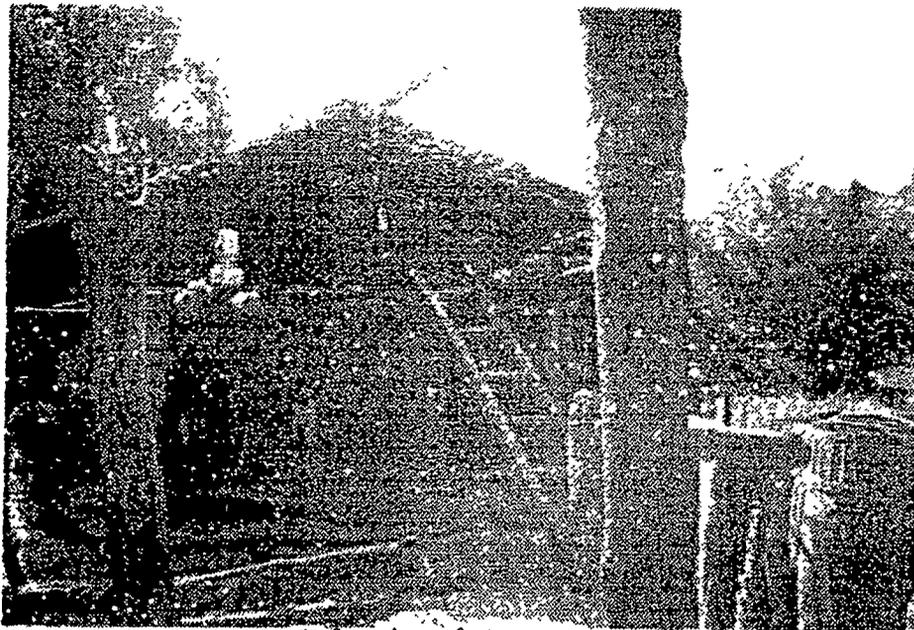




Chapter I Introduction



A hut of a Bhil family - Ratanmal, Dahod - 23/11/2002.

The journey to know some thing new is the actual way to live life. My steps towards this direction occurred when tribal people generated curiosity in me somewhere in my school days. I decided that I shall one day start knowing how tribal communities of Gujarat live and how they interact with people around them. My urge made me to study about them. This resulted in my opting to write Masters' dissertation '*Modern Studies on Adivasis of South Gujarat*' at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Before writing dissertation I had wondered that though being land of Gandhi how was it possible that Gandhi never took keen interest on the Tribal issues of Gujarat? But the readings made me aware that it was not that plain as it seems. Gandhi was certainly interested in knowing and improving the condition of the tribal people to whom he gave the name 'adivasis' in his *Constructive Programmes* (1942) but with so many responsibilities on his shoulders he transferred

this task to his sincere and devoted followers and workers like Amritlal Vitthalbhai Thakkar, Indulal Yagnik, Jugatram Dave and Kakasaheb Kalelkar. They all got absorbed into the task of bringing social reforms among the tribal communities. Those made me take up and explore these Gandhians' work among the tribals of Gujarat for my doctoral dissertation.

The study begins with a survey of the theoretical as well as cultural and historical studies on the tribals. The discipline of studying tribal communities world over is a late evolution which began in eighteenth century. Since its beginning it got entangled in several debates which somehow helped in its multi-faceted growth in various dimensions. The first part of the next chapter take a detailed note of various theories that have emerged for the study of 'aborigines', 'tribal', 'indigenous' people that have appeared in the past hundred years, not only enhancing the knowledge about the tribals but also influencing a great body of empirical works that has tried to grapple with the problematic. Next part of the chapter attempts to explore the geography and the ethnography related to the tribal communities living in the eastern highlands of Gujarat. It is said that 'without the understanding of the geography of the region the study of history remains half done.' Hence, the knowledge of the region and its broad physiographic features becomes a necessity for preliminary understanding before entering deep into the subject. The topic required not only the geographic information about what the region is at present but what it was like in the backdrop of the nineteenth century when people from different parts of the world started penetrating into it. This chapter situates the tribals of Gujarat in the wider network of the tribal population of India.



Tadvi women at work, Village-Sakva, Rajpipla, 28-12-2003 .

The history of modern India cannot be appreciated without looking into the workings of imperialism and colonialism. Colonialism did not spare any social segment untouched and even the secluded people, the tribal communities were brought under the gauge of the British Empire. The British administration got engaged in the 'wilderness' and 'wildness' of the tribals and worked out a detailed strategy of taming and civilizing the wilder people. Another European agency who got enmeshed in this civilizing business was the Christian Missionaries. But the missionaries soon departed from the imperial attitude to the tribals. They adapted their work according to the nature of the tribals and their surroundings, thus rendering valuable services. So much so that at times the British administration came to look at missionaries work among tribal with great deal of suspicion. Christian Missionaries emerged to be the first outside agency to work for the genuine improvement of the life conditions of the tribals by initiating

and expanding the educational and health facilities. In the Western India there were some princely states which also started programmes of the tribal welfare. An outstanding example in this direction was Sayajirao-III of the Baroda State. He was one of the most enlightened rulers of his times who brought several reforms to the tribal communities of his state. Such reforms resulted in sea changes in socio-economic growth of these people. Many of the tribal people of this state became recognized figures in the mainstream society.¹ All these facets have been taken up in the third chapter entitled *Tribal Communities in the Nineteenth Century Gujarat* surveying the backdrop for the later development.

The fourth chapter entitled *Gandhi and his ideology of Sarvodaya* attempts to look at the broad range of his ideas to appreciate his general concern for the downtrodden. Gandhi's apprehensions about western modernity and its impact on the rural masses were located within the matrix of anxieties expressed by some of his contemporary thinkers about capitalism's grand march trampling the defenceless multitudes of the non-western countries. Gandhi's ideas on globalisation, consumerism and their impact on the indigenous cultures are highlighted to then appreciate his solutions to the challenges of capitalistic modernism. His ideas about economics, value based education, and 'constructive programmes' are studied to then talk about his approach to tribals. It is in the broader context of his ideas of *sarvodaya*, *swaraj*, *gram-swaraj*, linked up, as they were, with India's independence that the tribals were also covered in his scheme of things.

¹ "The tribal students who received education in the Dhanka-Boarding Schools of Navsari Division of the Baroda state were given further higher education in the Baroda College as a result few of them proved their caliber or worth to be social asset. Many of them became teachers in the schools of *raniparaj* area. These young educated persons were fairly enlightened and they also formed their own social group. This social circle worked tirelessly for the welfare of its own community." As told by Dasriben Chodhri and Ashok Chodhri on 11/02/2002 at village Vedchhi in district Surat. Also see records on *Raniparaj* in Baroda State, ED, PD, MD/ BRO-SC/ Baroda. For details see Chapter-II, Part-II.

Even when he did not have time to focus his attention to work for the tribals, he inspired and deputed several of his followers to work in the tribal areas while living in the *ashramshalas*.

The fifth chapter studies in greater detail the work of the young Gandhians in the tribal areas of Gujarat. They found out that the tribal people were mercilessly exploited by local rulers, administrators, money-lenders and the liquor traders. The local landlords exercised tight control over their labour and despite the early efforts of social reformers including missionaries the condition of the adivasis was deplorable. The Gandhians then established several *ashrams* in the entire tribal belt of eastern Gujarat from north to the south. The chapter focuses on Gandhians' work in the Panchmahal district in the north and Surat district in the south Gujarat. They started a complete educational structure of *ashramshalas* in which the students of different tribal communities were given education according to the *nai-talim* or nationalist education as designed by Gandhi himself. Along with education, the Gandhians launched several economic programmes for the tribals to make them self-reliant and motivate them to join the national struggle for Independence. Over a period of time the results of such activities were quite visible. It led to the emergence of adivasi leaders to carry forward the Gandhian principles of *sarvodaya* and *swaraj*.

After Independence many younger enthusiasts entered the region of eastern highlands in Gujarat and settled down among the tribal communities of the region to serve them. Their works were varied and most of these practical Gandhian idealists could accomplish their dreams. They settled from Danta in the north of Gujarat to Dharampur in the south of the state, the territories which were most difficult to work in. They accepted the challenges and while continuing the tradition of

the first generation of Gandhians successfully carried out the ideals in more diversified ways. They have been working on the issues of environment, atomic power and its negative impact on society, renewable sources of energy and their implication in rural and urban world, revival of knowledge of indigenous cultures and several other issues in keeping with the changing times. Their efforts and actions have been guided by Gandhi's famous phrase: *"The world has enough for every person's need but not for a single man's greed."* The changes they thought they would be vehicles in bringing to the tribals were silently but steadily realized. The tribals became conscious of their rights through education which helped them broaden their world view. The Gandhians succeeded in inculcating self-confidence among the tribal communities to mix with the mainstream settled people. This has been a marked feature in the regions where the Gandhians had direct influence.

The work is based on wide-ranging sources, both archival and oral. The primary sources used in the thesis are housed in various repositories like Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai; Baroda Record Office, Southern Circle, Vadodara; District Record Offices, at Dahod, Ahwa, Palanpur; Taluka Record Offices at Khedbrahma, Vyara, Valod, Bhiloda, Danta, Vijaynagar, Chhota Udepur, Dharampur; Gandhian records maintained at Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad and at several *ashrams* in Gujarat and New Delhi; Missionary records at Premal Jyoti, CNI Bishop House, Ahmedabad, Lusadia, Bhiloda, Dahod, Jhalod, Vyara, Pimpri, Shamgahan, Bilpudi, Phulwadi and Ahwa Mission Houses. The fieldwork included extensive surveys of the tribal areas with physical study of locations of ashrams, mission houses, interviews with Gandhians, missionaries and numerous tribal leaders including women.