

Inter-ethnic Formations of Bhils in Indian Tradition

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Introduction

The Bhil is the largest, massive and oldest tribe of aboriginals of India divided into several endogamous groups (Singh 1981), the bulk of which is concentrated in the rugged region of the forest-clad mountain trinity of the Vindhyas, the Sahayadris and the Satpudas (Naik 1958:1) exactly in the contiguous areas of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Except a small number in Andhra Pradesh, the Bhil constituting 10.34 per cent of India's population (Census of India 1991) are scattered over a wide area stretching from the Aravalli range in the southern highlands of Rajasthan in the North to the Dangs of eastern Gujarat in the South and in the East passing through the districts of Jhabua and Dhar upto the forests of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh- the whole region lying between the latitudes 20°-25' N and the longitudes 73°-75' E (Doshi 1974: 1). A question that arises here is :What inter-ethnic formations of Bhils are perceived in the course of evolution of a civilizational society in India ? From the hoary past they have waded through a welter of inter-ethnic relations ranging from their independent groups and chieftaincies to intense cooperation or conflicts to the subjugated people as evident in proto-historical, historical and empirical sources of data in India .Indian tradition consisted of the four value-themes; viz., hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence (Singh 1977: 191) displays a series of influences and social formations in their protracted inter-ethnic relations.

Though known very little by the seventh century, Bhils have been ancient enough to be regarded a separate ethnic group in Sanskrit literature of **Diverse Rootedness**

There are diverse roots of the origin of Bhils; namely, Dravidian derivations, sanskritic literature and historical factorization. These are discussed here.

Dravidian Derivations

The word **Bhil** is derived from the generic term *bil* of the Dravidian language meaning **bow** -the characteristic weapon of the tribe. The original inhabitants of Tululand of South Kanara district in Karnataka known as Billavas, from the same generic term, who do not use the name Bhil among themselves but, instead, call one another by their personal relationships of father, grand father, uncle, etc. or by their official titles such as **Naik / Nayak** (leader), **Tarwi** (headman), etc. are

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generally accepted as the earliest inhabitants and referred to as the **bowmen** (Chattopadhyaya 1978:55). Also, *beel* or *billu* are the other Dravidian generic terms of the same meaning as written in different books (Mann 1978:113). The derivation of nomenclature from the Dravidian etymological roots indicates about them of being the earliest aboriginals (bowmen) inhabiting the land along with other groups for a long time.

Sanskritic Mythicization

There are the people who derive the word **Bhil** from a Sanskrit term *bhid* meaning **to pierce, shoot or kill**, in view of the Bhil people's proficiency in archery (Mann 1978:113). A widely accepted myth declares their origin from Parvati's brothers who on finding Mahadev unable to pay *dapa* or bride-price for their sister stole away and killed His Nandi -the sacred bull and, therefore, earned Parvati's curse to live a miserable life thereafter. This concocted story of unknown source seems to make them self-contented with a miserable social and economic degeneration and to justify them as the thieves of Mahadev in their predations. Another mythological tale recounts of Mahadev making a clay doll infused with life and calling it a Bhil. The legend of great deluge telling about birth and spread of mankind narrates that while washing clothes in a river a washerman forewarned by a regularly fed and grateful fish of the impending deluge ensconced himself and his sister along with a cock in a box, who were discovered by the God Rama's scouts searching the survivors on hearing the cock's crowing and directed them to go about populating the world. Of the twins that they procreated the first one (a boy) was presented a horse by the God but failing to use it he abandoned it and went away in the forest, whose progenies came to be called Bhils-the forest dwellers. Tracing their birth **differently** from the first Bhil twins, Ninama and Maira, in Satyayuga, Bhils believe that to test them the gods sent Kakai, a fairy, to ask for Ninama's eyes and Maira's head which they handed over to her at once. The pleased gods restoring their limbs wished them to populate the world.

The **Puranas** speak, among several distinguished Bhils, of inimitable expert archer, Eklavya; the noted author of the Ramayana, Valmiki, who starting his life as a Bhil bandit, Valia, became a sage turning his extreme grief over dark past into poetry and Jaratha whose arrow aimed to a deer hit Krishna fatally to bring a curse for the Bhil descendants of their right hand forefinger to become ineffective in handling bows (Chattopadhyaya : 56).

Bhagavat Puran accounted that the issueless sage, Vena, son of Anga - a descendant of Manu Swayambhu- rubbing his thighs produced a charred log-like, flat-faced and extremely short-statured man and ordered him to sit down, i.e., *nishad* which is a name adopted for him and his descendants dwelling the Vindhya mountains and distinguished by their wicked deeds. Rowney's account of another tradition narrates that Mahadev fell in love with a forest girl, and one of his numerous progenies from her who was ugly, vicious and killer of his father's favourite bull was expelled from the habitat of men, from whom descended the Bhil (Mann 1978:12).

Historical Factorization

The descendants of the Rajputs socially declassed on account of a social crime such as marrying to a Bhil girl, eating beef and illegitimate union of a Rajput ruler with a woman of the low caste like Khants in Dungarpur were obliged to join Bhils. Bhils of the areas such as Obri, Depara,

Bilak, Kagdar and Barapal in Udaipur, Padar and Dhambola in Dungarpur and Sundhalpur and Mandi Kheda in Banswara districts in Rajasthan regard themselves as the descendants of the declassified Rajputs and still maintain the Rajput sub-castes such as Parmar, Chauhan, Sisodia, Rathore and the like (Shyamaldas, Part-I). Conversely, certain Bhil bhomias/chiefs declaring themselves the Rajput, known as Bhila Rajputs for long, also ultimately merged into Rajput fold (Chaturvedi 1968) **Racial and Linguistic Hybridization**

The Bhil have characteristic features of short to medium stature, slim body, round head, low and broad nose, darkish brown complexion and broad face and wavy to curly hairs. Small faces and fair complexion are also common and flat nose or prognathous jaw may also be found here and there. Many of them look emaciated and dwarfed due to malnutrition and chronic starvation. The Bhil women seldom fat or plumpy have retained till date some of the grace and agility with dark complexion. Herbert Risley, and Crooke also, has racially assorted them to the Dravidian type which is reluctantly accepted in modern research. C.V.S. Venkatachari related them to the proto-Mediterranean race. Eisenstadt, Shah and Guha, all, grouped them with Gonds or Veddids of the proto-australoids. Majumdar states : *The more we analyse the data, the more it transpires that the Bhil are racially more distant from the so-called pre-Dravidian groups while they approach nearer to the higher castes.* Ghurye maintains that even if the Bhil were originally of the same racial stock as the Chenchu or the Munda tribes, the indications are that they have been thoroughly hybridized by contacts with alien races. Thus, the racial status of the Bhil on anthropometric grounds is still uncertain (Ibid:14-15). Grierson sees some non-Aryan, Munda Dravidian, element in Bhil language, which is all uncertain. Bhili includes a number of languages spoken by Bhils in a chain of dialects between Rajasthani and Gujarati and between Khandeshi and Marathi (Ibid).

Early Ethnic Encounters

Excavations and archaeological findings pertaining to proto-historical period of the Bhil region have proved the early existence of man along the rivers Mahi and Sabarmati, Gambhiri and its tributaries, Berach and Wagen in southern Rajasthan, at least 1,00,000 years ago (Prakash 1967:1). The nomad man living on fruits, roots and animal flesh stabilized to cultivate in the area of Ahar river some 4,000 years ago (Sankalia 1967:3-4). This man in all probability was the Bhil either real *adiwasi*, i.e., autochthonous or migrated from outside. In the time that followed, a lot of struggle in the region is evident from the fact that Ahar was rebuilt at least 15 times during the pre-historic period and three or four times in the early history. The original Bhil settlement found was of not later than B. C. 2000. The people were agriculturists who cooked food, used metal -specially copper- for domestic utensils and lived in planned houses (Ibid:12-16). Their passage through a long historical process of checkmated relationship with numerous other ethnic groups is variously evident.

B. C. 500 (Raghav : 404) and there has always been some implication of aboriginal from the word **Bhilla** as wheat and barley have been respectively referred to as *Bhil bhojanam* and *Bhil-anna* (Jain : 6). Adiparva of Mahabharata narrates the story about rejection by Dronacharya of a low family born Nishad Eklavya going all along to Hastinapur to learn archery, his mastery over archery before a clay-idol of the guru and Dronacharya asking him for the right hand thumb in order to render his archery ineffective. The Harivansh Puran mentions about relations of the semi-civilized Bhil aboriginals with Lord Krishna and His kinsmen, and ultimately Krishna's killing by

a Bhil's arrow as well as capturing of the Royal Yadav ladies on the way to Mathura under the escort of Arjuna equipped with his famous Gandiv (bow).

The first historical mention of the word **Bhil**, not before 600 A. D., in Gunadhya's Kala Sarit Sagar is about a Bhil chief opposing the progress of another king through the Vindhya. Yashodharman who had his capital at Mandsor in Madhya Pradesh adjoining Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan and earned fame for defeating the great Hun, Mihirkula, in 532 A. D. is regarded by Bhils of Kanthal (Pratapgarh) in Rajasthan as one of their chiefs of those days. Following his death, Harshavardhan annexed the region to his empire which disintegrated into several independent units after his death. The eastern part of Wagar, i.e., mostly the present Banswara district in Rajasthan captured by the Parmars of Malwa was ruled over by their vassals from Arthuna, but over the remaining parts there had been independent sway of the Bhil chieftains for a century (Chaturvedi 1968 : 41).

The status of Bhils as the oldest inhabitants of the country is recognized by Russel and Heeralal from their employment to keep watch and ward over the village boundaries presumably better known to the oldest class of residents. Though pointing to the uncertainty of their autochthonous status, C.S.V. Venkatachari counted them as a race inhabiting India earlier than the Aryans and the Dravidians. Ghurye considered them as the oldest inhabitants of Rajasthan on the basis of a number of references in religious classics, mythological treatises and the epics-Ramayana and Mahabharata. Tod called them Vanputras or sons of the forest, the uncultivated mushrooms of India, fixed on the rocks and trees on their mountainous walls to the spot which gave them birth. Incidentally, those oldest residents of the region have been living in the hilly and rocky terrain of the Aravallis which the geologists regard as among the oldest rocks in the world (Mann: 11-15). Thus, they are believed to have been the ancient inhabitants of the Aravallis before the Aryans gradually infiltrated the western and the central Indian Plains to dislodge them deeper into the upland forest areas (Tod : 1960; Chauhan 1978).

Thus, the early classical and historical accounts show that Bhils generally unaware of the caste hierarchy were martial people considered as aboriginals by the others. They had their independent political units scattered in the Bhil region. Besides, their settlements such as Bhilmal and Bhilwad (presently Bhinmal and Bhilwada) in Rajasthan evidently tell that the Bhil region was much more extensive over the vast tracts of better lands wherefrom Bhils were driven away by others in the subsequent ages (Chaturvedi 1968 : 41).

Social Differentiation

In view of gradually growing inter ethnic relations the Bhil got socially differentiated into three categories : (i) village Bhils, (ii) cultivating Bhils and (iii) wild or mountain Bhils. The village Bhils were those who had from the ancient times become inhabitants of villages in the plains (usually near the hills), of which they were the watchmen and as such a part of the community. The cultivating Bhils were those who continued in peaceful occupations after their leaders were destroyed or driven away by invaders to become desperate free booters. The wild or mountain Bhils consisted of those who preferred savage freedom and indolence to submission and industry, more or less, by plunder. These were not at all closed groups; the number in each category increased or decreased depending upon the kind of government, weak or strong (Erskine 1908:230). Presently, the categories exist no

more except that of the village/cultivating Bhils. This process points to the gradual socio-economic integration of these people with the larger society.

Bhil-Rajput Convulsions

Drawing from bits and parts of Bhil-Rajput relations in the recorded history, one can identify the high points in the historical development of Bhils (Doshi 1974:2); viz., (i) presence of the Bhil kingdoms particularly in the southern half of Rajputana (now Rajasthan) about 1300 to 1500 years ago, (ii) unseating of Bhils by Rajputs to annexe their kingdoms, (iii) their moving away into deep gorges of Aravalli hills and casual/unpredictable relationship with Rajputs, (iv) their oppression by Rajput kings through high taxation, forced labour, etc., (v) Bhils as plunderers, thieves and law-breakers; the problem of lawlessness caused by inefficient, weak and corrupt administration of Rajput kings and the arrival of the British on the scene and (vi) Bhils as settled agriculturists. The checkmated Bhil-Rajput relations form almost the entire recorded history of Bhils in India.

First Phase of Co-operation

On assassination of the king Shiladitya in Ram's sunline dynasty, the state of Vallabhi in Kathiawar of the western India fell to the barbarian Hun invaders in around 600 A.D. His pregnant wife escaping in forests handed her newly born son to a Brahmin woman before she took recourse to self-immolation in the fire in accordance with the Rajput tradition. The child **Goha** (cave-born) deriving the name by his birth in a *guha* (cave) mostly played with the daring and forest-loving Bhil companions in the state of Idar ruled then by a Bhil chief, Mandalica. In a play, he was once made by his companions their king. Later on, ungratefully, he became the king of Idar with the help of Bhils by killing his own benefactors. His name became patrinyimic to his descendants styled as **Gohilote** -classically Grahilote, in time, softened to Gehlote (Tod 1960:181).

Nagaditya of the state of Idar, the fourth king in the Guhilote dynasty who founded Nagda (near Eklingji) with Bhils' cooperation (Ojha: 402) was while on game killed by the people tired of his snobbery and ostentious superiority in about 626 A.D. (Tod 1960: 181). His infant son, Bappa (Shiladitya), taken to the fortress by a Bhil of Yadu descent was later removed for greater safety to the wilds of Parassur (Tod 1960: 181). Bappa Raval is regarded a corrupt form of *Vap-raaj-kul*, i.e., **father of the royal dynasty** -a title. According to a legend, while living near Nagda, Bappa, one day, played his marriage with the Solanki Rajput princess of Nagda. Knowing that the incident had enraged the king Bappa alongwith his two companions, Bale of Oondri village in the valley of Udaipur and Dewa of Oguna-Panarwa, escaped into the western wilds. The two names have come down alongwith Bappa's as the former had the honour to draw a teeka (mark) of sovereignty with his blood on the occasion of taking crown from the Mori (Tod 1960: 183). This custom of coronation continued by the descendants of Bale and Dewa until India attained Independence. There is little in historical accounts about life, social status and relations of Bhils with the other people during the next six centuries.

The capital of Mewar was shifted from Nagda to Ahar in 951 A.D. Later, the region around Chittorgarh was conquered first in 974 A.D. by Parmars of Malwa and, then, by Chalukyas of Gujarat. In 1174 A.D. Raval Samant Singh who revolted against the Chalukya authority from

Gujarat was uprooted altogether (Ojha Vol. I : 455) seeking shelter and co-operation of Bhils to kill Chaurasimal, the oppressor of Bhils. He founded the kingdom of Wagar with its capital at Baroda which was later shifted to Dungarpur (Ibid - vol. III : 49). When Kirtipal of Nadaul (Pali-Marwar) taking advantage of unsettled political conditions spread his sway, Rawal Kumar Singh, younger brother of Samant Singh, with co-operation of local Bhils easily reinstated Guhilote authority in the region. After invasion of Nagda by Shamshuddin Altamash, the slave king of Delhi, the capital of Mewar was shifted to Chittor in about 1224 A.D. Thus, the historical accounts show that Bhils and Rajputs co-existed so closely that the latter established their rule in the region with the cooperation of the former. Bhils were in no way despised as Bhil-Rajput intermarriages were frequently solemnized and the children of a Rajput by his Bhil wife were occasionally recognized as Rajputs (Naik 1958 : 19).

First Phase of Conflicts

Raval Vir Singh Deo of Wagar intended to found more safe and inaccessible capital, i.e., Dungarpur, treacherously killed Dungaria, the Bhil chief of the region, in 1304 A.D. Afraid of the curse of Dhanna and Kali, the two devoted wives of Dungaria, who had immolated themselves on their husband's funeral pyre, he named his capital after Dungaria and constructed the shrines of Dhanna and Kali, one each, on the Hill adjacent to the southern flank of the town which are known as Dhanna Mata Na Magra, i.e., the hill of the mother Dhanna where animal fair is held. This shows how the invader Rajputs diplomatically legitimized their authority over the Bhil region. In the period that followed, a large scale subjugation and ouster of the Bhil from their better lands drove them to desperate courses. Rao Ran Mal of Mandore (Marwar) acting as the regent of Maharana Mokal, from 1420 to 1428 A.D., had openly beheaded the **Gameti** (headman) of Pai paal (village) in Girwa tehsil of Udaipur during his operations for subduing Bhils of Bhomat (Shyamaldas Part-I: 318). In the atmosphere of overwhelming Bhil antagonism, the Bhil assassins -Chacha, Mera and Mehpa Panwar sought after by the Rao's forces- were given shelter and guaranteed safety in a small fortress called Rata Kot (Tod vol. I : 330). All efforts of the state forces to capture them proved abortive and ultimately Ranmal himself went to the slain gameti's widow to apologize, and persuade them to withdraw their support to the assassins (Shyamaldas: 318-19). About the same time Maharaval Gopinath crushed the unruly and rebellious Bhils of Wagar who a few years later in 1460 A.D. when the Mewar forces attacked Dungarpur provided shelter to the same Maharaval and his family (Ojha n.d.: 66). During the period Bhils were not only robbed of their good lands and qualities of truthfulness, simplicity and non-diplomatic ways for ignoble ends but also they were sacrificed for some magical effects to provide strength to forests and forts of the rulers. Thirty two forts and other buildings constructed by Maharana Kumbha (1433-1468 A.D.) and the Gaip Sagar dam by Maharaval Gopinath have the head or whole body of one or more Bhils buried under their foundations. Either they were forced or they volunteered for the bane in the hope that the ruler would be making the life of their descendants more comfortable than they could do. Alike Dungarpur, the two new states -Banswara and Deolia- were founded in 1530 A.D. and 1561 A.D. by killing the Bhil chiefs -Bansia and Deola- respectively and the places named after the slain savage chiefs as a diplomatic compensation or recognition of their mystical rights on the land. The treacherous killings and uprooting of Bhils from better lands impelled them into unfertile, marginal, and uneconomic holdings. The life of despise and economic degeneration continued upto 1568 A.D.

when Chittorgarh was finally sacked by the Mughal forces under the Emperor Akbar. Thus, Rajputs attained political, social and economic dominance and superiority, while Bhils became subjugated, despised, oppressed, exploited and degenerate people.

Second Phase of Co-operation

Just before the final sack of Chittorgarh, Maharana Udai Singh had to migrate to Raj Pipla in the shelter of Bhils (Ojha- Part-I: 725). But it was Maharana Pratap, *kika* (son) in their dialect, who associated Bhils with himself in the long drawn battle against the Mughal emperor, Akbar (Sharma 1962:75). Equating them with Rajputs he rewarded their services by granting free-hold lands and jagirs. The association was symbolized in the royal crest of Mewar with a sun flanked by the standing figures of a Bhil and a Rajput. In the battle of Haldi Ghati Rana Punja, Bhil chief of Panarwa, commanding the Bhil infantry valiantly fought against the Mughal army. Resorting to guerilla warfare, Bhils took messages for the Maharana and looted supplies to the Mughal army and regained the most of lost territories before Pratap's death. This cooperation continued during the reign of Amar Singh I. Awakened by the happenings in Mewar, the impoverished Bhils of Khandu in Banswara (Wagar) rose in revolt in 1583 A.D. Maharawal Man Singh who had insulted an arrested gameti was killed by the latter before he could be done to death (Ojha: 82). In 1679 A.D. at the time of invasion by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb the royal family was shifted to Nenwara in Bhomat (Sharma 1962:170). The Bhil chieftains of Panarwa, Merpur, Juda and Jawas alongwith 50,000 footmen joined the forces of Maharana Raj Singh (Ojha : 868). Later, in 1681 A.D., Bhils of Bhomat conducted the Mughal prince Akbar on his way to seek asylum from Sambhaji. Thus, the social and economic status of the Mewar Bhils improved during 125 years but Bhils of Kanthal and Wagar regions, i.e., Dungarpur, Banswara and Deolia remained despised and destitute. This phase of the Bhil-Rajput co-operation was the enforced one upon the rulers of Mewar in view of the danger from Mughal Emperors, while the oppression of Bhils continued in the other states which had accepted suzerainty of Mughal emperors. To some extent this could regenerate their social, political and economic conditions in Mewar.

Second Phase of Conflicts

In the wake of the weakened authority in Delhi after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 A.D., Rajputs forgot the services rendered by Bhils and treated them as inferior, monkey-like, more akin to wild beasts and vermins than men . They occasionally subjected them to forced labour, abducted their women for sexual ill-treatment or keeping them as concubines and imparted injustice to the victims by whipping or gouging out eyes or decapitating (Carstairs : 172). Pillage and burning of one or more paals of Bhils was considered the heroic act of a new ruler ascending to a royal throne. As an exemplary punishment for refusal to begaar (forced labour), the bodies of executed Bhil chiefs of several paals were kept hanging for several days by Maharawal Ram Singh of Dungarpur. Maharawal Vairishal of Dungarpur employed Bhils to assassinate Tulsidas Gandhi, the deposed prime minister of Mewar, near Parsad in Udaipur (Ojha: 133). Thus, during this phase the rulers had adopted an antagonistic attitude towards the Bhils.

Bhil-Maratha and Pindari Antagonism

During 1748-1818 A.D., before the treaties of the princely states with the British suzerainty, Marathas and Pindaries freely looted belongings of the rulers, plundered civil population, burned villages and destroyed crops (Tod: 372). Desperate Bhils resisting the freebooters were treated like beasts without pity (Hendley 1875:369), flogged, hanged, thrown over cliffs, beheaded or gunned down. Their women were mutilated or smothered with smoke and their children smashed to death on the stones. Thus, the free-booters further added to their destitution.

Bhil-British Confrontation

In 1823 A.D. when Col. Tod expropriated the *bolai* or money for safe passage of travellers through the forest region of Magra and Bhomat, the Bhils rose up in revolt to be quelled only after the position was restored. In 1836 A.D. the unruly Bhils in different regions of Banswara were brought under control by a large scale operations and in 1839 A.D. the large scale uprising in Bhomat (Mewar) could be quelled only with assistance of the British. In 1840-44 A.D. the Mewar Bhil Corps (MBC) was raised under a British commandant at Kherwara and a deputy commandant at Kotra to wean them away from predatory habits, to give them honorable employment and to assist the Darbar in preserving order (Erskine part-I. 78-9). In 1856 A.D. Bhils of Banswara revolted on the cessation of *rakhwali* -the money paid to Bhils for guarding the villages on Malwa border. In the Indian Revolt of 1857 A.D. the MBC was the only native troops in Rajasthan to stand by the British. In 1864 A.D. Maharawal Udai Singh carried out intense operations against Bhils of Deolia-Pratapgarh. In 1881 A.D., the mistrust, dissatisfaction and rumours among Bhils over the state activities such as census operations, prohibition of liquor manufacturing, establishment of police and custom posts in the Bhil areas and official interference in their customs like banning of witch-killing led to the spread of uprisings in the south-western Mewar. In Kherwara area, Bara Pal police station was raided by killing 16 souls in all and in the Girwa Valley Bhils of Aligarh and Pai killed Dulji Kamdaar, a revenue clerk, and a couple of policemen. Tired of perpetual harassment they blocked roads by felling large trees and retreated into forest interiors. Thus, while introducing reformatory activities, historical particularity of the Bhil society was neglected. Drawing from their past experiences they took every state action as for their oppression and harassment, and generally it raised doubt, mistrust and antagonism in their mind. About the census operations, some of them thought that the British Government wished to levy a *barar* (tax) as contribution towards the Afghan war or to recruit able-bodied men to fight for the British Government at Kabul or to attempt for gradual extinction of the Bhil population or to assign fat women to stout men and lanky to lean (Saxena 1971:166-70; Doshi 1974:5-6).

Bhil-Vilayati Encounters

Vilayatis (foreigners) in the region were the Muslim mercenaries from Arab, Makran and Sindh employed during the Maratha's predatory activities in Mewar, Dungarpur and Banswara. After the treaties of 1818 A.D. they shifted over to the job of revenue collection in the countryside as well as controlling the aboriginals. They floated petty loans among Bhils, charged heavy interests and deprived the debtors even of their ladies and children (Shyamaldas : 2193). Whenever Bhils killed Vilayatis, the deaths of the men of state were retaliated by massacre and destruction of habitations in Bhil paals as perpetrated in Dungarpur, Banswara and Udaipur in 1868, 1870 and

1872 respectively. An enquiry into the incidents established the fault of the Vilayatis who were then driven out of the states (Chaturvedi 1968:51; Saxena 1974:173-77).

Bhil-Mahajan Confrontation

Mahajans or Baniyas (traders) entered the Bhil areas in the distant past. Bhils pressed hard by begaar, revenue tax and *nazars* (offerings on the festivals like Dashehra, Diwali and Holi, on birth or marriage in the ruling family) had to, out of dire necessities, take loans from the Mahajans who charged fleecing interest rates and cheated them to lose their lands. This developed their antagonism towards the Baniyas, mostly Mahajans. During the uprising of 1881 A.D. all Bania shops were burnt in Bara Pal (Saxena 1971: 168). In the remote past the traders from Nai (village) and Udaipur (town) came on horsebacks at the outbreak of a day to trade in Alsigarh, Pai and other villages in the Girwa valley and returned home by the fall of dusk. Later, some traders partially began to settle in these villages to pursue their business activities. In Pai, not long ago, the Mahajans from Nai; namely Mohanlal, Vardichand, Ratan Nagori, Ujjanlal and Fatehlal had their shops in the house of Dewa Bhagora, Dita Relat, Ganga Ram Naath, Bhera Paargi and Gangya Paargi respectively all of the Mual Phala (sector) and Vardi Chand Javeria and Bandi, both, from Udaipur, had their shops in the house of Nathu Dungaria of the Vadla Phala and Ambawa Kataara of the Hamli Pipla respectively. Vardichand and Heeralal, two grandsons of Mohanlal, still, visit Pai twice or thrice a week to conduct business at their (only Mahajan) shop there. A Sindhi shopkeeper after a stay of several years in Pai rolled back his business to return Udaipur about 15 years ago. Saiffuddin Bohra has a shop in Vadla phala for the last 6-7 years. Another Bohra has opened a shop at the Pai Bus Stand two years ago. In Alsigarh, Shanti Lal Mahajan from Nai and Vijai Singh Kothari from Sisarma have their shops for the last 40 and seven years respectively. The lucrative business of Mahajans gradually declined after Independence in the wake of increasing awareness among Bhils, writing off their loans by the government and occupational changes taking place amongst them (Ram 1997 :43).

Bhil-Missionaries Contacts

Christian missionaries coming to this region in 1850 A.D. spread their activities gradually to convert many of Bhils. By their efforts, slavery was abolished from the region in 1872 A.D. During the calamities of famine in 1889-90 A.D., epidemic plague in 1904 A.D. and influenza in 1918 A.D., the missionaries worked among the Bhil victims providing medical treatment, spreading education and extending economic assistance. This facilitated the process of conversion in several areas. The converted Bhils are today socially separated from the remaining. Spread of the process was arrested by the movements and organizations spreading the Hindu ideals of life.

Bhil-Hindu Reformers Bonhomie

Though Bhils have since hoary past been in the contact with Hindu culture and society, the conscious spread of Hindu ideology amidst them was made only in the beginning of the twentieth century through Bhagat movement, Vanwasi Sewa Sangh, etc. Between 1903 and 1908 A.D., Govindgiri of Banjara caste operated through Samp Sabha, set up in 1905, launching a movement for the regeneration of Bhils. The Bhagats (followers) had to abstain from the practice of liquor, meat, sexual adultery, burglary, cattle theft, robbery, dapa (bride price), abduction of women, etc.

He demanded for a separate Bhil state in the region as a necessary condition for their regeneration. In 1913 A.D. he was arrested at his *dhuni* (seat) on Mangarh Hills in Banswara after a bloody resistance and was sentenced to life imprisonment (Chaturvedi 1968 :54-55; Shyamlal 1986 : 126-29). Vanwasi Sewa Sangh established for welfare of the tribals also brought social and political awakening, specially for abstention from liquor and opium (Saxena 1971: 185-86).

Bhil-Freedom Fighters Convergence

In the years 1921-22 A.D., Bhils of Mewar, Idar, Dungarpur, Sirohi, Danta and other places rising against different systems of taxation in the region were organized by Motilal Tejavat of Praja Mandal for their salvation from bondage and evils. He could organize them to a large extent against the rulers and instil in them the ideas of freedom (Saxena 1971: 179-84; Pande 1974: 49-53).

Conclusion

The oldest inhabitants of India, Bhils, have been in continuous interaction with groups in their vicinity engaged in composing a dynamic and complex tradition in the course of historical evolution. This tradition displays four major inter-ethnic formations of Bhils; viz., proto-historical Bhil autouchthones, Bhil kingdoms of ancient and early medieval periods, marginalisation of Bhils in late medieval and British periods, and integraion and regeneration of Bhils after Independence. They emerged from the status of the aboriginals, unaware of caste hierarchy , interacting occasionally with the others (Hindus and non-Hinus) in the proto-historical period of sanskritic-puranic texts to that of several autonomous kingdoms during 600-1500 A.D.; suffered marginalisation and exploitation by the Rajput rulers, Marathas, Pindaris, British Government, Vilayatis (Muslims) and Mahajans (traders); and finally bestowed with the sympathy of Christian missionaries, Hindu reformers, freedom fighters and welfare action of Indian state for their regeneraion and integration into socio-political mainstream in the later British and post-Independence period. On the whole, their prolonged interactions with the others made them increasingly despised, exploited, desperate, degenerate and marginalized in their own region. On economic plane they have become the donors of labour (Ram 1995 : 40), on cultural plane -the receivers of culture through Christianization, Bhagatization or Hinduization and on political plane-the subjugated masses. They are finally in the vortex of socio-political consciousness through their participation in the elections and politico-administrative bodies of various levels, especially the recently re-invigorated Panchayati Raj institutions which meet, to some extent, their lately raised demand for a separate Bhil state or self rule. But at the regional and national levels they form only a part of the exploited lower class masses (Desai 1977 : 20-21) in the contemporary Indian politico-economic setup.

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