

**Culture, Identity and Livelihood: An Ethnographic Study of
Devipujak Community of Gujarat**

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The draconian law Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871 was enacted under British rule which declaredly nearly 150 communities as born criminal in India. These communities were kept in the settlement for the sake of reformation and were constantly under surveillance of authority. Not only their movement was curtailed but it led to loss of their livelihood and violation of human rights (Idate, 2017). Since enactment of the act, these communities got separated from large society and looked upon as criminals. India gained independence on 15th August 1947 but these communities had to wait for another five years to enjoy freedom when Habitual Offender Act (HOA) was passed in year 1952 and they were decriminalised. India as a democratic country promotes principles of equality, fraternity and liberty. The constitution of India ensures dignity, freedom and equity to all sections including schedule caste, schedule tribes, women and marginalised ones. It is very important to note that the groups such as Nomadic and Denotified Tribes (NTDNTs) are still far away from the development. There is no universal classification of these groups in the country and are incorporated into different social categories in different states. The labelling of criminality imposed by British on them has kept them excluded from mainstream society and they are still living very vulnerable life.

The movement against British in year 1857 was described by Karl Marx as first war of independence. The Britishers felt that it is a high time to distinguish between the loyal and rebellion groups in India. Those communities who supported the rebellion groups were declared as Criminal Tribes by British administration (Idate, 2017). There were some scholars who claimed that these various communities particularly in Northern India fought against British in 1857 freedom struggle. Many local rulers were taking support from these groups either directly to fight against British or indirectly to assist their armies against colonial forces. They were wondering communities so very much aware about geographic information of country and helping as informants to freedom fighters with food, cash and weapons. (Devi, 1992; Radhakrishna, 2001; Kannan, 2007). It was one of the strong reasons

that British government was considering them threat to their rule and declared these communities as born criminals under Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871. Not only their freedom was curtailed but it kept them away from developmental initiatives (Dandekar, 2009). Some of these communities belonging to small princely states were thrown out of power and listed under criminal tribes. The purpose was to abolish their identity so it will not challenge the British administration at local level in future (Yang, 1985). The British officials were claiming that they wanted to reform these groups as their main occupations was to commit crime but the real intention was to suppress them one or another way. They enacted CTA with the purpose to control criminal activities of some groups. They believed that these groups were committing crimes from one generation to another. The detail study of the act on these tribes is very essential as the complete historical background of the act given by none of the author at one place (Sher, 1965).

- **Nomadism**

The origin of the word 'nomad' is derived from the Greek word *nemein* means 'to pasture'. Nomads are defined as “people that travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for their animals and have no permanent home” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 1205). It includes broad category from hunter gatherer to other moving groups for earning livelihood. Their movement is organized with cyclical and seasonal pattern for survival with purpose. With nomadic nature, they have well preserved their cultural and social history (Gilbert, 2014).

- **The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**

The British government enacted the Criminal Tribes Act in the year 1871 with aim to gain control over rebellion groups who protested against British annexation in India. With effect of the act, many nomadic groups were declared as born criminals and harsh provisions were imposed on them. The act gave much power to law enforcement officials regarding implementing the act including convictions and imprisonment of such communities without trials. Those who were enlisted under the act, it was mandatory for them to register themselves in nearby police station which had severely affected their movement. The rehabilitation centers were established on the name of reformation of these communities where they were chained and shackled with high wall surrounding in reality. If any person

from criminal tribe committed same offence second time under first schedule of Indian Penal Code (IPC), he was imprisoned for seven to ten years. The sentence was deportation for life convicted third time of same offence where as it was only three to six months or no sentence for people belonging to non-criminal groups of committing such offences. The law was discriminatory for criminal and non-criminal communities (Sher, 1965).

- **Habitual Offender Act, 1952**

After five year of independence, Habitual Offender Act was passed in the year 1952 repealing the Criminal Tribes Act. Hence, listed communities were declared as Denotified. However, stigma remained same toward nomadic communities and still they have not been incorporated into mainstream society. They are even today perceived as outcast. Though Habitual Offender Act, 1952 does not consider whole communities as criminal but individuals belonging to these groups still looked upon as criminals. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at its meeting held in the year 2000 recommended repealing of the Habitual Offenders Act (Devy, 2006). It emphasized to monitor atrocities against donotified groups, sensitization of police and state machineries toward them.

- **Denotified Tribes**

The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) was first enacted in year 1871 which declared certain communities as born criminals. It had many provisions on restrictions of movement of these groups and made it obligatory to register their attendance in nearby police station at the end of a day. The act defines Criminal Tribes as: “any tribe, gang or class of persons addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences” (Simhadri, 1991, p. 121). With enactment of the act, entire communities were declared as born criminals whether they had actual committed crime or not. Earlier the act was confined to Northern India but undergone several amendments in year 1897, 1911, 1923 and 1924. The Criminal Tribes Act, 1924 remained in force till it was repealed in 1952, hence these groups came to be known as Denotified tribes.

- **Historical Perspective of Nomadic and Denotified Tribes**

Asia, Africa, Europe and Northern America are considered home to nomadic people. During post-pastoral period, sedentism became preferred way of life and nomadism came into conflict with sedentary people. With the evolution of nation-state, industrialization and globalization, nomadic nature of life came under threat. The nomadic groups were once proud and service provider in the society who later reduced to one of the most marginalized and excluded sections due to historical injustice committed to them during colonial as well as post-colonial time. It is necessary to analyze historical context to understand situation of nomadic groups. In economics, principles of utilitarian consider people based on their utility (Japhet et al., 2016). The practice of isolating people who were having less utility was followed during sixteenth-century in Europe. The poor, lepers and person with unsound mind were eliminated from the mainstream society by keeping them isolated and sent out to remote lands (Foucault, 1988).

Some of the theories such as biological theory based on Francis Galton's eugenics theory and criminological theory of Cesare Lombroso considered intelligence and criminality have hereditary traits respectively (Galton, 1869 & Lombroso, 1864). Based on these theoretical understanding, efforts were made to possibly re-engineering society with biological and sociological intervention. These assumptions resulted into passing of Habitual Criminal Act, 1869 in England. It empowered police officers to identify, supervise and arrest 'habitual criminals' which equated them with criminal identity leading to stigmatization of these people in society (Radzinowicz & Hood, 1990; Wiener, 1994; Pavlich, 2010). The Criminal Tribes Act was enacted in British India immediately after two years of Habitual Criminal Act passed in England. The British prepared list of nomadic communities to identify and control their movements and compelled them for settled life (Japhet et al., 2016). The marginalization of these various groups was started with reign of power by British in the year 1858. The colonial legislations replaced the native customary laws which led to dissolution of traditional norms of Indian society. Over the period, nomadic communities were deprived of their traditional rights on land, forest and animals due to enactment of various legislations. Before nineteenth century, the different nomadic communities of India played very important role to render necessary services to far away villages which were otherwise inaccessible in

normal circumstances. Though they were excluded by caste, they had very special place to provide distinct services like entertainment, sharpening knives in society.

At the time of independence, India emphasized on idea of transforming deep rooted hierarchical society into a civic community of equals. Indian constitution stated three core aspects of lives of its citizen which will govern Indian future based on equal legal status of its members, enjoyment of equal civil and political rights and ensuring of social and economic rights for their development (Jayal, 2012). There are many communities in our society which are very far away to enjoy their rights and constitutional guarantees given to them. The CTA totally ruined life of NTDNTs communities. Not only restrictions were imposed on them but they came under purview of suspicion and whenever any theft was committed, they were first in circle of doubt and forced to accept crime which in reality not committed by them. The police officials and even people in society are having very prejudicial mindset toward these groups. It is estimated that there are around 198 Denotified and 313 Nomadic communities numbering nearly 60 million in country (Resist Initiative International, 2007, p.2). Among them, 28 Nomadic and 12 Denotified tribes are found in Gujarat. Due to wondering nature, they have always been looked upon with suspicion and remain away from associating with other communities in society at large.

- **Devipujak Community**

Devipujak community is listed as Other Backward Class (OBC) in Gujarat. Devipujaks are scattered in most parts of the state. They were listed as born criminals under Criminal Tribes Act and this draconian law ruined normal life of community. They have been victim of historical injustice. The act had harsh provisions like members of these groups were compelled to register themselves at local police station which had badly affected their nomadic way of life. The CTA was replaced by enacting Habitual Offender Act, 1952 officially declaring them denotified. Though they were decriminalized under act, the stigma remains same and they continue to be perceived as socially outcast. Society at larger considers these groups as criminals and many of them are living in disgraceful condition even today. Devipujaks are divided into many sub-groups like Datania, Gamecha, Patni, Vedva and others. Government of Gujarat issued resolution in year 2001 to replace the word Vaghri

with Devipujak because it was used very disrespectfully toward these people in society to show them inferior.

- **Rationale**

After seven decades of independence, Nomadic and Denotified Tribes are living very miserable life. The development measures are still very far from them and incidences of human rights violation become everyday part of their life. These communities are scattered in small groups and living away from mainstream society. Several committees and commissions were formed and many recommendations were given which hardly resulted for any sustainable development of communities. The stigma of criminal identity is still attached with these groups and many have lost their traditional livelihood due to economic changes occurred in last two decades. They have remained poor, marginalized and powerless since ages. Apart from it, they do not have strong political representation from community members. To overcome these hurdles, there is strong need to make sincere and concrete efforts for development of these communities.

Most of the existing literatures have concentrated on historical injustice, criminalization of these groups under umbrella term criminal tribes; and very few studies have been conducted on individual communities. Though they have many similarities in aspects of poverty, marginalization and atrocities but each community is having its unique culture, occupation, custom and way of living which need to be understood in context of particular community. The present study focuses on Devipujak community to understand ground reality of community covering their social history, culture, socio-economic conditions, their livelihood and stigma. It will help to understand Devipujak community with their views towards social reality. The findings of the study can be useful to plan welfare measures for community and future intervention for their development.

2. Research Methodology

- **Ethnography Study: A Perspective**

Ethnography is about telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story. Ethnography gives voice to people in their own local context, typically relying on verbatim quotations and a “thick” description of events. The story is told through the eyes of local people as they pursue their daily lives in their own communities. The ethnographer adopts a cultural lens to interpret observed behaviour, ensuring that the behaviours are placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context. The ethnographer is focused on the predictable, daily patterns of human thought and behaviour. Ethnography is thus both a research method and a product, typically a written text (Fetterman, 2010, p.1).

It is also one of the distinguish characteristics of ethnographic work to collect data in a ‘natural setting’ where an ethnographer is expected to interact with people in field where participant observation is involved as an important technique. An ethnographer can do it at least through implicit, and probably also through explicit, interacting with people in the field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the beginning, gatekeepers can be useful source to get access in the community; but at the same time it should be negotiated and renegotiated with people who are participants of the study. It is also not easy to make participants agree for the interview without establishing strong rapport with them. An initial exploratory character of ethnographic study implies that a researcher will not have clear idea where to begin, what setting need to be chosen, what observation to be done, which participants to be focused and so on. This is also applicable to make decision for interview. Ethnographers will develop clarity over the period of time whom to interview, where and when to start interview. An interview is started with unstructured form in beginning which takes form of structured interview towards the end of the field work. The data are collected in form of written fieldnotes, collecting documents and also through audio and video recordings. It takes quit long time and much efforts to process and analysed large chunk of data. That is the reason

that ethnographic research requires longer time and diverse skills with ability to make certain important decision in conditions of uncertainty (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

- **Research Paradigm**

“A paradigm constitutes a way of looking at the world, interpreting what is seen, and deciding about things seen by researchers are real, valid, and important to document” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The two worldwide known philosophical assumptions of research are ontological and epistemological. Ontology is concerned with what real or true exists in the world about which humans can acquire knowledge while epistemology focuses on how and what way knowledge can be acquired. Nomadic and Denotified communities having certain problems in common; but there are many differences between these groups in terms of their culture, identity and livelihood. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of the research study are based on **Subjective Constructionist Interpretivist approach**. An ontological assumption of research is derived from what the reality is based on subjective experiences by people. The perceptions of people towards reality are based on their own experience and understanding. The research study is focusing to understand reality of Devipujak people considering their views and perception. The epistemological foundation of research is how to understand reality. The understanding of reality is different for different people and considering it, an epistemological assumption of research is based on interpretive approach to know the situation of Devipujak community with their experiences. An interpretive approach assumes that reality is a social construction means what people believe is true about the world and is constructed with the interaction they are making with each other over the period of time. It does not believe in one reality and argues that reality differs in context. Different people have different versions of what is real and even they have different understanding for the same events (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). The study adopted ethnographic method to understand subjective reality to know meaning and function of human action particularly with Devipujak community.

- **Ethnography with Devipujak Community**

I was aware about Devipujak community since my childhood. They used to visit our home to collect old clothes in exchange of new utensils. Earlier, they were giving utensils of

aluminium but later they started giving plastic utensils. I used to wonder why they were not taking money for the things given to us. My family was having very cordial relations with them and they were visiting us four to five times in a year. Initially, I was not aware about the concept of nomadic, criminal or denotified tribes; but when I was pursuing Master of Social Work at Mumbai and had sometimes seen Devipujaks from my town at Mumbai railway station. As Mumbai was very crowded and people used to be in hurry so I never got a chance to interact with them. Females were also seen at Mumbai railway station with cloth bundle on their head. I was not aware that they were coming for selling old clothes collected by them in big markets like *Chor Bazar* situated at Grant road, Mumbai. Devipujaks were involved in occupations such as selling vegetables, collecting scarps in my home town. I had also observed that some people were not allowing them to sit nearby their houses to sell vegetables. Though I was aware about Devipujak community since my childhood, seen their poor conditions and hardship; but I was not having much knowledge about historical injustice done to them. While studying in Master of Social Work course, I became aware about the problems of nomadic and denotified communities.

In the beginning, I had thought to do study on nomadic and denotified tribes but was not specific to conduct on which particular tribe. I had also seen other nomadic communities like Madari, Nat who used to come to my hometown for entertaining people but not very much knowing about their situations. Devipujak was the community that I had observed closely though not having detailed understanding of their situation in terms of discrimination they face, historical injustice, their traditions and so on. I started searching literature on them and referred various articles, reports and books which helped me to understand the concept of nomadic and denotified tribes. I got information about Criminal Tribes Act, settlements for criminal tribes by British, criminal identity, discrimination, torture and poverty. I was somehow aware about the conditions of Devipujak community which encouraged me to know about them, to understand injustice suffered by them, their culture and identity. Based on studying existing literature and my own experience, I formulated research questions which led me to conduct an ethnographic study on Devipujak community. The research questions are:

1. What is social history of Devipujak community?
2. What were traditional occupations of Devipujak community and how changes have occurred in their traditional occupations over the period of time?
3. What is present socio-economic condition of Devipujaks?
4. How social organization influences life of Devipujak community?
5. What is identity of the Devipujak community for self and views for other communities as well as the perspectives of other communities towards them?

To get the answer of these questions, the specific objectives were formulated to gain deeper understanding about the community.

- **Objectives**

- To study social history and cultural of Devipujak community
- To study their traditional livelihood, its changing pattern and adoption of new occupations
- To study migration and its reasons among Devipujak community
- To study role of Caste Council and its influence on Devipujak community
- To study identity of Devipujak community from its own perspective, views towards other communities and views of other communities towards Devipujaks

- **Searching for Field Site**

Searching and deciding field site for ethnographic study is not less difficult than conducting it. It is very important to select suitable village considering objectives of the study. I was not having very close contact with Devipujak community and was not much aware about their culture, social organizations, and historical aspects in detail so it was very difficult for me

from where to start to understand the community. One of my friends Jatin was working as a Physiotherapist at Community Health Center (CHC) in Saurashtra region and he had colleague named Maheshbhai who was belonging to Devipujak community and working in 108 Ambulance as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). My friend informed him that I am doing a doctoral study on Devipujak community. He made my telephonic talk with Maheshbhai and he assured me to provide all necessary support for this work. I met him in person and had long discussion about my research. I gained quite good information about Devipujak community from him especially about Saurashtra region which enhanced my understanding for the community. After couple of months, I started pilot visit to different villages where there were settlements of Devipujak population. I got list of Booth Level Officer (BLO) with their mobile number from Block office.

I contacted them and they helped me to make my initial contact with Devipujak people. A BLO is having close contact with people in their booth areas so it helped me to contact them in the beginning. I roamed around twenty-two villages and was meeting Devipujak people there. Maheshbhai accompanied me at three villages and he was busy with his job so was not able to be with me every time. I was sharing information with them about my research and was also observing which village will be suitable field site keeping in mind objectives of the study. I had decided certain criteria like migration, different caste groups, occupations, practicing cultural rituals for selecting the field site. Pritampur village was finally decided as a field site which was fulfilling broad criteria of research.

▪ **Selecting a Village**

In the beginning, a BLO of Pritampur village helped me to get access of Magabhai who was resident of village. He was having contract of Mid-Day Meal in the school. I told him about my research and he agreed to extend his support. Maghabhai asked me to meet him after some days because he was busy in election campaign. After a week, I met him and he sent his younger brother along with me to make my contact with Devipujaks in village. It was an evening time and we both went to the settlement of Devipujaks which was situated at periphery of a village. We reached there and saw that some of them were playing cards in

group. They stopped it when we reached near them. Magabhai's brother gave my introduction to them and then I shared purpose of my visit. People did not understand what I was telling them that I am pursuing a Ph.D and would like to conduct a research study on them. I told them in simple way that I would like to write a book on you so I need some information from you. I did not get much response in first meeting and they told me to come after some days. Maheshbhai's maternal-uncle Kharmubhai was staying in village. After some days, Maheshbhai and I went to meet him at his house. Maheshbhai told him about my study; but he said that I will not get cooperation from other people in community. Kharmubhai told me that he will make my contact with people but they may not provide you right information. Kharmubhai told about my research to people in community and asked them to meet in group after two days for discussion. It was an evening time and we both went to meet people but only ten to fifteen of them gathered for discussion. We had discussion about my study and purpose for staying here. I thought that it will help me to gain access in community easily but it was not so. Even they had known about me but they were not responding well. I felt that it would be good to meet every member personally which can help me to build a rapport with them. I started contacting them one by one after some days which helped me to gain access to people in Devipujak community.

▪ **Demographic Profile**

According to Gram Panchayat data, Pritampur village was having population of 2048 with 347 families. Devipujak community is categorized under OBC in state so there was no separate population record for particular community available with Gram Panchayat. A survey was conducted to know socio-economic aspects of Devipujaks which found 603 people of Devipujak community residing in village. The village was having population of other castes also such as Darbar, Bania, Barber, Patel, Brahmin, Koli and Schedule Caste.

▪ **Daily Routine in Field Work**

My routine was to visit community generally in evening time during initial days because it was the time where people were sitting outside their homes with family members and relatives. Majority of the people staying in village were daily wage earners so they were

leaving their homes early in the morning. It was an evening time that I was able to meet most of the people in community. I was greeting them with word '*Jay Matadi*' and in return they were also greeting with *Jay Matadi* to me. I was meeting earlier to key informants, sitting with them and engaging in very casual talk with them. After some days, I started going to farm along with them to understand about their livelihood. Majority of the people in village were farm labourers. Over the period of time, I started participating in their cultural activities also. They are worshipers of goddess and believe in *Dana ceremony* which I used to go attending it. I had also participated in two marriage functions held in village and observed their marriage rituals. I was always trying to attend their functions and rituals whenever I came to know about it. I went to death occasion of relatives of Vajabhai and observed their rituals. Though I was meeting key informants during early days to gain information about my research but I started meeting different people over the period of time in community. It helped me to know about various information and life style of the Devipujak people. The *Mandavo* is considered as very auspicious occasion in life of Devipujak community. Whenever I was getting information about organization of *Mandavo* in the village or other places, I was participating in such occasions and trying to understand and observe their rituals during occasion. I was trying to visit Devipujak community at least once in a day and meeting people there. I also used to meet other castes people in the village. There was group of middle-aged people who were sitting outside their homes for an hour or two every day. Many times, I was sitting with them and was getting involved in conversation with them. It was helping me to know about perspectives of other caste people also towards Devipujak community in formal or informal conversation with them. I used to visit groceries shops and soda shops in the village with main purpose to meet different people and getting engaged with them in interaction which was helping me to know about village, its history, population, culture and also views of different people towards Devipujak community and other caste.

3. Major Finding of Ethnographic Data

- **Social History and Mythology**

The meaning of a word Devipujak is 'worshiper of Goddess.' They have strong belief in goddess. Devipujak community was earlier known as 'Vaghri' and the word was used as slang towards them by other people and it was very humiliating for the people of community. The government of Gujarat decided to use word 'Devipujak' instead of 'Vaghri' in its official record through resolution SSP- 112001- Mn.148-A passed in year 2001. The community was earlier known as Vaghri so different writers have given various theories about meaning of the word Vaghri and origin of the community. Enthoven (1975) had explained the word Vaghri means tiger-like. They were known by this name because they were brave like tiger and were protecting people from wild animals. The another thought behind name of Vaghri was that they were so skilful to play pellet drum to please goddess in such a way so the goddess will appear to bless them. The string on pellet drum is known as '*Vagh*' so they are known as Vaghri because they play the '*Vagh*' (Verma, 1964). It is more likely that the word Vaghri is derived from '*vagads*' meaning sandhills of the Rajasthan which indicates that there were inhabitants of '*vagad*' region. (Enthoven, 1975).

There is one wide spread folk tale regarding origin of Vaghri name. During *Navratri* festival, a boy belonging to Pardhi community caught lion cub and people gathered over there. They kept idol of *Vagheshwari Ma* on lion cub and did *Parikrama* of *Madh*. The Rajput people were impressed with the bravery of Pardhi boy so they first time called him Vaghari. Afterward, the community was started known as Vaghari (Verma, 1964).

- **Origin of Vaghri**

According to Malkan, the existence of Vaghri caste is since ages. They are originally derived from Aryans. They migrated from Caucasus Mountains which is situated at border between

South Russia and Central Asia to Central and Western part of India in search of food and water for their livestock (as cited in Talpada, 2020). In ancient time, Vaghri were living as tribe and were known as *Pardhi*. They were hunter and gathers and used to keep weapons like knife, spear, bow and arrow with them. They used to wear clothes around waist made from animal skins and binding red cloth around their head. It was proud for them to hunt animals. Their original habitat was Gujarat and they had strong belief in their goddess (Verma, 1964). In opinion of Col. M J. Bhide, the origin of Babari community in Rajasthan is from Rajput clan. Their names are also similar to traditional names of Rajput community. There is know tale behind name of Babari community. Once there was marriage of princess. Four Rajput men were going to drop princess in palanquin at her in-law's house along with groomsmen. When they were passing though dark jungle, robbers started attacking them. Groom was killed in the attack and some of the groomsmen ran away to save their life. The four Rajput men fought against robbers and killed many of them. They reached very far from the palanquin while fighting with robbers. After victory over robbers, they came to the place where princess was left in palanquin but found that princess was not there. They started searching for princess and ultimately saw the floating dead body of princess in Vav (well). They felt very sad knowing death of princess and thought that King would kill all of them if we go and tell him the incidence. So, they decided to depart and moves to difference directions. They started living with tribal people after departure. They were also hunting along with them and learn collecting honey from jungle. They used to put *Dantun* in houses of villagers when they were not having any other work to do. The villager gradually started asking them which caste they are belonging and they used to reply *Vavari* which is derived from the word 'Vav' in which princess sacrificed her life. They were gradually being known as 'Babariya' instead of Vavari over the period of time. Even today, the Vaghri community is known by surname Babariya in Rajasthan (as cited in Talpada, 2020).

Enthoven mentioned that the Vaghri tribe of Gujarat probably belonged to Bagri tribe who were inhabitants of Bagar region of old United Province. There was no exact number of their population in Maharashtra but have migrated there from Gujarat and settled down at places such as Bombay, Pune, Kalyan, Thane and Dhulia (as cited in Singh, 1994). Vaghri believes that they are descents of Rajput. When Solanki reign achieved victory on Gujarat so Vaghri tribe also came under attack. And they escaped to jungle to protect themselves from attack by

soldiers. During this time, they came into close contact with Rajput community. Slowly and gradually their strong bonding established with Rajput communities such as Solanki, Parmar. This resulted into marriage relationship between Rajput men with Vaghri women and their offsprings started living like Rajput. The Rajput community consider themselves above in caste hierarchy to Vaghri so they outcasted the people who got married with Vaghri women. Their populations increased over the period and started living in a group at different places (Verma, 1964).

- **Belief in God and Goddess**

The word Devipujak itself means worshipers of goddess and religious rituals of deities are called *Dharam* by them. The Kumarkhaniya Devipujak worship *Bechari Maa* as their *Kuldevi*. They also worship other goddesses such as Meldi Maa, Khodiyar Maa, Dagai Maa, Shitala Maa, Jogni Maa and so on. They believe that they have to follow all rituals of goddess even they do not have enough money. They will borrow it from local moneylenders and perform all rituals of goddess. They deeply believe in goddesses and said that '*Ame Nabada pan Amari Devi Balvan*' (We are weak and our goddess is very powerful).

- **Dana Ceremony**

Dana ceremony is a way among Devipujak community to understand a wish or order of the goddess. A goddess speaks to people with means of *Dana*. There are many occasions such as solving quarrel among family members, initiating any new task, going out of town, knowing reason of fever, confession of mistakes and so on when *Dana* ceremony is performed. A person called *Joshi* is the one who perform *Dana* ceremony among the community. They have their own pattern of performing *Dana* ceremony and there might be slight difference I region wise. A *Joshi* will first spread a cloth on ground and will arrange necessary things like Jawar (sorghum), incense sticks, picture of goddess on cloth for the ceremony. They perform it with pattern of *Vachha* (even number) and *Vadhamana* (odd number). A *Joshi* will make five heaps of sorghum in sequence which should in in order like *Vachha, Vadhamana, Vachha, Vadhamana and Vachha*. They perform it three times and all the time same number

of heaps of sorghum happening in same sequence then they believe that goddess has blessed them and has given permission to do task. They follow either three heaps, five heaps and nine heaps while performing Dana ceremony. I had attended such occasion when they are performing *Dana* ceremony during my field work.

- **Bali**

Animal sacrifice is practiced by number of sections as rituals in our society. It is very important part for worshipping many deities. There are certain festivals when hundred of animals are sacrificed on particular day, even smaller number of animals are offered to deities on most of weeks in year. It gives religious justification to sacrifice animal by offering it to deity or ancestor spirit. This practice is not considered as sin but believed as sacred act and consumed as *Prasad* (Srinivas, 1980). Most of time goat is preferred for the sacrifice rituals in village. People usually keep certain number of goats earmarked for animal sacrifice ceremony (Govindrajan, 2015). Animal sacrifice also called as *Bali* which is very common among Devipujak community. Generally, they offer goat in *Bali* to their god and goddesses. Some portion of meat is offered to deity first and remaining is eaten by family members and relatives as *Prasadi*. Sometimes rooster, lamb and buffalo are also offered in rituals of animal sacrifice to deity among some sub-castes of Devipujak. They offer animal to deity with belief that they will be protected from ill-happening. There are many reasons for *Bali* such as to get cured from fever, to take new initiative, vow, accomplishment of wish or task. I had observed certain incidence of animal sacrifice during my stay in village. Once Hirabhai's daughter got fever and after some days Hirabhai himself got sick. So, they were believing that people are getting fever one after another in family due to unhappiness of God. They decided to offer Bali to God and pleaded to protect them from any misfortune.

- **Mandavo**

Mandavo is regarded as one of the very auspicious occasions among Devipujak community. They believe that they can only perform *Mandavo* if goddess showers blessing on them. It is

a big event in their life where there is gathering of family members and relatives, *Bhajan* (hymn) and *Dakla* and rituals of Bali to deity. It starts during late evening and last till next day morning. They have to take permission from goddess first to perform *Mandavo*. For it, they are supposed to perform ceremony of *Rajinama* which means they have to prove themselves innocent before goddess through Dana ceremony. A *Joshi* will see Dana of each and every family member and they have to accept all offences and ill-acts before goddess. The exact pattern of Dana will not come unless they accept all offences committed. To perform this ritual, every family member has to come together even though they do not have speaking relations in normal days. They have to set aside all their differences and sit together in rituals. I had got opportunity three times to attend *Manadavo* during field work. Some of them, I attended outside the Pritampur village.

In Pritampur village, Karajibhai and his elder brother organised a *Mandavo*. I was invited by them to participated in an occasion which was started in late evening. A mandap was installed at Madh of Jogni Maa near house of Karajibhai's elder son. It was mandavo of Jogni Maa and Karajibhai himself was *Bhuvo* for it. There was gathering of family members of Karajibhai, relatives and other Devipujak from village which constituted nearly 250 to 300 people. Two separate seating arrangement was made for male and female on floor. They also called group of artists for singing *Bhajan*. Some of the people were dancing in their own way during singing of *Bhajan*. Mostly, bhajans of their goddess and forefathers were sung in the event. Karajibhai who was main *Bhuvo* of occasion took bath during late evening. There were four to five people who were making him ready for event. He wore vest and *dhoti* and was garlanded around neck. He wrapped up shawl which they call *Chandaravo* on upper body. He applied tilak on whole forehead and then went to Madh. He first bow down to goddess for prayer at *Madh*.

- **Marriage**

Marriage is considered essential foundation of social organization and basis of some significant legal right and obligations. Since time of Rig Veda, marriage is regarded with great importance in society. After getting married, husband and wife are expected to fulfil

their traditional duties as a couple and work towards material and spiritual well-beings of each other, family members and society. There is no uniformity found in rituals, rites, customs and ceremonies of marriage which varies from region to region, caste, community and religions (Chandrika, 1996). Like other communities, marriage is believed as sacred among Devipujak community. The community is having its own rituals in marriage ceremony.

- **Death**

Death is hard reality of life but it is also saddest part of human life. There are certain rituals followed at time of death which may have variation in caste, religion and region. In Devipujak community, they bury the dead person except two families in village who were following rituals of cremation in Pritampur village. The family members cry at the time of death. They follow mourn for twelve days. There was separate burial ground for Devipujak in village. It was a time of Navratri festival and there was death of young married women in community. She was suffering from fever for some days and had epilepsy all of a sudden. She died at very young age leaving her two children behind. The family members also took her hospital but she could not be saved. I went to meet family members along with Arvindbhai who was belonging to Devipujak community. The mother-in-law was crying with deep grief. The whole community suspended celebration of Navratri festival due to death of community member as mourning symbol. They follow ritual of '*Pani Pavu*' on 11th day for death of male and 12th day for death of female. On this day, their relatives visit the house of dead person for consoling them. During my field work, I had attended rituals of *Pani Pavu* of Vajabhai's relative. We went to village which was 6 to 7 kilometres away from Pritampur. They keep photo of dead person and keep axe near its photos. There are earthen pots filled with water. The relatives come and greet family members of deceased. Male relatives meet male members while female meets female. Velabhai tied towel on head to deceased's brother and gave him Rs. 50/-. They keep separate notebook to write down name of relatives giving money. The relatives will take one glass of water from earthen pot and pour on space near photos of deceased. They believe that the water is reaching to deceased person. The relatives are offered food on the day of this ritual. If deceased is young, elder relatives will not eat food at its home.

- **Occupation and Livelihood**

In Hindu society, caste-name is derived from the principal professions people following in particular caste or crafts. For instance, Brahmin means practicing occupation of rituals and worshipping. Many of the individuals in Brahmin community were engaged in priestly occupation for long time, but it has changed now and group members are not only pursuing priestly functions but have taken up role in allied fields like writing, clerical work very different to original work. Kumbhar name is derived from a group who is engaged in making pot. Tili or Teli caste is involved in occupation of oil (Ghurye, 1950). The British government misunderstood criminal tribes on the wrong belief of Indian caste-system. They believed that these groups commit crime from one generation to another same way particular caste group carries forward their profession from one to another generation (Kapadia, 1952). Devipujaks were living as hunter-gatherer earlier and they were assisting local rulers for hunting in jungle. Many subgroups of Devipujak community like Datania, Chunaria, Gamechia, Chibhadia, Talpada are named on the basis of their occupations. Chunaria Devipujak were lime burners where as Datania were engaged in selling babool stick (Enthoven, 1922 as cited in Singh, 1994). With the advancement of technology, new form of occupations emerged. It was not possible for all members of community to practice their age-old traditional occupations due to growth of population and changing scenario. In some cases, traditional occupations became superfluous and many communities had to adopt new means of livelihood. The traditional weaving occupation was lost due to arrival of new technology in weaving industry. Datania Devipujak who used to sell babool stick to villagers lost their age-old livelihood due to tooth-brush usage. This changing scenario led to migration of many communities to urban areas in search of livelihood.

- **Traditional Livelihood**

Devipujaks are very brave and adventurous people. They were forest-dwellers and possessing sharp skills of hunting. Local rulers used to take them in jungle for hunting due to their powerful hunting skills. They were recruited as soldiers in army of local rulers for their warrior like characteristics. I met Karajibhai whose family was given rights to provide

Dantun to villagers by local rulers. It was their traditional occupation and his mother was giving *Dantun* to villagers everyday and they were getting food from them in return. Their family condition was very poor and still they have not much progressed socio-economically. *Chowkidari* meaning guarding the farm land was also traditional occupations practiced by community members. Their duty was to protect farm land from looters and animals. Farm land was given to them for one year contract by big farmers in village for guarding. They were given either cash or food grains by farmers for their work. It was their responsibility to protect farm land otherwise they have to bear loss if any damaged caused to crops. Other occupations were animal husbandry, rearing livestock like sheep, goat, buffalos practiced by them. They were also practicing occupations of growing vegetables and fruits like brinjal, foot kachri, and watermelon near river bank and fulfilling their daily needs.

- **New Means of Livelihood**

Many nomadic and denotified groups have to adopt new occupations leaving their older ones due to technological advancement, enactment of certain laws and outing demand of traditional occupations. Some of these communities were dependent on forest produce and game-shows of wild animals like bear, snakes, monkey, birds which became illegal after arrival of legislations on wild life and forest conservations. There was not any other option left for these groups to move out from their age-old occupations. The traditional occupations of forest products and domestication of wild animals which were earning sources for them became offence suddenly due to legal restrictions.

Many families of Devipujak community have migrated to urban regions like Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bangalore for earning. They are engaged into different occupations like secondhanded items, new clothes, bags selling, spices and so on. I had observed that large numbers of families are engaged in occupation of second-handed clothes during my stay at Mumbai. They go out in the morning and roam house to house for collecting old clothes and other items. They collect old clothes from customers and give them plastic utensils in return instead of cash. Items like old clothes, watches, camera are collected by them. After having enough collection of old items, they go to *Chor Bazar* which is largest second-hand market

situated in Mumbai for selling stuffs. They sit on footpath and sell collected items to various customers who are visiting market. Market starts early in morning at five hour and remains open for next three to four hours. Devipujaks are also engaged in horticulture nowadays. They keep huge land on contract for a year and do farming of mangos, gooseberry, banana, chiku and coconut (Talpada, 2020).

- **Migration**

With changing scenario of livelihood opportunities and less earning options in village, Devipujak families move to urban regions for income. They migrated to big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai in search of earning and engage themselves into different occupations. I visited Mumbai and stayed there for a month during field work to understand their life in city. In village, people are not getting employment for a whole year. Most of them are working as agriculture labourers there. Three families were having ownership of agricultural land and two of them have more than 150 acres of land. It becomes difficult for them to sustain themselves in village due to less earning options so they migrate to cities. Life is also not less miserable in cities. They face various difficulties in terms of proper habitat, cleanliness, basic amenities and all. I had visited slum where they are residing during my stay in Mumbai. The slum was very congested and deprived of basic amenities. They earn little well in urban areas compare to village; but the problems of education for children, unhygienic surroundings, no-permanent dwelling are there. The houses were very small in size where it is difficult to stay even for one family in which two to three families including their children live together.

- **Social Panch**

The Jat Panchayat or caste council plays very significant role in life of NTDNTs. It is considered as integral part in their life which exerts control and possess great decision-making power about the important aspects of their lives. The jat panchayat can impose restriction and punishment, decide traditions and rituals, impart justice and compensation

(Raghavan & Mishra, 2015). There is a strong influence of caste council among Denotified tribes which affects most of the decisions related their social and domestic life. The help of agencies such as police and judiciary are taken by these groups nowadays; but still majority of them are taking up their issues in their own caste council for resolution. This traditional body of justice is highly controlled by elders in terms of power structure (Bokil, 2002). The jat panchayats are mainly male-dominated groups where women are hardly permitted to represent their views even in the matter which are directly pertaining to their life (Agrawal, 2018). The Sansi community does not bring matter into court but approach their caste council in case of dispute. Small issues are settled down by presence of less jury members in social panch while serious issues are discussed and decided by intervention of more jury members in social panch (Singh, 1959).

There have been many incidences that various caste-council played important role in bringing communities together and ensuring justice among them but they have been redundant with development of judiciary system which ensure protection of individual human rights. The traditional way of delivering justice is not more aligned with modern thoughts of justice, freedom, equality and fundamental rights (Bokil, 2002). During time of extra-marital case when jat panchayats intervene, they impose high penalties. If women do not accept wrong doings and refuse to give name of person, she has to face hard situation (Bokil, 2002). The chastity tests after allegation of extra-marital affairs are very common among Sansi community in Rajasthan (Bagchi, 2012; Parihar, 1999 as cited in Agrawal, 2018).

I attended two sittings of social panch during course of field work. I had made many observations about function of it when attended two assembly of it. I had also discussion with community members regarding functioning of social panch among Devipujak which enriched my understanding for it. The institute is simply known as '*Panch*' in Devipujak community.

- **Stigma**

With enactment of Habitual Offender Act in year 1952, these communities were decriminalized under law; but they have not got rid off from societal stigma. People shared many incidences of stigma and discriminations during my stay with them. I was conducting FGD with youth and they shared an incidence of discriminatory behavior of other caste people towards Devipujak community. A boy was working at marriage decoration shop in Ahmedabad. He was somehow not able to adjust himself there so returned back to village. He was in search of employment and he approached one of the hotel owners for work. He was denied and told by an owner that other caste people will not come to his hotel if they know that Devipujak is serving there. Devipujak community is included under OBC category and does not belong to ex-untouchable group; but higher caste people do not eat with them. They consider Devipujaks lower than them in social order.

- **Discrimination and Exploitation**

There was one family who migrated to Pritampur village before some years from nearby village. They left their village due to harassment by Darbar community who was considered very powerful. They were compelling Devipujaks to work in their farms with lower wages and sometimes exploiting their women. They cannot go for work to another village even though they were paid high. If they did so, they had to face consequences from the Darbar community. The attitude of police is also not supportive and positive towards Devipujak community. Even today they are first suspected and caught by police if any theft happens in village or nearby areas though they are not involved in it. The community people are having fear of police due to their discriminatory nature toward Devipujaks.

4. Suggestive Roadmap for Devipujak Community

- The Nomadic, Denotified and Semi-nomadic communities are most neglected ones in the society in recent times. They are placed under ST, SC or OBC category in different states but they are not able to take effective benefits of reservation policies. It is advisable to make permanent commission for Nomadic, Denotified and Semi-nomadic communities (Idate, 2017).
- In every state, separate Department or Directorate to be set up which will be responsible for the overall welfare of NTDNTs in state.
- There is no universal classification of nomadic and denotified community therefore some of them are listed under SCs/STs in one state and as OBCs in another state. Such irregularities should be removed and proper listing of these groups to be done rationally wherever possible with developing clear understanding through ethnographic studies and following due procedures. Devipujak community is classified under OBC but they are not able to take due benefits of reservation for higher education and public employment. It would be great help if sub-categorisation is created for such communities which can address issue of their less or non-representation in higher education and public employment (Idate, 2017).
- UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) observed in the year 2007 that Habitual Offender Act (1952) is used in same manner like CTA against nomadic and denotified groups so it recommended state authority to repeal it and make concrete efforts to rehabilitate nomadic and denotified groups affected by it (United Nations, 2007).
- The government officials should be sensitized towards situation of NTDNTs so they take effective benefits of important documents and welfare measures such as Aadhar card, Voter ID Card, BPL card, Old Age Pension Scheme and Widow Pension scheme.

- There were very few individuals among Devipujak community who reached to higher education and working in formal sectors. The sincere efforts to be made to improve education level among children of Devipujak community. They should have easy accessibility of educational welfare schemes like Right to Education, Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Scheme.
- There were many families who were living in *Kachha* houses in village and also living in slum at different cities. They should be given benefit of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana both for rural and urban families considering their eligibility so that they can have good housing facilities to stay.
- In village, Devipujaks were borrowing money from local money lenders for occupation, health issues of family members or social functions. Generally, local money lenders charges high interest in comparison to bank and sometimes they might have paid more interest than their principal amount but still they are not able to pay back their whole debt due to high interest charge. They should be integrated to formal scheduled banking services which can provide them loan for their occupations contributing towards economic empowerment of these groups.
- The scheme such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNAREGA) must be effectively implemented at rural level so that they can get employment at their places only. They may not need to migrate to cities for livelihood if they get employment opportunities at local level most of the times in a year.
- The political participation is very less among the NTDNTs and those who are active politically are not considered important segments in decision making. It is suggested that they get representation like STs and SCs into local governance bodies to achieve political empowerment of these groups. They can also be provided reservation benefits in state assemblies and parliamentary elections (Renke, 2008).
- The NTDNTs communities are less empowered socially, economically and politically and often become victims of atrocities. They are also not Constitutionally safeguarded

like STs and SCs. They should be provided protection under Prevention of Atrocities Act which will legally protect them (Idate, 2017).

- Devipujaks community are still stigmatized and viewed as criminals and they are first target of police department in case of occurrence of crime in area. It is important that police officers should be sensitized towards nomadic and denotified communities to prevent atrocities against them. The members of NTDNTs should be appointed in National and State Human Rights Commission which will help to prevent their harassment.
- Devipujaks migrated to different places particularly in cities for the purpose of livelihood. They also carry their small children along with them which is badly affecting their education. Their children either leave the school in middle or remain irregular. Additionally, both husband and wife go for work in village so elder daughters mostly are taken out of the school to take care of siblings. If more residential schools are established nearby population of nomadic and denotified groups, it will contribute to improve education level among children of NTDNTs. The migratory or earning parents can keep their children into residential schools and they can earn their livelihood.
- The women are helping equally to male members in Devipujak community. The government can provide them livelihood opportunities through various welfare schemes like Self Help Groups (SHGs), vocational trainings, art and craft.
- They should be availed benefits of schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), E-Shram card scheme which will ensure social security of them.
- They face social discrimination one or another way in society. It is moral responsibility of all of us that we should not keep prejudicial attitudes towards them and accept them as part of our society.

- It is crucial to develop leadership among the community members who will represent the issues of community at local, state and national level for holistic development of community.

The Devipujak community and other denotified groups have been victim of historical injustice and are still facing stigma and discrimination in society. Most of them are living marginalized and socio-economically backward life due to social exclusion. It is not only responsibility of government but civil society, non-governmental organization and community itself should consider it their moral duty to work together for welfare of nomadic and denotified groups. The prevailing stigma and prejudicial attitudes towards them had been major hurdle in social integration for NTDNTs. It is need of an hour to build society free from violence, crime and injustice.

5. References

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