

SOCIAL STATUS OF MALDHARIS IN BANNI AREA OF KACHCHH

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ABSTRACT

Banni area is a large grazing land spread over 3847 sq km area, where livelihoods of maldharis are depends upon livestock and handicrafts. Therefore, present investigation was carried out during the period from 2008 to 2012, to study the social, educational status and their social customs. It was revealed from the investigation that region was predominated by Muslims (90%) and Meghwal (10%) communities. These social groups were divided into different sub groups and their traditional occupations were handicrafts, wood crafts, mud work, leather work and rearing of livestock as main source of livelihoods. However, literacy rate among these peoples was very low (26.50%). During their social ceremony like marriage, they followed the different customs / traditions viz., gave the buffalo or cow to their daughter as gift during. However, all these groups had their own traditional customs and dresses. Therefore, requirements of these people shall be taken into consideration, during planning the development of the region.

KEY WORDS: *Livelihoods, literacy rate, livestock, social / traditional customs,*

INTRODUCTION

Banni area of Kachchh is situated at 69° 24' E Longitude to 23° 42' N Latitude axis and spread in about 3847 sq km area. There are almost no rivers or natural streams in Banni. However, about 100 rivers and rivulets flowing northwards from Norht and Central Gujarat and Kutch mainland drain into the Banni along it's southern boundary and submerged with Arab Sagar. Area near this boundary gets flooded during the monsoons mainly by the water brought by these rivers and local rainfall. The region is known for White Desert, Little Rann of Kachchh and Great Rann of Kachchh, Chhari Dhand etc., as geographical areas and handicrafts, embroidery work, leather work and mud work along with their livestock breeds like Banni buffalo, Kankrej cow, Kachchhi goat,

Kachchhi camel and Sindhi horse etc. as the main source of livelihoods. The economical conditions of these people are poor and they don't have any occupancy right on the land they used for grazing their animals.

MATERIALS AND NETHODS

The present investigation was conducted during the period from 2008 to 2012 to study the social / traditional customs, educational status and main occupations adopted for livelihoods security in the region. About 88 respondents from 16 villages were selected randomly and data were collected in the form of questionnaire and analyzed to estimate the means as well as frequency distribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social groups of maldharis in Banni area

The term Banni is originated from the word “*Baneli*”, which means self reclaimed. This region was home to a number of nomadic sindhi-speaking Muslim groups belongs to 13 sub-caste, but they don’t had any social relations. These groups are known as- Mutva,

Jat, Halepotra, Rayashipotra, Node, Bhambha, Sameja, Pathan, Korar, Khaskeli, Lunai, Jetha and Korar. These *maldharis* live into small cluster of households, where bhunga type of houses are very popular, which is earth proof also (Plate 1-3 : Houses in banni area).



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

However, all these Muslims had nomadic life and settled in 45 villages in the Banni and Jat was the major social group in the region, followed by Mutva (which were habituated only in 8 villages), who came about 400 to 500 years ago from Sindh. The main occupation of all these social groups was rearing of livestock. Along with them, there were some Hindu groups of harijan also and their main occupation was handicrafts.

Further, it was revealed that, 45 villages of Banni area were governed by 19 panchayat and region was divided into different parts like : “*Pachhim Banni area*” (Khavada area, which includes the villages viz., Kuren, Dhrobana, Dinara, Ratdiya, Dhoravar, Kuneria, Jhuna, Ludia, Golpar, Soiyla, Khari, Aardha and Sanghara.); “*Jat Patti area*” (which includes Jats habituated villages) and “*Udgamni Banni area*”. The main occupations of all these maldharis were rearing of Banni buffaloes or other livestock.

Literacy rate

The literacy rate of people in the Banni region was evaluated and found that overall literacy rate was very low (26.50 %), which was below the national average as well as state average (61%) (Anonymous, 2012), however, surprisingly literacy rate among women was only 1.80 per cent. In case of boys, it was 46.89 per cent and among girls, it was 22.90 per cent (Table 1), indicated that education level in the region was very poor. The school in some of the village was only up to primary level or up to 7th standard. The transport facility was also very poor in the region.

Land use pattern

The land use pattern in Banni area was different than any other part of the country, where only grazing land was available and no agriculture was practiced. The invasion of “*Prosopis juliflora*” and ingress of salinity was the rising problems of the region,

where *maldharis* were residing in the region without occupancy right. Further, it was summarized that grazing land was declining every year at the rate of 0.50 per cent per annum due to invasion of “*Prosopis juliflora*” and desertification in the region. However, land use pattern of kachchh district was different, which showed that there was maximum barren land (17.05 lakh hectares) and cultivable waste land (16.81 lakh hectares) as compared to other districts in the state, which was 65.6 and 84.70 percent of the state barren and cultivable waste land, respectively (Table 2). The area under forest, non-agricultural use, pastureland, fallow land, cropped area, gross irrigated and net irrigated area were about 2883, 726, 701, 1275, 6550, 1769 and 1420 lakh hectares, respectively. However, it was the biggest district of the state, having about 23.29 per cent geographical area of the state.

Occupation

The main occupation of households in the region was rearing of buffalo / cattle / sheep / goat (Plate 4 and 5). The alternate occupation was handicrafts (Plate 6) / labour work like contract grazing or production of coal from the *Prosopis juliflora*. However, in adjoining area of Banni *maldharis* doing cultivation of different crops, but they also facing the problems of ingress of salinity in the region. Further, it was suggested that earlier *maldharis* were selling their animals due to lower price of milk i.e. Rs.12.00 to 14.00 per kg of milk during 2008-09, but now trend had been change due to marketing facilities provided by the Sarhad Dairy, Bhuj and NDDB in the region and they fetching very good price of their milk i.e. Rs 24.00 to 36.00 per lit. of milk. However, some area was still out of reach of this facility, but in the coming years, whole area might be covered under these projects.



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6

Social customs

The social customs as well as their education Level was studied and observed that they preferred to get married within their villages (Plate 7-8), where cloths, jewellery and one or

two animals like buffalo or cow or goat or sheep were given to their daughter depending upon the animals reared by the *maldharis*. The Banni buffalo given to their daughter was their status symbol.



Plate 7



Plate 8

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Banni area of Kachchh, where main source of livelihoods was rearing of livestock, handicraft, mud works and leather works etc. The education level in the region was very poor and their social customs like marriage, which is generally within village and wear specially, designed dresses.

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Table 1: Education status among maldharies in Banni area of Kachchh

Sr. No.	Category	Total Household	Sex	Literate	Illiterate	Total
1	Adult	88	i) Men	35.69% (91)	64.31% (164)	100 % (255)
			(ii) women	1.80 % (04)	98.20 % (218)	100 % (222)
2	Children	88	(i) Boys	46.89 % (83)	53.11 % (94)	100 % (177)
			(ii) Girls	22.90 % (30)	77.10% (101)	100 % (131)
3	Overall percentage	88		26.50 % (208)	73.50 % (577)	100 % (785)

Note : Figures in parenthesis indicate the number of respective class/ category

Table 2: Land use pattern in Kachchh district of Gujarat

Sr. No.	Land Classification	Kachchh District	Gujarat State
1	Geographical area (Sq. km.)	45,652 (23.29)	1,96,024
2	Area under forest (,00 hect.)	2,883 (15.45)	18,653
3	Land for non-agri. (,00 hect.)	726 (06.26)	11,419
4	Barren land (,00 hect.)	17,054 (65.60)	25,997
5	Permanent pasture land (,00 hect.)	701 (08.24)	8,507
6	Cultivable waste (,00 hect.)	16,812 (84.70)	19,849
7	Fallow land (,00 hect.)	1,275 (13.68)	9,320
8	Total cropped area (,00 hect.)	6,550 (06.27)	1,04,400
9	Cropping intensity	106	111
10	Grass irrigated area (GIA-,00 hect.)	1,769 (05.29)	33,421
11	Net irrigated area (NIA-,00 hect.)	1,420 (05.06)	28, 060
12	Irrigation intensity (GIA/NIA*100)	125	119
13	Livestock Density (1000 hectares)	345	1,165

Source: Chaudhary and Singh (2010 lo cit)

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