

# Upgrading Status of the Meena Women in Rajasthan

(With Special Reference to the Meena Women in The Karauli District)



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## Abstract

Traditionally the Meenas are patrilocal, patrilineal and kinbased Society. They culturally and traditionally divide their homeland into twelve territorial units called 'Pals' and they live in both compact villages or isolated hamlets called 'dhanis' which are uniclan in nature. Generally the village of Meena community is comprised of the members belonging to a single 'got'. However, in a large number of villages two or more 'got' of the tribe are settled. Thus we can say that the village community is mainly tribal community. Agriculture being the primary occupation of the community, the typical Meena village follows its ancient pattern of settlement either on alluvial plains or on the semi-arid plateau. The habitation area is well marked with the boundaries of the villages and fields. Since age long Meenas have continued to live in the forests, hilly regions. They live in huts which is more popularly called 'Dhodhe' or 'Jhopadi', is made up of clay, hay and cow dung. They used to construct their houses usually in dense forest and hilly areas so that they may live in isolation and could not be easily deducted. These safe zones of Meenas are known as Mewase.

They possess qualities like courage, loyalty, leadership, physical strength, resilience, fighting tenacity and military strategy. Though many of their strongholds lay in ruin, the Meenas bravely hold what remains theirs, while looking to reclaim their lost empires. Meenas are stubborn and sturdy people, but also brave and very hardworking, they remain true to the traditions and values of their heritage.

The paper surveys the upgrading socio-economic, cultural and political status of the Meena women in the Karauli district.

**Keywords:** Upgrading, Reservation, Main stream, Destiny, Career, Scenario.

## Introduction



Of the total population of Rajasthan more than 10% are Meenas. Meenas were added to ST list in 1954 and gained sizeable clout in key areas like the police and administration. Their concentration is mainly in Swai Madhopur, Karauli, Dholpur, Bharatpur and Dausa district. Meenas have better awareness about their rights. They are progressive and have a better social standing. Meena has been considered as the largest tribe of Rajasthan. "Among the Meena the Mediterranean features are more pronounced. They are basically well settled agriculturists and occupied the most fertile area of Rajasthan. The historical facts and foibles emphasizes that Meena are among the oldest inhabitants of Rajasthan. Their population has been estimated to be 3,799,921 (2011 census) approximately.

India and even from the foreign countries every day, and for its Meena tribe which reflects peculiar cultural traits. The Meena tribals live in remote and unapproachable remote areas where they keep their existence confined to the barren land. They have their own blisses through joint family system, child marriage system, veil system, customary living. Generally, the Meena tribal society is a male dominated one where the male members enjoy a better and privileged life than the females. Right from the point of time the children are 5 or 6 years old they are trained in working hard at home and in the fields. Being religious minded and lovers of kinship, they exercise various rituals at homes and at temples. At the same time, they seek pleasure in enjoying moments with their kinsmen.

The Meena women are not weak, rather quite bold enough to share their liabilities successfully. They not only manage their homes but also work in the fields in order to help their husbands and other family members. The Meena woman, however has long been desirous of being self depend in terms of money, as she finds herself as a puppet dancing in the hands of her husband and other male members of the family. Her public life does not allow her any freedom. Shackled in the long age traditions and culture, she enjoys satisfaction through her child marriage to the person selected by her parents, through the management of her home and children, and through the simple blisses of her family life.

However, the contemporary scenario all over Rajasthan, and particularly in the Karauli district, reveals the changing picture of the Meena women. There is seen an incredible awareness for education, employment, rights etc. among them. Struggling against the long age traditions and family values, she has now started crossing the threshold of her home seeking her own identity through the use of her multifaceted talent in the various walks of life. Now her sense of education and liberty has taught her no more to be too bovine to handle the affairs publicly. She is constantly on move to join the process of women empowerment and globalization. Her presence under various capacities is witnessed in both the public and the private sector, and in all the departments. She is constantly proving that if she is allowed, she can go to any extent in order to attain her goals. The departments like education, medical, engineering, administration etc. witness the presence and potential of the Meena women in the district of Karauli.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To bring forth the status of Rajasthan in India and to reflect its heritage culture and demographic features
2. To go through the past of the Indian woman
3. To bring forth the traditional living and working of the Meena tribal people in Rajasthan
4. To produce the socio-cultural and political scenario of the Karauli district of Rajasthan
5. To find out the status of the Meena women in the district
6. To explore the causes of their poor and miserable existence and backwardness

7. To interpret the various ongoing social processes that help the Meena women of the district to link themselves with education, job and politics
8. To ponder and interpret the various schemes meant for the welfare of the Meena women
9. To point out the various fields that are liked by the Meena women in the district for job and career
10. To explore the participation of the Meena women in the district in public and private sectors
11. To interpret the cause and effect relationship of the issue in consideration

#### **Review of Literature**

Nathalie Williams (2009) indicates that educational attainment has positive effects and enrolment has negative effects on out-migration and including enrolment in the model increases the effect of attainment. In the case of women, with the changing role of gender, increased education and labor force participation, the affect of educational attainment changes drastically over time, from almost no effect, to a strong positive effect.

The Tribal India (Septemeber10, 2011) reports that Meena is a caste and community mainly found in Rajasthan, India. Meenas celebrate Meenesh Jayanti in the name of Vishnu on 3 Tithi of Chaitra Shukal paksha according to the Hindu calendar. The main reference of this belief is based on the scripture of the Matsya Purana. Members of the Meena community are found in the northern part of Rajasthan. Meenas share the Brij and Matsya Area of Rajasthan i.e.Sawai Madhopur, Dausa, Jaipur, Dholpur and Karauli districts in Jaipur and Bharatpur region (also the Bharatpur and Bayana districts) with other communities. They inhabit the area from Jaipur–Sikar in Shekhawati region and Alwar in the northeast region of the state. They are also widely spread in Kota, Jhalawar and Bundi. Meenas are also found in north-western Madhya Pradesh i.e. Sheopur, Morena, Gwalior, Shivpuri, Guna, Sajapur, Bhopal etc.. The Meenas, community of Rajasthan, are an agricultural people occupying one of the most fertile regions of the state. The Meena kings were the early rulers of major parts of Rajasthan including Amber (early capital of Jaipur).

Abha Sharma (2014) observes in the context of a Meena woman called Murali that as a child she used to keenly observe the government officials and leaders who came to her village Bassi, near Jaipur, Rajasthan, for official functions on occasions like Independence Day or Republic Day. Sitting in the audience, she used to watch in fascination as they addressed large crowds. She even had the urge to join them at the dais but knew she needed to become "someone important" in order to be able to do that. Born into a family of daily wagers, it never really seemed likely that Murli Meena would achieve this desire. Although she was a natural leader, there simply were no opportunities for her to distinguish herself. Her fortunes, however, changed when she got married to someone who lived in the neighbouring village of Dehlala and decided to discard the 'ghunghat 'Looking back, Murli says she wanted to live

as freely as the daughters and daughters-in-law of the Brahmin and Jain Communities in my neighbourhood.

Sanchari Pal (February 7, 2017) observes that living in a village that had elected a female leader caused villagers to report lower bias against women. By creating empowered female role models, they also led villagers to state higher aspirations for their daughters and to invest more in their education. Rural Indian women haven't always had much by way of social agency or power to formulate strategic choices, control resources and take decisions that affect important life outcomes. This, however, hasn't stopped them from elbowing past certain patriarchal structures to powerful effect.

Monika (2018) views that Anemia is prevalent in all categories of women. Women's health is poor especially among Saharia women who are still striving hard to meet the national health standards. A multidimensional approach is required to uplift the health status. Hemoglobin levels of all the women were found to be very low. The mean hemoglobin value in Saharia ( $8.3 \pm 1.4$  g/dl) and Meena ( $8.1 \pm 1.4$  g/dl) women was found to be significantly lower ( $p < 0.01$  at 99 per cent confidence level) than that of the reference group ( $9.5 \pm 1.4$  g/dl) and much below the standard value of 12 g/dl. Chronic energy deficiency (BMI  $< 18.5$ ) was more prevalent in Saharia women (68 per cent) followed by Meena (~24 per cent) than reference women (7 per cent). Only 29 per cent Saharia women were under normal BMI and majority of the reference group women (77 per cent) and Meena women (72 per cent) had normal BMI (18.5-24). Nutrient and dietary intake of both the tribal women groups were low when compared with suggested levels. In Saharia and Meena women, magnesium and thiamine were significantly higher ( $p < 0.01$ ) and other nutrients were significantly lower ( $p < 0.01$ ) than recommended dietary allowances.

Report of Ikaki (2018) enlists the following facts about the Meena tribe-

1. Physically they are recognised as tall, athletic with well-defined features, and are historically noted for their bravery.
2. They are one of the largest tribal groups in Rajasthan alongside the Bhils.
3. They are an agricultural people by history and culture.
4. They are well integrated with other higher castes like Rajputs and Brahmins, who perform all rituals from birth, marriage and death like any other higher Hindu caste.
5. They are a member of the second of the four great Hindu castes (the Kshatriyas), the military caste. The traditional function of the Kshatriyas is to protect society by fighting in wartime and governing in peacetime.
6. Meena women have comparatively stronger rights than many other Hindu castes, with remarriage of widows and divorcees well accepted in their society.

7. The town of Amer and home today of the Amber Fort, located high on a hill 11 kms from Jaipur, was originally built by Meenas.
8. Festivals, music, songs and dance are prominent in the culture and tradition of Meena tribes.
9. The Navratri festival is celebrated twice a year with great devotion all over India and is a time of great celebration among Meena tribes who come together for singing, dancing, swordplay and dancing.
10. Meena people firmly believe in marriage, with matchmaking based on horoscopes often organised by priest singers known as bhopas.
11. Traditionally, there are clear differences in dress for married and unmarried women. Jewellery is an integral part of Meena dress, including ornaments for the neck, nose, wrists, forearms, ankles. Tattooing is popular, especially on the hands and faces and a Meena woman never wears her hair loose.
12. Traditional dress for Meena men consists of a dhoti and a turban. Although, younger men have adopted the shirt and loose trousers. Marriage brings a change in costume with more use of appliqué designs. Tattooing is popular with men and jewellery is most commonly limited to earrings. Hair is worn short with beards and small moustaches popular

#### **Hypothesis**

1. The Meena is a popular tribe of India, particularly found in Rajasthan
2. Sawai Madhopur, Kota, Karauli, Dholpur etc. are some of the districts of Rajasthan where the tribe witnesses its presence and its existence
3. The Meena tribe has its own typical culture and social order which impart it a peculiar status
4. The tribe reveals a good division of labour between the male and the female members of the family
5. Joint family system, child marriage, rigid inclination to the customary modes of living are the distinct features of the Meena tribal culture
6. The Meena women are hardworking ready to fulfill successfully their duties as wives and mothers
7. The Meena women are now an integral part of the social processes, such as, women empowerment, Sanskritization, Urbanization
8. The modern Meena women are ready to change their destiny through education and employment
9. Day by day there is an awareness in them for their rights
10. In the Karauli district of Rajasthan, there is a revolutionary and tremendous upgradation in the status of the Meena women in the Karauli district

#### **Methodology**

Based on the personal experiences, observations, perceptions, convictions, interactions and discussions, and secondary data in particular collected casually from the newspapers, magazines, reports, television documentaries, internet sites, the paper is primarily a theoretical study prepared with a view to reflect the upgrading status of the Meena women in the Karauli district whom the author treats

as the representatives of all the Meena women at large. In order to shape up the thoughts, the author began with her serious pondering over the existence of the Meena women. Beginning from this point she decided to discuss the issue in the context of the Meena women in the Karauli district where still many of the Meena girls and women are looking forward to the arrival of some angel who can help them be free from their hellish narrow world. Having a historic-analytical approach, the research design that could help the author arrive at findings and conclusion was adopted. After setting the objectives for the study, she selected a few studies on the issue, and studied and reviewed them applying her own experiences as a member of the Meena tribe, she proceeded further through the content analysis, formulation of hypothesis, research methodology and findings and conclusion. For the sake of making the work scientific in spirit, she followed all the steps of social research suggested and approved by most of the eminent social scientists like PV Young and others.

### Findings & Conclusion

1. The status of the Indian woman has undergone several phases
2. Rajasthan, though a backward state of India, is rich in its heritage culture and industrial sector
3. It is known for its various tribes that give it a specific identity
4. The tribals of Rajasthan enjoy a typical living and culture
5. Karauli, famous for the Kaila Devi temple, witnesses a mixed socio-cultural scenario constituted by the members of the different religions, castes and tribes
6. The Meena tribe in the Karauli district imparts the district a distinct identity
7. The Meena woman, though inclined to traditions, is hardworking ready to work both at home and in the field
8. Child marriage, ignorance, illiteracy, submissiveness, lack of self awareness etc. are some of the causes of their poor and miserable existence and backwardness
9. The processes like modernization, Sanskritization, urbanization etc. has brought new rays of hope in their life
10. Panchayatiraj, 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, Child Marriage Act and other Acts and provisions assuring safety, security and protection of the rights have made the Meena women bold enough to give up their traditional modes of living
11. The reservation policy, SC and ST Act, various schemes meant for the encouragement of the girls' education at schools and colleges are successfully linking them with various careers
12. The State Government is running several campaigns, schemes and programmes in order to link them with the main stream of the development of the nation
13. The awareness among the Meena women about education, political rights and jobs is increasing incredibly.
14. Though both the sectors are open to the Meena women, but the women in the district prefer the

public sector and government sector for jobs to the private sector

15. The causes that force them to change their destiny through education and employment are their economic dependence on the male members, domestic violence, ignorance and illiteracy, deep inclination to traditional modes of living, evils of child marriage that spoil the life and desire to have a safe future
16. The results are both good and bad. Positively, they include the Meena women's entering the various fields in order to prove their potential, increase in awareness, literacy rate, participation in political activities, economic independence, economic support to family, better caring of the children etc.
17. Negatively, they include, their detachment from their traditions, family values, division between home and office, over dominance etc.

Rajasthan, in addition to the other features, is a state known for the tribal societies. The major tribes residing here are Bhil, Meena, Damor, Patelias, Saharaiyas, and Gharasia. Sahariya, a primitive tribal group, residing in part of Baran, Kota, Dungarpur and Sawai Madhopur districts, is among the most backward tribal groups. The economy of tribals continues to be predominately agriculture with small landholding and irrigated area. These communities have higher incidence of illiteracy, malnourishment and poverty, and face social and geographic isolation. The region lacks productive land, irrigation facilities, industrialization and skill building opportunities.

The Karauli district of Rajasthan, known for its Meena tribe in particular, is witnessing a revolutionary change which can be seen in all the aspects associated with the district, but particularly in the status of the Meena women who, through self awareness, literacy, education and employment, are ready to pace with the world at large, and are no longer ready to confine themselves to the four walls of their home where in the past, they were no better than dumb animals with no demands and no complaints. Now, by being an integral part of the various ongoing socio-economic and cultural processes, and by availing themselves of various government schemes they are not only managing their domestic affairs quite smoothly, but also working quite successfully in the various government and private departments.

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