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Tribal Culture & Women of Melghat : A Sociological Perspective



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Abstract

Man is a gregarious animal therefore he loves culture which has been come into existence through his relationship with other fellow human being. It is consider that language is a one of the important element of the culture though *tribal* speak their own dialects so they face lots of problems while living in mainstream society but these dialects have been blockade particularly, in the progress of *tribal* women. The impact of culture is more brutal on women therefore they have to undergo physical, mental and economical problems. It seems that tribal women do not have any respectable place in the rituals and worship ceremonial. Widow marriage, bride-price etc. custom might show the higher status of tribal women but according to the feminist perspective bride-price has become the medium of trade. In widow marriage of *tribal* women nobody consider her aspiration and desire, so she has to obey the commands of her elder male counterparts of the family. Like any other mainstream culture of the society, the custom of ornament and jewellery has imposed on the *advasi* women and it has become the restrictive and mandatory custom for *tribal* women.

To understand the problems of *tribal* women descriptive methodology has been employed. After the study the researcher has found that the *tribal* women has secondary place in the *tribal* culture.

Keywords: Tribal Culture, Women, Dialect, Bride-Price, Festivals, Birth-Death and Marriage.

Introduction

Society and culture has very reciprocal relation, it is difficult to imagine man without culture because culture is an outcome of internal relation of man with the other fellow human being. Every society has its own culture. All over the world man has same biological instinct like sex, sleep and hunger but to fulfill his biological needs man has created certain rules and regulation. Man has a rational faculty and creative genius therefore he created his own culture to justify his way of life but the idea of cultural thing is abstract therefore various totem, images ,custom and tradition etc. have been considered as the standard of his belief, superstition and value system. However, custom, tradition, various totem and images etc. things counted in the broad concept of the culture.

While talking about the culture Edward Tyler says, "being member of the society every man has acquired wisdom, arts ,belief, ethics, laws, tradition and many other habits from the society. To the combination of all these ethos Edward Tyler called the culture."¹

Race is one of the important parts of the culture, according to Crober, "race is a biological concept. Every race has its own characteristics and they have inherited some physical traits from their forefather. In the Melghat tribal have various custom, tradition rituals, belief, superstition and festivals, through these cultural events it is easy to know the problems of tribal women and it is reflected in their cultural ethos.

The present research paper is based on the "Social, economical and health problems of *tribal* women in Melghat (Amravati district): A sociological study." In present research paper primary and secondary sources have used and new technology has been instrumental to find new aspects of *tribal* women and their socio-economical problems.

Physical Attribution and Dialects (Language)

Since so many centuries tribal are inhabiting in the Melghat. In Melghat Korku is one of the well known tribes and it has divided into four parts, *ruma*, *potdya*, *dularya* and *bobai*. In these four *ruma* korku is a large tribe who is more dominant in population. The *ruma* korku has some physical characteristics. The *ruma* korku have medium height but they are little bit taller than gond tribal. The *ruma* tribal have black complexion, snub nose, curly hair and broad lips. Like *ruma* korku men, women have black complexion and medium height. The korku tribal tribe has lineage to the

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gond tribal and it has some racial relation with the *Korawa* of the Madhya Pradesh². Ravindra Mukharjee says "ruma korku belongs to the agney Austric language family or Negrot³. According to the Western scholar Russell and Hiralal, "Gond folk belongs to the Dravidian race."⁴ But according to the Huttan and Guha, "Gond are proto Auatrelight." Gierson G. F. (1906) states that Gondi tribe's language belongs to the Dravidian languages. Sheshrao Madavi says, "Gond tribe speak *gondi* dialect which has relation with the group of the Dravidian languages."⁵

In the tribal of Melghat there is lots of diversity so they speak in their dialects but it does not have script therefore tribal of the Melghat do not have their own written literature. Due to this language barriers tribal folk lacks knowledge of the modern language, while coming across to the other main stream communities they face lots of difficulties. These language problems have been blockade in the economical progress of the tribal tribes of the Melghat.

Costume (Dress)

In Melghat tribal wear traditional cloth like *dhoti*, *duppte*, *kurta* and *turban* to the heads. on the contrary, women wear saris and blouse but their style of wearing sari is different from the main-stream women of the urban areas. Many year ago men used to wear loin cloths but now days they are inclining more to the modern clothing of the western attire. Now a day's young generation in tribal are wearing modern cloths like jeans, T-shirts, shirts, pants, Bermudas etc. Tribal women would like to wear saris of flamboyant colour, specially they are fond of red, yellow, pink and orange colors. Young tribal women as per their education and economical situation have liking for Punjabi dress, jeans and T-shirts but the number of educated women is very lower in compare to any other women of the main stream society.

Ornament and Tattoos

In the Melghat *tribal* women have tremendous attraction for ornaments and jewellery. There is a custom to pierce the ear to wear the jewel of silver or gold and it is consider as an auspicious thing. The tribal women wear ornaments of colourful glass, *bakalya*, *tagli*, *chhani*, *polle*, *natha*, *moti*, *kaddora*, and *braclet* of silver. Long before ago in tribal women it was not customary to paste *kukoom* on the forehead but now days they are incline to smear the *kumkoom* on the forehead and it has become fashion in modern tribal women.⁶

Tribal women have tremendous liking for silver jewellery, in there need or in difficult situation they pawn the jewellery at the local market or at the money -lender, to fulfill the needs of grocery and clothing tribal folk pawn the jewellery on the day of bazaar. Presently tribal women are under the influence of Hindu society, and they are wearing ornaments like mangal -sutra or jodve, which are the symbol of married women. Stephen Fuches says, "tribal women make a tattoo of M-size on their forehead and under it they make a symbol of dot."⁷

Other hand, in tribal men there is no liking for ornament and jewellery but it is mandatory to tribal women to have made tattoos over body. It is not a mere symbol of beauty but it has been a hallmark of chastity and holiness. Those women who do not have tattoos they are consider as unchaste and unholy. Therefore it seems that tribal women have made tattoos of trees, plants, flowers, and varied totems of their pedigree.⁸ Erstwhile tribal women used to make tattoos by using needle and the ink of the *biba* (name of the fruit) but making a tattoo was a painful task and it could be a cause of infection but there was no other option to the procedure and it was a compulsory thing. Shailaja deogaokar in her book, 'Maharashatratil Adivasi' states, "the practice of tattoo making might have come into existence to assess the endurance power of women"⁹

Tattoo making is a painstaking task, it causes injuries to *tribal* women but it has so many traditional myths therefore it is mandatory to have drawn tattoos over the body of women. However, it is not compulsory to tribal men to have tattoo over the body though some men draws the tattoos on arms, legs and hands. These tattoos consist of the totem, ancestral gods and their names in small letters. It is one of their belief that these tattoos could be their identity or it could save them from disaster. Sheshrao Madavi says, "in *Gond* women it is a belief that if they would not draw tattoos over body their forefathers could not recognize them or they would be nervous on women folk"¹⁰ Another noteworthy thing is that advasi women used to wear less cloth so outsider people would have wrong outlook at the women, so to protect from such type of notions tribal women began to draw the tattoos all over the body. In old days tribal women used a particular types of needle to draw the tattoos but in present time tribal women are using the new equipments to make the procedure easier to draw the tattoos. Thus the practice of tattoo making have become a customary thing.

(Table No.1)

Categorization of Tribal Women and Tattoo Making According to Their Diversity and It also Indicates the Gender Ratio in the Practice of Tattoo

| Sr. no | Tribe/Gender | Korku | Christian korku | Nihal | Gond | Bhilla | Total |
|--------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | women | 389 92.84% 85.30% | 07 1.67% 87.5% | 01 0.23% 100% | 22 5.25% 75.86% | 10 2.38% 90.90% | 419 82.97% |
| 2 | Women & Men | 77 89.53% 16.88% | 01 1.16% 12.5% | - | 07 8.13% 24.13% | 01 1.16% 9.09% | 86 17.02% |
| 3 | Total | 456 90.29% | 08 1.58% | 01 0.19% | 29 5.74% | 11 2.17% | 505 100% ^s |

(Note- This Information is Based on The Research. The Percentage is Taken From The Year 2009-2013)

After studying the table the researcher has come at the conclusion that 100% tribal women draws tattoos over the body, on the contrary only 17.02% tribal men prefer the tattoos over the body. It indicates that only tribal women have the brutal impact of the tattoo practice and rituals of the traditional tribal culture. So they have to face lots of hardships in their lives. But tribal male do not have any compulsion to carry out the practice of tattoos and rituals. It shows the gender-bias in the tribals of the Melghat.

Festivals of tribal

In tribal culture there are so many festivals which are celebrated collectively by the tribal folk. In their all festival country liquor (*siddu*) has special significance and it is consume by both male and female counterpart, on the occasion of birth-death, or wedding it is customary to have drunken the country liquor but it's consumption is dangerous to the health, and it is more vicious to the health of pregnant women. In tribal culture there is no value to the individual life rather they give much preference to the collective life. In every festivity of tribal dance has special significance and it has become the special feature of theirs culture. In each and every festival tribal male participate in large number and they have some privileges but women have very secondary role in rituals and religious ceremonies.

Generally *bhawai*, *gudhi padhawa*, *jiroti*, *nag-panchami*, *patala*, *holi*, *rang-panchami*, *til-sankrant*, *divali*, *pola* etc. festivals are celebrated by the Tribal's in Melghat. In Melghat korku is in large number and they consider *Holi* as their grand festival though Gond tribal regard *Diwali* as their one of the important festivals. They celebrate these festivals by consuming country liquor, with vigor and jest. Tribal have their unique and independent culture but the influence of Hindu culture has been growing day by day and it is indirectly destroying the aboriginal culture of the tribal so now it is on the verge of the decline.

Birth & naming ceremony

In tribal of Melghat woman give birth to a child at home, with the help of *dai* (midwife). In tribal women the information of pregnancy or delivery would not be discussed with other people, rather they keep it as a secret. It is a superstition among tribal women that if the information is disclosed in public somebody would do black magic to their new born. After the birth of baby, it is consider that all the family member are polluted for three days. On the fourth day of new born, mother takes bath and it is regarded that clean and holy. Other family member take bath at river or lake then they worship the Sun God thereafter it is thought that all the family member are clean and purified.

On the fifth day of the new born, the five sweet balls of the sesame and jaggery would be made and out of five three would give to the mother. To name the new born, invitation is given to the senior ladies of the locality and sweet balls distributed among them. After the ceremony mother is allow to consume the regular food. After the birth of new born, on the seventh or eighth day the name is given to the new born. K.V. Barahde says, "a village *bhumka* name to a new born."¹¹ According to Dinkar

Umbarkar, "a old lady of a village (sieni buddy) told to family to the worship the village deity."¹² While naming the new born women sing the traditional songs, in past mother used to take new born on the lap and other women circled around the mother and sung the cradle songs. In present day, tribal women take the help of hospital Nurse to name the new born. In traditional songs women shower praises of the Lord Meghnath and village deities for the blessings and health of the child and his mother. After the naming ceremony, jaggery is distributed among people.

Types of Marriage and Ceremony

"Marriage is second most important thing in the life of tribal of Melghat. Marriage is a unification of two families, two villages and two sect of the race. Marriage is not only fulfilled physical, mental needs of the newlywed couple but it also has become the cause of the social integrity."¹³

In tribal society of Melghat varied types of marriages are predominant. Some types of marriages are polygamy, marriages between internal relationship or between blood relation, among these marriages some are more noteworthy; the first is elopment marriage and forceful marriage, both these type are more popular in tribal of the Melghat. While marrying, bride –groom has to give bride price to the father of bride. There is no need to give any amount in currency. The price could be paid in things like liquor or pair of ox or sack of grain etc. Therefore it is thought that daughter brings the money or wealth."¹⁴

According to Wahru Sonone, "by giving bride – price, the bride- groom and his family buy the woman like a thing and treat her like a slave."¹⁵ In tribal of Melghat widow marriage is considered as the legal thing and it has got consent from the elder member of the family but in this type of widow marriage there is no provision of bride–price, but if it is given the price is very scanty or less. Maximum time the marriage of widow is fixed with the widower. On the contrary, while fixing marriage of widower he could marry with any bachelor girl. All these method of marriage shows the secondary place of tribal women in the society of tribal

In tribal the age of boys marriage is between 15-20, and girls marriage age is between 12-17"^{16,17} In present research it is found that 42.37% tribal girls are married, between age of 15-17 and among them 74.76% are illiterate. The table no. 02 show the marriage and educational status of the women. Due to child marriage girls could not produce the healthy foetus or if it is born it becomes the victim of malnourishment. The child marriage could not make a girl responsible person or it does not make her aware about her physical and mental requirements, because of this the rate of infant mortality and ratio of malnourishment is higher than any other part of Maharashtra. According to the research and new survey it is confirm that not only mere child marriages are responsible for the pathetic condition of tribal of Melghat but some of its social and cultural tradition are also responsible.

(Table no.2)

Chart of Age of Marriage and Ratio of Literacy Among Girls

| Sr.no. | Education/Age of Marriage | 12 - 14 | 15 - 17 | 18 - 20 | 21 - 30 | Total |
|--------|---------------------------|---------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Illiteracy | - | 160 58.18% 74.76% | 115 41.81% 42.43% | - | 275 54.45% |
| 2 | Primary incomplete | - | 28 50.90% 13.08% | 27 49.09% 9.96% | - | 55 10.89% |
| 3 | Primary | - | 26 30.58% 12.14% | 55 64.70% 20.29% | 4 4.70% 20% | 85 16.83% |
| 4 | Secondary | - | - | 72 82.75% 26.56% | 15 17.24% 75% | 87 17.22% |
| 5 | Higher secondary | - | - | - | - | - |
| 6 | College | - | - | 2 66.66% 0.73% | 1 33.33% 5% | 3 30.59% |
| 7 | Total | - | 214 42.37% | 271 53.66% | 20 3.96% | 505 100% |

(Note- This Information is Based on the Research. The Percentage is Taken from the Year 2009-2013)

Burial of the Dead & Tribal Rituals

In tribal society when anyone dies his/ her body is buried, while burying the dead body the care is taken to keep the dead man's face at the South. The work of grave digging is done by the family members. In present, some *korku* has started the practice to cremate the dead bodies on the pyre, after burying or cremation, family member return to the home and make a effigy out of wheat or jawar flour then family members and relatives worship the effigy of the dead and they offer some grains, rice, turmeric or some drops of liquor etc. to the effigy of the dead."¹⁸ According to Raikwar, in the family of the died person, the family member thought that the family is polluted for a day but next day as usual they take the bath and perform their regular duties.¹⁹ To offer the respect towards the dead, family member or relatives celebrate a day once in a year it is known as the , 'Pittar Miloni' festival or the festival of ' Sidoli'.

In Melghat, on the thirteenth day of the death, tribal performed the worship which is known as the ' *teravi*'. If the dead is male they offer flower to his photograph, or place some money or *gulal*, new cloth, etc. near his photo. This worship is administer by the local priest of the tribe who is known as the *bhagat*. Currently some educated tribal invite to the *Brahmin* to do the worship, this particular worship is being performed by the son of the dead or his brother. In all these ceremony there are certain rules for women folk. The widow has to sit near the photo of the dead .After the death of her husband she is not allowed to wear any ornament or jewel. Her maternal relatives offer her new cloths, set of bangle, blouse piece or money according to their economical capabilities. After the death of a husband a widow lose her right to wear ornaments or jewellery thereafter she is not allowed to wear *mangal sutra* or *judwe* which is symbol of her marital status. Thus the tribal widow is being deprived from her rights after the death of her husband. All these things indicate the secondary place of tribal women in the society.

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