

Kinship & Rituals among Sahariya tribe of Rajasthan



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Abstract

Kinship and rituals is a common feature of the tribal world in India. Each of the tribes in India associates itself to some religion and practices that religion in practical life. The influence of the little traditions under which the local deities are worshipped prevail there. The tribal people have a strong faith in religion, local gods and goddesses, gods and goddesses associated to the religion they exercise, kinship system etc. The whole behavior of the tribal people is governed by the religious practices and kinship system. Religion links them to the community in terms of fraternity, chastity of character, sacred modes of living and behavior. Similarly, the kinship system that is based on blood, marriage and adoption, plays a vital role in imparting a specific and distinct status to the tribal people. The socio-economic status in the society is determined by the kinship system.

The faith of the tribal people in kinship system can be seen that they live in perfect harmony with their kinsmen and are always ready to welcome the kinsmen who are away from them. None of the festive occasions is celebrated without the large numbers of kinsmen who impart grace to the occasion.

The tribal people take religion as the supreme power and binding force. Hence, in order to please the deities, they perform several rituals that include daily or occasional worship, offering food, etc. The Sahariya tribe of Rajasthan reveals the same trends of kinship and religion. They have a great respect to their kinsmen and are highly religious in nature. Their culture reveals the traces of kinship and religion. A theoretical study at the root, the paper attempts to produce a concise picture of the life and culture of the Sahariya tribe with a special focus on their religious creeds, superstitions, worship and rituals.

Keywords: Kinship, Family system, modes of worship, superstitious, ritualistic, rituals.

Introduction

The spotty and almost extinct and lost history of the Sahariya tribe fails to supply any account that is worth considering. However, as it is believed by the Sahariyas that their beginning is from the days of the Ramayana, and that their origin is from Shabri. It is also believed that while casting the universe, Brahma made out a place to seat all persons, and put a Sahariya in the centre who was joined by others soon, but the others threw him from the square centre to an extreme corner or khoont. The story says that Brahma cursed the Sahariya that he would live in forests. Another saying goes that the descent of the Sahariyas is from Baiju Bheel, who worshipped Lord Shiva.

Traditionally speaking, the Sahariyas live and dwell in clusters (Saharana) outside the main villages. Prehistoric standards of construction houses is apparent in their housing. They are made of stone boulders and roofing of stone slabs. Being poor they often have mud structures and rarely have pucca houses made of bricks and stone. They live in joint families, but the size of the joint families they live in, is generally small. It is a tradition among the Sahariyans that after marriage, the elder sons are allowed to live separately with their wives and children, and the youngest son bears the responsibility of the parents and his younger siblings.

The members of the Sahariya associate themselves with Hinduism which they practice honestly in their practical life. They believe strongly in Animism Folk, Hindu gods and goddesses and celebrate most of the major Hindu festivals that include Veer Teja, Dhakar Baba, Durga, Hanuman, Lalbai, Bejasan, Savni

Amavasya, Janmashtami, Raksha Bandhan, Deepavali, Holi and Teja Dashmi.

To the Sahariyas, everyone in the cluster and family-line to be brothers and sisters, hence marriages from the members belonging to other clans are arranged. However, it is good that they do not favour and encourage the child marriage. Widow marriage is permissible only in that case if the male is either widower or divorcee. Polygamy prevails there, but only males can go for it.

Some of the remarkable facts about the Sahariya Tribe that enable the people to develop an understanding about it are enlisted as follows-

1. The Sahariya tribe is a little known tribe at present, and its members are found in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan mainly.
2. Baran, Kishanganj, Sawai Madhopur etc. are some of the districts of Rajasthan where the traces of Sahariya tribe are found.
3. The population of the members of the Sahariya tribe is about 623000 in India. Of the total population about 82000 live in Rajasthan
4. Gathering minor forest produce, cultivating, working as agricultural labourers, selling of forest wood, gum, tendu leaf, honey, fruits and vegetables etc. are some of the main business of the Sahariyas
5. They are found living in small villages
6. Afraid of the dacoits in the adjoining areas, they are forced to abandon their land and run away
7. The Sahariyas are often at the target of the dacoits
8. Poverty and penury engrip the Sahariyas for a major part of life.

Review of Literature

1. Carol Kramer John E. Douglas (1992), in *Ceramics, caste, and kin: Spatial relations in Rajasthan, India*, making ethno archaeological research in two cities in Rajasthan, India, investigated relationships between social organization and ceramic distribution. Using a ranking system to evaluate kinship distance and digitized data on the locations of ceramics, potters, and vendors. The study found that the contribution of the tribals of Rajasthan and their kinsmen is so immense in the concerning field.
2. Maya Unnithan (1993), in *Girasias and the Politics of Difference in Rajasthan: 'Caste', Kinship and Gender in a Marginalised Society*, inform that to the Girasias, patrilineal kinship and territory play a central role in their sense of 'caste' identity, unlike other communities (the Rajputs and Bhils are exceptions) for whom caste is a more dispersed, agnatic and affinal group. Descent is crucial. Although their kinship ideology emphasises a sense of separation rather than hierarchy, Girasia kin divisions present members with equal opportunities to be unequal. Lineal kinship provides the paradigm for talking about all relationships whether or not based on actual biological ties. Equally, gender provides an idiom for the construction of difference. Descent groups are differentiated according to the evaluation of groups from which they have been able to obtain

wives. Both Girasias and outsiders use the attire and the behaviour of women and perceived gender roles to distinguish between themselves. Despite the local complexity of Girasia kinship and gender relations which cannot be expressed in the language of caste and tribe, outsiders (other castes, classes, government officials, academics) continue to regard the Girasias as tribal as a result of the politics of caste and gender at the local, regional and national levels.

3. Ranjan Kumar Biswas and A.K. Kapoor (2003), in their study entitled *A Study on Mortality Among Saharia- A Primitive Tribe of Madhya Pradesh*, observe that as primitive tribe, they are inhabiting in very interior area and most of them are landless. Daily labour is no more enough to improve their financial status and by which they are acquainted themselves as poverty stricken. A major group of Saharia are illiterate. In respecting to the socio-cultural orthodox, they are enforced to practise marriage at early age. They are not aware to adopt any family planning contraceptive methods. Early age at marriage and family planning non-adoption usually influence to perform frequent child birth. Side by side, due to non-immunization, inadequate medical facility, etc., both mothers and children are affected by various diseases. Beside this, malnutrition, insanitation, low living standard, harsh environment, etc., may be mentioned as the reasons of their various diseases. Due to absence of proper treatment, most of the disease affected Saharia have been expired and these are greatly concerned with their various measures of high mortality rate. Lastly, the observations suggest to make assurance regarding their socio-economic upliftment, purified drinking water, educational facility, regular availability of the appropriate health and family welfare services, etc. under long time multistages development scheme.
4. Madan Mohan Mahawar (2007), in his informative research paper on *Traditional knowledge on zootherapeutic uses by the Saharia tribe of Rajasthan, India*, producing a detailed account of the Sahariya tribe, writes that Sahariya, the only primitive tribe of the Rajasthan state, resides in the Shahabad and Kishanganj Panchayat Samiti's of Baran district (24-25' to 25-25' North latitudes, 76-12' to 77-26' east longitudes and 262 mts. Altitude). The total population of Saharia is 79,312 with sex ratio of 951 females per 1000 males. A majority (93%) of the Saharia population inhabits of Kishanganj and Shahbad. The major occupation of the head of the households is either agricultural or other labour (82%), followed by cultivation (14.3%), service (1.6%) and business (1.3%). Ox, Cow, Buffalo, Sheep, Goat are major domesticated animals used in agriculture by them. They are non-vegetarians and eat the flesh of goat, sheep and birds. Nearly half of the households were living at a distance of 10 km from primary health center for allopathic treatment.

5. Report of Planning Commission, Govt. of India- Changing Socio-Economic condition and livelihood of Geographically Isolated Primitive Tribal Communities in Kandhamal and KBK Districts of Orissa (2009) says that the tribal communities are spread over 15 per cent of the geographical areas in various ecological and geo climatic conditions varying from forest, hills, plateau and plains. They are still living with primitive agricultural practices with stagnant population, lowest literacy rates and are at the lowest rung of human index.
6. Vinay Kumar Srivastava (2010) in his study Socio-economic Characteristics of Tribal Communities That Call Themselves Hindu, observes that tribal people have always had relationships with other religious streams, as well as with local cults and sects, not only borrowing from them but also, in some cases, influencing them. However, most of their interactions have been with the majority Hindu community, the structural principle of which is the caste system.
7. Rima Dada & Others (2011), in Genetic sketch of the six population groups of Rajasthan: a study based on 12 autosomal loci, concludes that that, after Africa, the history of India has played a key role in human evolution. Further admixture followed by geographical, cultural, linguistic isolation has led to relatively homogeneous gene pools in the Indian context. Rajasthan also displays huge genetic diversity attributable to the region's biological, social, and geographic heterogeneity. In archaeologically terms, too, Rajasthan is very rich, having Paleolithic (Didwana), Mesolithic (Bagor), NeoChalcolithic (Ahar, Balathal, and Gilund) and even Indus Valley civilization sites (Kalibangan). Ethnically, it has also been reported that the Minas share several clan names with the Rajputs, whereas the Damors, Saharias, Bhils, and Garasias all form separate branches which may be attributed to their diverse origins.
8. Vijayalakshmi Kalagnanam (2012), in the study on Land Cover/Land Use Change: Exploring the Impacts on the Sahariya Tribe of Rajasthan, find that forest cover has declined drastically over the past 50 years in the Baran District region. Tribal members who lived comfortably on forest products are now struggling to earn a livelihood. These struggles have been associated with the depletion of forests brought about by an increase in population (both human and livestock), agricultural expansion and land conversion during the past 50 years. Although Khanda Sharol village members still depend on the forest for fuel wood, NTFP that are gathered now are nowhere close to the number of species collected or the quantity that they used to gather in the past. Village members are scared of losing the forests which were important to their culture and source of livelihood. The ST and SC members of the village are especially bearing the brunt of the loss of forests, with changes in the means of

livelihood, shifts in household economies and deteriorating health and well-being.

Objectives of the study

1. To produce a common features of the tribal world of the tribes in India
2. To pay a serious attention to the study of the specific features of the Sahariya Tribe
3. To be familiar and discuss the socio-cultural environment of the Sahariya tribe
4. To concentrate on the religious environment of the Sahariya Tribe
5. To get an idea about the religion-orientation of the members of the Sahariya tribe
6. To discuss the superstitious environment of the Sahariya tribe
7. To learn and interpret the prevalence of little traditions in the Sahariya tribe
8. To discuss and interpret the rituals prevalent in the Sahariya tribe
9. To discuss the kinship system of the Sahariya tribe
10. To find how the members of the Sahariya tribe are governed by kinship and rituals performed to please the deities.

Hypothesis

1. India is a home of several tribes that win India a peculiar identity through their cultural modes of living
2. Religion plays a dominant role in governing the members of the tribes
3. The Sahariya tribe is one of the primitive tribes of India
4. The members of the Sahariya tribe can still be found in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in addition to some other parts of India
5. Kinship has an important role to play in determining the nature, attitude, behavior and other personality traits of the members of the Sahariya tribe
6. The kinsmen visit the members of the Sahariya tribe on all the important occasions, such as, at the time of birth, marriage and death etc.
7. One's kinsmen are one's role models in practical life, and their modes of living, working and behaving are imitated
8. Religion is a binding force among the members of the Sahariya tribe
9. Little traditions prevail in the areas where there dwell the members of the Sahariya tribe
10. The members of the Sahariya have a ritualistic approach, and perform several peculiar rituals in order to please gods and goddesses.

Methodolgy

The method adopted for the study was inductive and descriptive. The author's own experience with the Sahariyas, and the literature on them supplied details of the Sahariya culture. For the purpose of study, the following steps were undertaken with a view to making a scientific study of the Sahariya tribe-

1. Developing a passion for understanding the culture of the Sahariya tribe

2. Developing knowledge about such a culture in an informal way through the people that could describe the Sahariyan culture
3. Deciding the title for the paper-writing
4. Choosing the research design that paved the path for the study, and that smoothened this path
5. Determining the objectives for the study that prevented the author from getting strayed and that allowed him to make focus on the decided objectives
6. Formulating hypothesis on the basis of personal experience, culture etc.
7. Collecting, classifying and interpreting the data collected from the secondary sources of data collection in particular.

Findings

1. Kinship among the Sahariya has an utmost role
2. Blood, marriage and adoption are the three bases of kinship, and each of them prevail in the Sahariya tribal world
3. Kinship contributes in the personality development of the Sahariya tribals and allows them to learn a great deal about the various modes of behavior and attitudes from their kinsmen
4. The role and significance of the Sahariya kinsmen is apparently seen at the time of birth, marriage, death, settlement of family dispute, panchayat etc.
5. The Sahariya tribe is a Hindu-tribe, and the Sahariyas call themselves Hindu with an unshakable faith in the Hindu religion and most of its deities
6. Religion plays a vital role in governing the society, and especially, in governing the tribals who have a strong faith in the religious powers.
7. The Sahariya tribe believes religion to be an integral part of their practical life. It regulates their life and behavior, and develops in them the sense of collective consciousness which finally results into their unity, chastity and the moral values.
8. The Sahariya tribals believe in sorcery and superstitions which they exercise in order to bring themselves some profit and to harm others
9. Little traditions prevail in the Sahariya tribal world that can be witnessed through their regular worship and performance of rituals in order to please them, and in their optimistic approach that all their problems will be solved by the local gods and goddesses they worship.
10. The Sahariya tribals have strong belief in Animism Folk, Hindu gods and goddesses that they worship
11. They enjoy the celebration of all the major Hindu festivals, such as, Veer Teja, Dhakar Baba, Durga, Hanuman, Lalbai, Bejasan, Savni Amavasya, Janmashtami, Raksha Bandhan, Deepavali, Holi and Teja Dashmi.
12. Religion which allows the Sahariyas to perform various rituals to please the deities, is a binding force among the Sahariyans.

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