

*Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

# Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan (An Interpretative and Analytical Study)

Kashif Jamil

Ph.D Research Scholar in History IUB, Bahawalpur.

Email: kashifjamil397@gmail.com

Dr. Samia Khalid

Assistant Professor History, Bahawalpur, IUB,

Email: samkhameo@gmail.com

Received on: 12-01-2022

Accepted on: 15-02-2022

## Abstract

Before the partition of India (1947.) Cholistan was a part of Rajasthan India. It's a cradle of great Indus civilization and the Hindu tribes of Cholistan are representative of this great civilization. They are still followers of their ancient traditions. Superstitions are a major part of their ancient rituals. Though some published works are available on Cholistan but not a single work has yet appeared on Hindu tribes of cholistan. Keeping in view the lack of publish material on Hindu tribes of cholistan attempt has been made to highlight the amazing and superstitious culture of Hindu tribes of cholistan. Primarily this article is based upon observations, group discussions and interviews of Hindu tribal representatives however secondary sources have also been used where necessary. The article has been classified into two sections: Superstitious culture and Amazing Culture.

**Keywords:** Bawaria, Bhil, Mengwals, Punchak, Sati, Cholistan, Barat, Bhopay, Devi

## Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan

In Cholistan there are three Hindu tribes Bhils, Bawarias, and Mengwals. Bhil Hindu tribe of Cholistan is an ancient tribe of *Rajasthan*, once lives in the banks of the lost river *Sarsvati*. Their culture seems to be the oldest surviving culture in the world. Bhils are neither invaders nor migratory people. They have been mentioned in four Hindu yugs.<sup>1</sup> However during these yugs their professions have been changed due to some reasons. For instance, they had been rulers of the small states, warriors, robbers and plundering, bowmen, cultivators and shepherds.<sup>2</sup>

Bawaria is nomadic and hunter tribe of Rajasthan. During Shahab-ud-Din Ghouri's Attack to Chitor Bawaria and Bhil tribes were regarded as skilled and professional bowmen and Banduckhis<sup>3</sup> who fought in the army of Jaimal and phatta against *Shahab-ud-Din of Ghor*. Later on they were scattered in *Alwar*, *Bikinar*, *Mewar* and The Punjab. When Man Singh was wounded in the battle of Ujjain, he was escaped with the help of a Bawaria.<sup>4</sup> In 1896-97 large number of poor Hindu Tribes moved from Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur to Bahawalpur

### *Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

state due to the feminine there.<sup>5</sup> Among these refugees there were number of Bawaria who scattered in Cholistan. Again in 1904 about two thousand Bawaria emigrated from the Punjab to Bahawalpur.<sup>6</sup> Mengwals, locally known as chamar<sup>7</sup>, are lowest caste Hindus<sup>8</sup> like Bhils and Bawarias. They lived in Bikaner, Jasimer, Marwar on the banks of river jamna, from there they scattered in the area of present Cholistan. H.A.Rose claimed that in Sirsa a *chamaris* called Mengwals as a compliment.<sup>9</sup> Further he says; the chamar is the tanner and leather worker of North-Western India and western parts of Punjab he is called *Mochi*. The name chamar is derived from the Sanskrit *charmakara* or worker in hides.<sup>10</sup> M.A.Sherring also called them as *chamars* due to their association with leather and he is of opinion that their seven sub-division were in Benares.<sup>11</sup> He says that their sub division groups are found largely in every district. According to census of 1865 they exceeds three millions and half. <sup>12</sup>

#### **L Superstitious culture of Hindu Tribes**

All Cholistani tribal Hindu believe in super stations. James Tod in his book annals and antiquities gave a description about the superstition of Bhils, how they present their offerings to a decorated sacred tree against evil spirits.<sup>13</sup>

##### **(1) Secure Travelling**

In present scenario the tree of *pipal* and plant of *tulsi* is also supposed scared. If they cross a stream or river than they keep some money with them and throw into the water for a secure travelling. <sup>14</sup> They believe that they are giving share of water and the devi of water is pleased now so they are out of danger and can cross the water safely.

##### **(2) Goat/Pig Sacrifice**

One the event of wedding When Bhil and Mengwals go with *barat* to get a bride then they sacrifice a goat and all people pass on over its blood. Bawaria do this with pig. It is to be supposed that now *barat* is safe from *absugan* or demon attacks.<sup>15</sup> this rite is still practiced in majority of Cholistani Hindus. Though due to influence of Islamic culture somewhere Bawaria tribe change their animal pig with goat because pig is supposed unclean in Islamic culture. So this is observed that Bawria changed their animal goat with pig to please the Muslim landlords so that they could create good working relations with them.

##### **(3) Iron knife and Stick for protection**

In Bhils when wedding date is fixed of bride and groom for marriage they supposed to be in danger zone, unless they take rounds around the burning fire. So bride and groom stay separate from other in a corner of house. They are not allowed to see somebody and go outside of house. Bride keeps iron knife and groom keeps iron stick for protection for witchcrafts. This culture is also adopted by the *sarik* people of this area. They feel comfort when they tie a knot by taking rounds around the fire. But due to influence of other culture like Islamic culture now in educated tribal hindus it is observed that after fixing of wedding date they keep continue their routine business and work. Though this is seen in only a small number of educated people. Some of them after fixing date don't hold the knife or iron stick in their hands.

### *Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

#### **(4)Shadow of sticks**

In all Hindu tribes on the event of Holi, they start Holi from that house where a new baby is born in Bhils and Mengwals somebody sit in *chauth* by holding child and rest of people make a shadow of sticks on new baby born and it is believed that the child is now safe from demon attacks.<sup>16</sup> So this is a strong belief system which is still part of their rites.

#### **(5) Rebirth in different forms**

All Cholistani Hindu tribes believe in rebirth the *Upanishads* seem to be saying that ordinary deluded people are reborn in accordance with the rites they perform. <sup>17</sup> So from of reborn depends on the acts of previous life. If he had bad acts he can be reborn in the form of animal and bear the punishment whole life, if he had good acts then he can have good life in not birth. <sup>18</sup> 'Bhopay' or 'Gurary' accept money and tell the future birth form of dead. But it looks a looting trick. The majority of Hindu tribes of cholistan is uneducated so that's why they are staunch follower of their traditions. But in present era those who are getting education don't believe in superstitious elements of their culture. Somewhere Islamic culture also changed their thoughts and gave them enlightenment.

#### **(6) Break up with dead husband**

In Bhil and Bawaria Hindus when a husband dies then his wife take rounds around the grave in reverse order to break a relation with dead husband so that she could start new life. Though after the husband death rasm-e-sati had been practicing in these tribes but now it has been rejected by the Hinduism socially and constitutionally. Usually when tribal Hindu tribes tie a knot they take rounds around the fire but for breaking relation with dead husband they take rounds around the grave in reverse order. This seems a self-created rite and suggested by the Hindu religious leader and Pandits.

#### **(7) Fear of Lunar eclipse**

In Bhils and Mengwals when a 'lunar eclipse' is occurred then they offer some butter to cow to save their family form demon attack.<sup>19</sup> It is believed that when there is 'lunar eclipse' then their lives are in danger. Cow is supposed sacred animal and has a rich status in their lives so that they think that if they please a cow by offering them butter then deities will be pleased and spare their lives.

#### **(8) Scarifying a bull to please God of rain**

Rain is very necessary for Cholistani Hindus livestock and harvesting. Sindhi Mengwals pray for rain from *Megrishidevta* and to please him they decorate a bull and sent to jungle for the beasts. It is believed that they are making happy to god of rain. Presently their custom is changed. Now they sacrifice a bull and its meat is distributed to poor to get rain. Here an Islamic influence can be observed with the change of their ritual. Bull is sacrificed and its meat is either cooked and distributed or distributed in raw so that people could eat and pray for the rain. Islam has played a vital role to change this ritual, though it's not fully adopted by all the tribal hindus but it changed their culture.

### *Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

#### **(9) Fear of death of family members**

In Mengwalhindus when a person dies in *Punchak*<sup>20</sup> days then the whole family supposed to be in danger zone and they have to bury some dummy dead bodies with the dead to cheat or divert the *Yamraj*. This is also a strong superstitious belief of tribal Hindus that when a person dies the whole family is supposed to be in danger especially Pandit and spiritual leaders make this concept strong as the tribal hindus are simple and blind followers. To save a family from danger different pandit and spiritual do different *anusthans* (pooja pat) to put off the danger from the family this is also observed that the *pandits* or spiritual leaders receive thousands rupees for saving the lives of other family members. It's simply a looting trick to the simple and innocent tribal hindus. Once the writer also participated in this ritual when a *pandit* charged 25 thousand rupees from a family to save themselves because their family member dies in *punchak* days. They *pandit* was of opinion that the dead's spirit could not go to heaven properly and want to take them entire family with him. This information created a restlessness and chaos among the poor family and they pay a heavy money to spiritual leader to get rid of dead's spirit.

#### **(11) Unclean animals of Bawaria Tribe**

Bawarias are also very superstitions they believe that if they touch any prostitute or cock they will become 'untouchables'.<sup>21</sup> So this is observed that if you will go to cholistan and visit Bawria's colony nobody will find donkey, cock etc. Ahmad Ghazali seconded Mazharul Islam and gave detail why Bawarias don't like cock, dog, donkey etc. <sup>22</sup> So present Bawarias don't have donkey and cock at their homes.

#### **(12) Form/shape of next birth**

When anybody is close to death in Bawaria tribe they keep some dry flour in plate and cover it, and put it the head side and they believe that before dying, the person soul will leave foot mark it will be sign that in next life in what form he will be born.<sup>23</sup> though an almost half of them have left this ritual due to Islamic influence upon their culture. This ritual also indicate towards the concept of reborn again in different form as this theory of reborn or *punarjanam* is so famous in the Hinduism. But not all the Hindus of other tribes do this rite as Bawaria do when a person is close to death.

When someone dies in Bawarias they make mark on his/her body so that they can recognize him/her if he/she reborn in the same tribe same colony or home or in relatives. One of Bawria representative Paimla Ram was of opinion that a bird seagull was very familiar with their family and they suppose that it's a *punarjanam* of their elder.

#### **(13) Fear of Black magic**

Bawaria believe that after eating the meat of pig they will be safe from black magic, demon power and witchcrafts. <sup>24</sup> Bawaria avoid wearing green color dress they believe that green color is reserved for saints. The people of Bawaria tribe are strong believer of black magic so that's why they remain scared and feel fear from black magic furthermore the spiritual leaders also mislead them to accept the money to give them security and purge them from black magic and other demon powers.

## *Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

### **II. Amazing Culture of Hindu Tribes**

#### **(1) Strength of Caste System**

All Hindu tribes of Cholistani are strictly not allowed to marry in same caste. They don't take wives from the family of relatives like '*Chacha, Taya, Mamoo, Khala, Phopho*', etc. They considered their cousins like brother and sisters, on event of marriage groom gives '*dopatas*' to all his female cousins to declare them as sisters. All the Hindus are staunch follower of this concept that they don't marry in same blood line. They even don't think about it furthermore to avoid inconvenience in family relations/cousins. They created a strong practice to make a bridge whenever a boy or girl marries groom gives *dopataas* to all his female cousins to declare them as sister. From childhood their children are taught to say brother and sister to each other to eliminate the margins of relations. So from childhood a girl of family knows that all male cousins are her brothers and a boy supposes all girls to his sister like. So this training also save themselves to create illegal/love affair relations among the cousins. Love marriage or marriage in caste is prohibited in all Hindu tribes.

#### **(2) An ancient invitation system**

In Bhils and Bawarias invitation of marriage is given to other by giving them yellow colored rice, this is an ancient tradition of inviting others on wedding this is also practiced in Cholistan and Rajasthan (India) as well. If nobody home then some yellow colored rice are put on the door of house. Though this is era of fast communication like mobile and internet are used to communicate but ancient Hindu tribes practice this way of invitation which is so interesting and amazing where as in Mengwals and elder of family tie a thread on the wrist of all head of other families for invitation. It sometime takes too much time to tie a thread on hundreds of wrists. In this way of invitation no one can deny that he did not get an invitation sometime a spiritual leader also helps to tie a piece of thread on wrist of tribal people due to large number of people.

#### **(3) Mehndi custom for identification**

In Bhil, Mengwals and Bawrias when they apply '*mehndi*' on groom, he lies down on '*charpai*' and all the *barati* have to apply *mehndi* on right hand for identification that they are with groom. Usually every *barati* applies *mehndi* on right hand for his identification so that when they go to other area to get bride the bridegroom's relative and people could recognize him that he is the companion of groom. This ritual is still famous and practiced in all Hindu tribes of Cholistan.

#### **(4) Restrictions for bride/bridegroom**

In all Hindu tribes '*barat*' stays whole night and bride/groom take rounds around the fire at midnight sometimes a very early morning. Before 5-6 days of marriage bride groom stays in separate home they are not allowed to go outside in these days. Spicy food is not allowed for them they hold on iron knife and stick to prevent themselves from demon attacks.

#### **(5) Gender Discrimination**

All Hindu tribal women are not allowed to sit on *charpai* in the presence of men. It shows the dominance of men in society or may be it shows great respect of men by their women. It also

### *Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

indicates the gender misbalance in the hindu tribal society it also shows that women has less importance in their society. Women cannot sit on *charpai* even in the presence of his own son/ husband or other male family member. This is amazing scene then somebody see them in their routine life that the men of family are sitting on the *charpai* whereas all the women of family sit on the ground. They only can sit on *charpai* when no male member is at home. Though they work together in fields they go to market together but women are not allowed to sit on *charpai* in the presence of men. This is also amazing that women has accepted this discrimination whole heartedly by supposing that this is a necessary part of their culture and they never complain to their men for this discrimination.

#### **(6) Tribal restrictions for acceptance of raped woman**

If a Hindu tribal girl runs away with someone outsider or raped/kidnapped the bitter reality is that tribe does not accept her unless she get a bath in sacred river Ganga of India. The hindu tribal consider her unclean but do not see the injustice done with her. If she is raped/kidnaped then what is her fault. But in spite of this she is not accepted by the tribe. She has to take a bath in sacred river *Ganga* or *Aghor* stream in Balcohan for her cleansing. Before cleansing she has to live outside the colony of tribe. When she is cleansed then she is taken back to her tribe before the rite of cleansing she suffers a lot by her own tribe.

#### **(7) Longest fast of older son**

In Mengwals and somewhere in Bhils when a man dies his elder son practice *Apwas* from death day to *KiriaKarm*. If a woman dies then *Apwas* is practiced by her older daughter. When a married person dies his older son practice *apwas* of 10-12 days as spiritual leader suggests. In this period of *apwas* he has to survive only on liquid like water, milk and some fruits. He is not allowed to take cooked food. At one side he loses his father and other side he has to face hunger for 10-12 days. The purpose of this *apwas* is so save the rest of family members from death and to connect the *atma* with *parmatma*. Sometimes older son himself is in minor age but inspite of this he has to perform this ritual. The author met a boy who was 9 years old who practiced the *apwas* and survived on milk and fruits for 11 days. The mengwal hindus of cholistan are found strict in their traditions and rituals.

#### **(8) Making of new relations**

In Mengwals a family resident of groom's village adopts bride as their own daughter and will take care her forever. This is called '*dharmkibeti*'. this is an ancient tradition when people don't have means of transport & communication then the bride's same cast family residing in groom's area voluntarily adopts the bride as his own daughter due to same caste. This ritual creates new relations with same caste of tribal but now due to fast way of communication and transportation this ritual is dying. Now this ritual is appearing in different ways like when some of tribal Hindu goes for ziarat of Holy places they also make new relation by adopting mother, brother or sister.

#### **(9) Grandfather's spirits protects the grandson**

In Bawaria tribe when first baby is born if he is a boy then his grandfather's name is given to him in case of girl grandmother's name is given. This practice is also found in local sarikis. The belief behind this practice is that they think that by adopting grandfather/grandmother

### *Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

name for their boy or girl their soul will protect their children and good properties of their personality will also covert to their children.

#### **(10) Payment for daughter/Bride**

In Bhils groom pay for bride so usually this is supposed that Bhils may sale their girls or accept money for their girls but this is totally a misconception. In fact in British period the desert area of cholistan and Rajasthan suffered from shortage of food. In 1867, 1890, 1895 many low caste Hindus migrated from Rajasthan to Bahawalpur State due to drought and shortage of food. <sup>13</sup> When Bahawalpur State merged/accessed with Pakistan. These Hindu tribes became Pakistanis. When rich bhils supported the poor bhils and desired to marry with their daughters and offer all the expenditure of wedding, gradually this turned into a ritual and bhils gradually accepted money from the family of bridegroom. In present scenario this has become a famous and strong ritual of bhils. No one can imagine to marry without paying the money or no one is ready to give their daughter without accepting money in the cholistan desert. Even if someone don't accept the money against this ritual this is supposed that the bride may have some bad character that's why their parents are not ready to accept money so Bhils are entangled in these ancient traditions.

#### **(11) Carrying of own plate and glass**

In Bawarias on event of marriage every tribal go with his own plate and glass for eating. It shows that in past may be they will have been treating as lowest class or untouchables. A scattered majority of bawaria tribe is living on the banks of cholistan desert and all are invited on event of wedding but everyone either male or female rich or poor comes with his/her own plate and glass and when the wedding feast starts they gathered in an open place or ground by holding his/her own plate and glass that is brought by them from their own. A Bawria representative was of opinion that it's an ancient tradition they don't know how and why it was started? Another Bawria representative was of opinion that nobody gives their crockery on rent because they are hindus. Now means of resources have increased, economic condition has become good but inspit of this bawaria's ancient tradition is still continuous.

#### **(12) Wedding's special food**

On girls marriage (girl's parents) offer boiled rice to the *barat* sometime *ghi* and *shakar*is also separately served.<sup>24</sup>this food is not changed and continuous for hundreds of years among the bawaria tribe. Their economy is some better than the past but they did not change their food that is served on wedding event.

#### **(13) Special fast of Wedding**

In Mengwals and Bawarias Parents of bride and groom practice special fast on marriage day for the blessings of couple. Both the parents of bride and groom strongly follow their centuries old tradition. In all the event of wedding both bride and bridegroom's parents practice special fast and in between they also do their routine wedding arrangements. They believe that special fast give the special blessings to new couple.

*Superstitious and Amazing Culture of Ancient Hindu Tribes of Cholistan ...*

**Notes and References**

1. In Hinduism From the beginning to ending of the universe it is divided in four eras called Yug. Each era is consisting of millions of years. These are four *yugs* *Sutyug*, *Tritayug*, *Doaparyug* & *Kalyug*. Presently we are passing through the last *Kalyug*. For detail see Guru SukhDevG, *Bhil Raja*, Guru Ashram, Opp. Nishat Cinema, Rahim yar Khan, 2011. p.1-41 & Swami DianadSarsvati, Tr.by. Singh, Nehal. *Rig Ved.*: Nigarshat Publishers Lahore, 2011. p.16-17
2. D.D.Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Vikas Publishing House. p.43. Bhils were informed by the Shiv G for ruling in Ragorkapoor. For detail see *Bhil Raja*.
3. Sir Denzil Ibbotson, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and N.W.F.P.*, Vol.II, Language Department Punjab, 1970, p.73.
4. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Vol.III, Oxford University Press, 1920, p.1821.
5. Malik Muhammad Din, *Gazetteer of the Bahawalpur State*, Sang-e-Meel Publication Lahore, 2001, p.92.
6. *Ibid*, p.304.
7. *Ibbotson*, op.cit., p.73.
8. *James Tod*, Vol.III, op.cit. p.1821.
9. *Malik Muhammad Din*, op.cit., p.92.
10. *Ibid*, p.304.
11. *Malik Muhammad Din*, op.cit., p.155.
12. *Ibbotson*, op.cit., p.658.
13. *James Tod*, vol.III op.cit. p.1703.
14. Ahmad Ghazali, *Cholistan*, LokVirsa, Islamabad, 1984, p.320.
15. Interview with Rana G, 5-july-2020, 89-p, Rahimyar Khan.
16. Interview with Pretam Das 4- Mar-2020, Rahimyar Khan.
17. NaneyAuer Falk, *Living Hinduism an explorer guide*, Western Michigan University, Thomson wardsworth. p.37.
18. Interview with Guru Sukhdev G, 9-july-2020, Rahimyar Khan.
19. Interview with JatniBibi 24-june-2020, 88-P. Rahimyar Khan.
20. Hindu follows lunar calendar and in this calendar a period of 5 consecutive days is called punchuk. These five days are supposed bad days of the month. On calendar they are marked with a sign of black cross. They avoid holding any program of happiness in these days. In every month punchuk comes in different dates. If somebody incidentally dies in punchuk period then the whole family is supposed in danger zone. Then they bury some dummy dead bodies with the real one by counting the punchuk days. It is supposed by tribal Hindus this practice keeps safe other members of family.
21. Mazharul Islam, *LokPunjab*, Islamabad 1976, p.322.
22. *Ahmad Ghazali*, op.cit. p.312
23. Interview with Paimla Ram 11-mar-2020, SokarBasti, Yazman.
24. Interview with Shangari, 11-Mar-2020 SokarBasti, Yazman.