd in Mahajan and Badge 17).

Bhil women possess the great attraction of jewellery. They generally wear silver jewellery on special occasions. They are very interested to make different hairstyles. They also enjoy the festivals, rituals and tradition with men. They do not have many differences regarding the roles of women and men. On special occasions, women put up makeup and wear traditional clothes.

In terms of women's status, there are variations in statements of social scientists and anthropologists. Actually, there are two societal structures in tribal communities – patriarchal and matriarchal. Some thinkers say that because of the two societal structures, women condition is better than men. On the other hand, some thinkers say that women's condition is worse than men of society. The views of Prof. D G Patil are worthy to mention in this context. He noticed:

Women condition is worse. When she reaches to 10-15 years ago, she gets married and in her early age, she starts delivering babies. There are no

proper intervals in deliveries. Generally, 25 -30 years tribal woman delivers 5-8 children. She does not have a proper diet during her pregnancy and after delivery. Out of this, the health of women deteriorates drastically. (37)

Festivals are parts of each culture. As per the seasons, each culture has different types of festivals. The festivals are the provisions to bring the community together to enjoy life. A festival is an opportunity for women to wear new sari, ornament and have special make-up. Dr. Anand Gore says, "The life of Bhil community is full with difficulties but, they are free in nature and happy as they celebrate the festivals with great happiness with singing songs, and dance" (qtd in Patil and Pagare 82). The festivals bring all the cultural representatives at the same level. The Bhil community generally celebrate Holi, Diwali, Dasara, Nagpanchami, Gudipadava and Akshay Tritiya.

'Holi' is the most important festival of the Bhil community. The festival largely celebrated at the 'Kathi Sansthan' (Centre of Tribal Culture). The entire community gathers to Kathi Sansthan from various places. They use their traditional dress, ornaments and beat Dhol. Men and women come together to perform the dance. The Patil of the respective village leads his people. The Bhil dance on the rhythm of the dhol. The young boys and girls dance together in order to select their life partners. This dance is well-known as 'Bhongrya dance. A week before the Holi festival, there is an arrangement of 'Bhongrya Bazaar' in each village. People from different places come together to shop for festivals. There is also a 'Gulalya Bazar'. It is known for its title as the people throw 'gula' in the air and go to bazar shop for the Holi festival. During the Holi dance, many youngsters fall in love with each other. Earlier, most of the marriages

used to fix during the festival. The communities follow a simple system of marriages. During the festival, if a boy falls in love with a girl then he asks her parents for allowing him to marry their daughter. If they reject the invitation, then the couple elopes and returns after some days to their respective places. Later, both the families accept the elopement as the marriage.

Indal is one of the festivals in the Bhil community. Indal means the worship of God Indra. The Bhils want to get their desires and ambitions fulfilled by worshipping God Indra. They celebrate this festival with neighbouring villages. All people dance together and perform pooja of Indal. Wag deo is another festival celebrated by the Bhils. It comes in the month of August and September. Wag is the god of jungle is the belief of the Bhils. They expect that Wag the god of jungle should protect pet animals and human beings. After performing pooja they think that Wag deo blesses and protects everybody. This festival is celebrated either on Wednesday or Friday.

Diwali is also an important festival of the Bhil community in Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. They celebrate Diwali in different villages at a particular time. The day of celebration is decided by the chief of the village. On the Diwali night all the Bhils drink wine and dance on the rhythm of dhol. The people from different villages come to see the dance and the entertainment programme called 'Tamasha'. They also arrange the mask dance in which some people put on mask of different god and goddesses and go on dancing during night. They sing songs through out night. These songs are called 'Rodali'. The Bhils are fond of festivals. Their festivals are celebrated at public places and not in house.

The Bhils live in the company of nature and hence they design their gods such as the sun, moon, animals, birds, rivers, mountains. They arrange special poojas for pleasing gods. Trees, stones hills, valleys and animals are their god. They worship nature as gods. As they have been in good touch of Hindu religion, there is a clear influence of the Hindu religion on the tribal culture.

Thus, the Bhil community has preserved its distinct culture even in post modern time. The Bhils observe their traditions, rituals and festivals which have come down to them from their forefathers. The traditions and festivals reflect the life and culture of Bhils. The world blindly runs after the materialistic development, but the Bhil community prefers to be in a touch of nature. They live together, celebrate their festivals together and dance together. This is the strength of their culture. That is why they never suffer from isolation and frustration. Now, it is a high time to bring the Bhil community in the mainstream of the development without disturbing the beautiful culture of the community.

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