

## **CHAPTER 1: SURVEY OF RAJPIPLA'S TRIBAL SOCIETY, FOLK MUSIC AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

### **A brief description of Rajpiplas Geography and its history**

The erstwhile independent princely state of Rajpipla after independence was merged into the Bharuch district. Subsequently the Narmada district was carved out of from parts of Bharuch and Vadodara districts on 2<sup>nd</sup> october 1997. Thus most of the Rajpiplas tribal area is currently under the Narmada district.

Narmada district is bounded by Vadodara in the north, by Maharashtra state in the east, by Tapi district in the south and by Bharuch District in the west. The district occupies an area of 2749 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 514,404 (as of 2001). It was 10.13% urban as of 2001. The newly formed district consisted of Tilakwada taluka of the earlier belonging to Vadodara district and 3 talukas, earlier belonging to Bharuch district namely Nandod, Dediapada and Sagbara.

Thus the Narmada district consists of 4 talukas: Nandod, Sagbara, Dediapada and Tilakwada.

Located between the banks of Narmada in the north and Tapi in the south this scenically picturesque stretch of Satpuda mountain ranges spreading across around 616 square miles is inhabited by the wonderful tribal's of the Rajpipla. Between the Tapi and the Narmada numerous rivers and streams flow through this hilly region making it bountiful and lush green. The region is bestowed with varied fauna, flora and a rich wild life.

Before touching to the music of the tribal folk, a brief journey through the tribal life and society would be appropriate.

The tribal's are known to inhabit this region since times immemorial. A lot of research has gone into determining the original race of these tribal's. Anthropologists believe that the tribal's of this region are Bhils. However scholars differ in their opinions about the descent of these Bhils. One stream of scholars associates their descent to the Aryan race while other streams classify them as pre Aryan and Dravidian Dr. Jayanand Joshi one

of the eminent scholars on the tribal literature of Rajpipla believes that going by the similarities in languages and literature, These tribal's appear to be the descendents of the Aryan race<sup>1</sup>. Further the tribal's consider themselves to be the descendents of the Aryan race. Dr. Jayanand Joshi divides the tribal's into two sub types

- 1) Bhils Vasava
- 2) Tadvi Dhanka

According to him "The Bhils have historically been powerful amongst the tribal communities the leader of the village is often referred to as Vasavo, The Vasava's are relatively better off in comparison to other tribal sub groups. The word Vasava may have its roots in Vasya which means to settle down. Further those settled on the banks may also have been referred to as Vasava's. The Vasavas of the river banks serve the local communities while those settled in the mountains lead the lives like other bhils, their principal economic activity being hunting and food gathering"<sup>2</sup>.

Further "The Tadvis are residents of the Garudeshwar area they are also known as the Dhankas. They believe themselves to be belonging to the Champaner area in the nearby Pavagadh hills. They consider themselves as descendents of the warrior Rajput clans. According to them the word Tadvi has its roots in Tat or bank. They believe that after their native champaner was attacked they migrated from the hills to the banks of Narmada and settled there. Thus they came to be known as Tadvis<sup>3</sup>.The Tadvis remarkably worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses"<sup>3</sup>.

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1: Raj Na Aadivaasi Cheliya pg 13,

2: Raj Na Aadivaasi Cheliya pg 15,

3: Raj Na Aadivaasi Cheliya pg 16

These people have over ages preferred to exist in relative isolation, away from the mainstream society and politics of the region. However in the post independence times the social, cultural, political and economic interactions of these people have increased in nature and scale.

### Political Orientation:

Study of the history of these tribal's From Dr. Jayanand Joshi's work *Raj na Aadivaasi Chheliya*" reveals that they have often played important role in political power struggles. According to him The word "*Bhil*" has its roots in the Tamil word *Bilawal* and in Sanskrit the word *Bhil* means to cut. All these words also mean bow and arrow. Since these people used to cut wood in the jungles they came to be known as *Bhils*<sup>1</sup>. Thus like most tribal people the *bhils* also have a martial orientation. They have served different dynasties and rulers as also they themselves have been rulers at times.

Other references from the history of Gujarat point to the fact that the tribals of this region have been a politically active community. In the words of Dr Jayanand Joshi "here the *Bhils* are not merely the wood cutting people. They were well connected to the Royal family and the army. And they have braved armed attacks". On the basis of these facts he considers these *bhils* as distinct from *Bhils* of other parts of the country, and surmises that there is a strong possibility of these tribals having Aryan descent<sup>2</sup>.

Further the rulers of the erstwhile Nandod and the Rajpipla kingdoms often used the martial skills for defending their kingdom. Thus these tribals have not merely been the hunter gatheres but they have played active role in the politics of the region. In post independence times the tribals have started identifying their political importance and infact their political participation has increased.

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1: Raj Na Aadivaasi Cheliya pg 17, 18, 2 : Raj Na Aadivaasi Cheliya pg 32.

## Economic Activity

Historically the primary economic means of these people have been hunting, fishing, food gathering, wood cutting, collection of forest products like honey, gum, wax. They also make utility articles like mats, baskets etc from bamboo. Some of them collect precious stones like akik (White stones); some make grind stones for grinding food grains etc and supplying it to the regional markets. These people had also been cultivating land. Some of them had earlier been doing the Jhum cultivation, however with strict governmental restrictions the practice is currently supposed to be discontinued. Since the means of economic activity of the tribal's had been primitive, they had perpetually suffered from abject material poverty in comparison to the neighboring people. Interestingly Dr Joshi also notes that these people are somewhat lazy and not particular about their hygiene. Further some of the economic activities mentioned above are seasonal in nature. Owing to these reasons the tribal's often migrate during the lean periods to work as labourers on farm in rural areas and as laborers in construction activity in surrounding rural and urban areas. In the recent times the tribal's have been encouraged by the state to take up government employment. Resultantly many of them have joined the government and have often permanently migrated out of their traditional homeland. The state of Gujarat has witnessed a very high level of industrial and economic development. The districts of Vadodara, Bharuch, Ankleshwar and Surat located in the vicinity of Narmada district are major industrial centers. Thus the region has offered good opportunities for industrial employment. Further the level of literacy and education amongst the tribal folks has improved in recent times and they are increasingly availing the employment opportunities offered by the region.

The region though geographically distinct from its vicinity, is relatively well connected by rail and road transport. Infact the road connectivity has remarkably improved in the recent years. Further the mobile and television sets have literally brought the outside world into the huts of these tribal's. Thus today their lives and culture are changing faster than ever.

## Socio Cultural aspect:

In general these tribal folk are innocent, simple and brave people. Perhaps the fact that they lead a life quite in harmony with nature makes them so. Their songs bear testimony to this fact.

The tribals inhabiting the area live in dispersed settlements of 50 to 60 small huts located on the hills or in the farms. The huts are quite sparsely located one can hardly see two huts together. The roofs of the huts are made up of jungle grass. It has undersized doors. Generally all the livestock like hens and goats are stuffed in the same hut. Sometimes the goats are tied to a small pillar outside the house. The wherewithal and the crockery etc is bare minimum. All the utensils are made up of mud. Those better off use bricks and cement in building their houses. These days a lot of cemented houses have appeared and the scene of the interior of the house is also changing fast. Now the gadgets like television sets and CD players have become ubiquitous in the tribal house holds.

These tribal people in general suffer from the addiction to liquor and tobacco. Even the females are not an exception to this. Liquor is consumed during festival marriages and other important social gathering. In fact as far as the experience of this researcher goes, consumption of liquor and tobacco is tabooed much less in the tribal society in comparison to some other societies of Gujarat.

These people are blessed with immense sense of hospitality. The true spirit of "Atithi Devo Bhava" is at display to any guest visiting them. I have personally experienced this fact. Even while braving the barest poverty they strive to entertain the guest to his satisfaction. In this context I would like to relate a personal experience of mine. Once I had been to Pipla Kankaala village, in Dediapada sub district. I was out on field work. After being through my work I moved out to the connecting road to avail some vehicle to reach back home. It was the month of May, and the sun was blazing hot. I was waiting at a small grocery shop which was like the outpost of the village. A man standing

there was noticing me. Since I had visited the village by now for more than once he could recognize me. The wait for the vehicle became difficult as almost for one hour no conveyance appeared. The man who was otherwise very hesitant to talk to me came up and asked. Would you like to have water? I said yes. He went a bit farther and climbed upon a mango tree and went back to the village with some unripe mangoes. In a short while he was back with a glass full of cool mango juice. I wonder what inspired that man to take such pains for an unknown guest, that to not a personal guest but a guest of the village. It was a memorable experience for me.

In one more incident I was visiting Sejpur village. I had started my day early in the morning at 6:00 am. The recording was complete by 1:00 p.m. They insisted me to leave only after having the lunch. They made a special dish out of unpolished brown rice from their own farm. After the lunch as I expressed my appreciation of their food and hospitality. They insisted that I should carry the brown rice back home for my family. Perforce they packed about 5 kg of rice for me. Further a girl accompanied me till the bus stop outside the village to carry the rice. I could easily make out that this was a poor family barely meeting its ends. But the spirit of hospitality shown towards the guest was just magnificent.

## The Tribals and their music

Music is the life breath of the tribal's of Rajpipla. As is aptly brought out by Dr Jayanand Joshi in the words of a tribal "If you want to know about my life, then listen to my songs". Till very recent times folk music had been the principal means of collective and individual entertainment for the tribal's. All the major events of individual and collective life of tribal's are associated with some of the other type of songs, music and dance. The songs of these tribal's are known as "Chelliyas". Chelliyas exist for romance, love, marriage, festivals like holi, fairs, etc. These Chelliyas are composed by musicians whose origins are unknown to us. But through tradition these songs are handed over from one generation to the next. Thus this folk music has grown, prospered and changed over centuries to arrive in its current form. The importance of Chheliyas in the lives of these tribal's cannot be over emphasized. Tribals are poor, simple and

affectionate people. They struggle daily for earning their livelihood. In such trying times they may or may not have the food but they surely have chelliyas to accompany them. Chelliyas become the preferred means of emotional expression.

Tribal society of Rajpipla has a distinct and vibrant collective life. In fact it would not be very far from truth if we are to say that tribal's exist more as a community and less as individuals. Collective life of tribal's is inconceivable without Chelliyas. In their farms during the sowing of seeds, after a tiring days work out or during the harvest chelliyas are the sure and sole companions of the community.

Major Festivals like Holi have dedicated chelliyas and the whole community comes together during these festivals to revel and celebrate, of course in company of the chelliyas. For example holi is the most important festival of the tribal's.

In such a society how can romantic expression miss out on music? Love, affection adoration or worship each of these emotions has dedicated a Cheliya. Tribal societies are very close to nature and their expressions of lustful feelings are quite frank. There are dedicated Chelliyas referred to as naffat (shameless) Chelliyas for such expressions.

Marriage is naturally a very important event in the individual and collective life of the tribal's. In fact it is a very detailed and elaborate ritual spanning from 5 to 7 days. The whole event of marriage includes numerous rituals for the bride, bridegroom and their close relatives. Most of these rituals have Chelliyas to accompany them. The females of the village assemble during the ritual and perform Chelliyas; often these are accompanied with dance and music.

These songs are simple in theme and are in the local dialects like Khatali, Dogri, and Vasavi etc. The songs are generally sung in groups as is the case with most folk songs, some times though rarely they are accompanied with music and dance. In most of the cases the songs are sung by the females. These songs depict a wide range of emotions including that of elation, humour, sarcacism and agony. Songs often have references to natural elements like trees, rivers, birds etc.

## Musical Instruments:

Tribals use percussion, string and wind instruments in their music following is a description and photographs of all the instruments used by the tribal

### 1) Percussion Instruments

Tribals use Dhol, Dholki and Tabla from among the common percussion instruments. The use of percussion instrument in classical and light music is to provide the beat and the rhythm and to harmonise with the tune. In the case of tribals the utility of these instruments is slightly different.

These instruments provide the basic beats and rhythm to their songs. They do not contribute to the tune of the songs. Thus finer sounds are neither required nor expected from these instruments. Moreover, traditionally since the tribals don't use any microphone systems to amplify the sound they need to create greater volume of sound out of the instruments they use. It is therefore that in all the percussion instruments that they play, they use wooden sticks to play them as against fingers used in classical and light music.

#### A) Dhol : (ढोल)

The double side barrel drum is the most common instrument used by these tribals. It is the same instrument that is used in the light music. Usually one or two tribals hang the Dhol in their neck tied up with a thin rope and loudly beat the dhol with wooden stick. They also dance with the folk around. During the holi festival as the Gheriya's or the tribal folk dressed up to sing and dance visit the urban areas of RajPipla, they play the music dhol still louder as they intend to draw the urban crowds. It is this crowd that they intend to entertain and it is this crowd that endows them with money after being entertained.



#### B) Dholki: (ઢોલકી)

The use of Dholki is the same as dhol except for the fact that dholki is a smaller variant of big dhol.

#### C) Tabla: (તબલ)

In the classical and light music, Tabla set is constituted of two drums the Daayan (Smaller one, played with the right hand and the Baayan the larger drum played with the left hand. The tribals play the table with two big drums or the Baayan's only. They play the drums with wooden sticks as against fingers.

#### D) Drum (ઝૂં)

Commonly available western type drums are used along with other instruments while playing the songs.

### 2) String Instruments:

#### A) Paavo: (પાવો)

This is a string instrument (Please refer photograph ) with a single string. The instrument is made up of two parts first one is a wooden block upon which a metallic wire is attached. The other part is a wooden arc like a bow with a string joining the two open ends. It is played by sliding the string on the metallic wire just like a violin. There is a magic that happens here. The players of this instrument do not know anything about the notations or tunes of the song. They do not have any formal training in music, but they effortlessly grasp the tune and play the song that is sung by the folk.

#### B) Ektaaro: (એકતારો)

This is a one piece string instrument played with fingers. It usually has one string but sometimes there are two also. The instrument is usually not used to give tune to the song. The players generally play it while dancing

### **3) Wind Instrument**

#### **A) Pipudi: (ପିପୁଡ଼ି)**

This instrument is similar to Shehnai. This is generally used during the marriages only. While the female folk sing the songs relating to various events, the pipudi player provides the tune and the interlude.

### **4) Others**

Ghughraa (ଘୁଘରା): these are big brass bells around the size of. The tribal folks tie a number of them in a string and wear them around their waist. As the dance the bells produce music harmonious with the dance.

## Photographs of Musical instruments used by the Tribals of Rajpipla

Dhol



Tabla and Dhol



Paavo in hand and Ghughras tied on the waist





Ektaaro, Paavo and Drum

