

Social Environment, Dresses and Food of Two Main Communities before Exodus

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Abstract

Major partition of Indian subcontinent happened in 1947. Millions of people were displaced due to partition and very large population of many communities migrated from one part to the other. Two major communities which migrated were Punjabies and Jatts. Punjabies have been described as enterprising and industrious not only in contemporary India but abroad as well whereas Jatts are known for their fighting spirits against the enemy. In the present paper the dresses, ornaments, food, drinks and hierarchy stratification has been studied for these two major communities.

Keywords: Communities, Jatts, Punjabies

1. Introduction

Punjabies have been variously described as aggressive, enterprising, lovers of good things of life, labourers and martial race. Their industriousness and entrepreneurship have made them famous in not only contemporary India but abroad as well. This has given rise to an image which at time looks larger than the life. This turn has further provided a boost to create an aura of laurels around the Punjabies.

As regard the communities past so much can be gleaned from the Imperial gazetteer and other source material that a fairly aqueat picture of the community can be reconstructed in terms of social, economic and geographical setting. The geographical setting of undivided Punjab i.e. before partition in 1947 as described in imperial Gazetteer has been reproduced below.

In its strict etymological sense the Panjab or 'land of five rivers is the country enclosed and watered by Jhelum, Chanab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. The province lies between 27° 39' and 34°2N and 60°23' and 79°2' E having a total area of 36,532 square miles.

The province falls into five main physical divisions. Three of these, the Himalayan region, the Himalayan submontance, which stretches from the Jamuna to the salt range and the grid plateau of that range are small in area, but the submontance is the most fertile and wealthiest in the Panjab. The other two are the arid south western plains and the western portion of the Indo-Gangetic plain west which extends as far westward as Lahore.

Both the divisions are of the vast extent, but infertile toward the south where they encroach on the plains of

the Sind and Rajputana over the greater part of the Panjab, the climate is of the most pronounced continental character, extreme summer heat alternating with great winter cold.¹

Geographically Punjab had been the northern land gateway to the Indo-Gangetic plain. Except for the European powers, virtually every invader had entered India through the Panjab. By the same time, regimes securely based on the Gangetic plains such as the Mauryas. The Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals and the British attempted to expand via Punjab into Central Asia. Because of this, on the one hand the character of the Panjabi people, as a whole, has been shaped into one of self-reliance and initiative constantly vigilant against external damagers, and on the other the religious political elements of the diverse culture traditions (Muslim, Hindu and Sikh) have constantly had an impact on the people at one time or the other. As a consequence on the one hand the prevailing form of social co-operation and the type of political solidarity bear loose reference to 'Caste' and rules of purity and pollution, than to the family unit and its values. On the other hand in spite of a geographical homogeneity a uniform historical legacy and a number of common characteristics, various economic, religious, social and cultural differences divide the people sharply.¹

Panjab became a meeting place of various people and a melting pot of diverse culture in ancient times on account of invasions. Hence its society became heterogeneous and heterodox and detracted from the standards of the conservation people. The puritans hustled themselves in the Gangetic valley and branded the Punjabies impure and impious and shunned contact with them. The literature of this period breaths a spirit of revolt against the people of Panjab. But in this land of sin

and sacrilege there was a unique widening of horizons and broadening of perspectives as a consequence of the coming and mingling of various people and their cultures. The results of this is the leveling down of the walls of tradition, demolished the towers of isolationism and breathing in the open air of syncretism. This in turn led to the development of a vast 'weltanschauung'.^{1,2}

The above account depicts clearly the Panjabies as people who are not stickler of the notions of the hierarchy and purity and pollution which has otherwise enveloped the entire Hindu society. The barriers of caste are not all that rigid in Panjab as elsewhere in the country. Panjab has been pointed out as one of the notable exceptions to the caste system in India. This is due to Muslim and Sikh influences, which theoretically are against the caste system and to the role of the Hindu revivalist movement Arya Samaj in Panjab.

The Jats

General Information

The Jats, who have been playing a significant role in the cultural, political,¹ economic and ethnic¹ history of northern and north-western regions of the Indian sub-continent, are some of her most ancient races. Their titles are Chaudhary,² Pradhan, Thakur, Malik, Faujdar, Sardar (Sikh Jats). Interestingly, the Dahiya Jats are called Badshah and the Gathwalas Malik. There were as many as twenty synonyms of their name in India and abroad. Various theories, viz. 'British from Siva's locks', 'from jartas or jarthkas of the Mahabharata time', 'from the jathar mountains or raised by Brahmans on the Kshatriya widowed ladies after Parasrama's vendata against them' or from the Yadavas' or 'from the Rajput-Gujar union were propounded on their origin, but they absurd, unscientific and have no legs to stand. However, in Haryana they are known only as Jat or Jatt or Jutt, a name popularly derived³ from Paninian term Jatta which denotes union or federation or confederation (jana or Sangha) of the Ayudhajivi (warrior tribes) of contemporary Panjab and Sindh, where they are still called Jatta or Jutt. Prior to Panini, when they were merely nomads, Yaska³ marked them as Jatya Atnaro (wanderers) in or like the Juts with matted locks of hair. Surprisingly, their tradition connects them with Jata, who is said⁴ to be one of the sons of Lord Brahma. Unfortunately, efforts⁵ have always been afoot to represent them as immigrants (Sacae-Getae = Saka or Scythian from Central Asia) into India in the preceding century of the Christian Era. Ipso facto, they can, by all means, plausibly be identified with the Gut or Gutu (G = J) of the Indus Valley Seals, who were also the Sacae Getae or Got or Goth, the Sake or Scythians of Waddell,³ to whom they were the sons of Narishyanht, the Aikswaka ruler of India. Undoubtedly, they are autochthons³ of India. Risley and others have proved their Aryans origin and so much so, Kephart, to whom there was no Scythian

race,⁴ accredits them as the progenitors of the "white or Nordic Race (the Aryans), whereas Vaidya⁴ has them belong to the first race of Aryans, the solar race of the Aryans of the Punjab.

Be that as it may, now they have three major sections, viz., Hindu, Muslim and Sikh comprising more than three thousand gotras in the sub-continent. The Muslim Jats obviously migrated to Pakistan after partition in 1947 and the Sikh Jats concentrate mainly in the present Panjab. Haryana has now only Hindu and comparatively less Sikh Jats, whose gotras are more than hundred⁷ in the state. Interestingly, we come across some of their ancient Pravaras also. Since, excepting the Scheduled Castes etc., the basis of census from 1941 is occupation, their proportionate strength is not available. The latest census report is that of 1931 which besides district gazetteers, informs us that the percentage of Jat population was 33 in Rohtak district, 26.8 in Hissar, 33.7 in Jind, 10 in Gurgaon, 16 in Delhi, 15.3 in Karnal, and 16 in Ambala. This percentage must have risen with the growth of population.

They are predominantly agriculturists par excellence. "The Jat's baby has a plough handle for a play thing. The Jat stood on his corn heap and said to the King's elephant-drivers, will you sell those little donkeys?" Since the time of Akbar they have been known as Zamidnars (husbandmen)⁷ They are now one of the "authors" of the "Green Revolution", heading towards bringing about the "White Revolution" and have made the state surplus in foodgrains. Besides entering into all kinds of services, they have also taken to trade and transport, brick-klin laying and builders, industries and colonizers in the country and abroad. The child and bonded labour is now conspicuous by its absence among them.

They wield their sword as dexterously as they do their Sickle and Scythe. In fact, if Panjab is the "Sword" of India, Haryana had been the "sharp blade" of that sword, for on her soil (Panipat, Train) had been fought the most decisive battles since the Mahabharata. "The history of the Jat Regiment is the history of Indian Military and the history of the Jats is the history of India." The accounts, however, indicate that the Haryana soldiers have been decorated with the highest gallantry awards posthumously as well as survivings in the recent wars against Pakistan in defence of their motherland. "Dying fighting is supreme happiness to them and death from natural causes ignominious and shameful." Similarly, in the past also they sacrificed themselves to defend the country; but, observes R.C. Majumdar, "If there had been a history of India written without prejudice and predilections, the heroic deeds of these brave people, Jats, who stemmed the tide of Islam for two centuries, would certainly have received its recognition they so richly deserved."

They normally speak and communicate among themselves and with other in their local dialects, viz. Jatu, Bangru, Brij & Bagri, Panjabi in case of Sikh Jats; Hindi, Urdu, "Hindustani" and even English preferably in case of

educated ones. The ex-army persons sometimes used Roman-Urdu. The scripts, used by them, are Devnagri, Arabic or Persian, Gurmukhi and English. They, however, had their own language also known as Jatki (bhaska), which is not in vogue now. Its script was somewhat akin to Devanagri, Landa Hindi or Mundi Hindi or Hindgi, a language without written vowels, the teaching and learning of which continued only at primary level upto about 1940, is still used by them in their bahi khaataa (family diaries). Absence of the vowels in the obsolete language of the Jats and is that of their alleged ancestors, the Sakas (Scythians) who, after their expulsion by Sagar from India, adopted the Greek script or alphabets, is a common feature.

Dress and Ornaments

The normal dress of male consisted of turban, kurta or kamij, dhoti and juti or patan (of leather). The dress may be made of cotton, silk or synthetic fibre. The Hindu Jats wear their turban with a slant either on right side or on left and the Sikh Jats do the Patiala style. They wear their chaddar etc. in the style as reflected by the Mohanjudaro statute. They also use Kamri, angarkha (tunic), chaddar, khes, dohar, shawl, loee and blanket, guilt, gadda (razai or Saur and Sauria) or dari according to season. For children the popular dresses are jhugla-topi and pharagal. The female dress comprised colourfully embroidered orhna, omak, chundri, dupta, dukania, Sopli, chhama, phulkari, shawl and chunni; kamiz, Sameez, Kamriangi or angia, lahnga, borda, khubhurgra, ghagri and daman (of all original colour or print). But now the Jats especially the present generation, under the impact of mass-media have taken to all possibly thinkable forms of modern dresses. Previously men always preferred white clothes and women colourful but now young boys and girls sometimes put on clothes of the type and colour (shirts, T-shirts, half-pants and full pants, jeans or geens) that one is at a loss to distinguish between their sexes unless one sees their breast. Kamiz or bush-shirts and pyjama, sweater, coat and pantaloons in case of boys, who do not even know how to tie a turban or dhoti, sharara and grara, jumper and shalwar, Sari and even frocks in case of girls, who cannot stand, except in occasional ceremonies and dances, the heaviness of the daman of twenty to fifty two yards of cloth, have become more popular. Peacock is their token and emblem in the form of a weather cock on top of their havelis.

Murki, hansli, kantha or kanthla (naclace), tabiz and ring, all made of gold, were the coveted ornaments of man but now only ring and chain are popular. Borla, munh ka chhaj or mukherna, siraunthi, landai and buzni (for ears), koka and nath or nathli (for upper teeth), hansli and kianthi (neclase), mala, jhalra and haar (for chest), Taad (for arm above elbow), Churi, Karulai, Karai, chann, pachheli, kangan (for the wrists), hathful and finger rings (from borla to rings, all made of gold or silver), taagri and pallu (for waist and hips), pati, newari, jhanjan, kari, chhailkarai and pazeab baankarai (for legs and ankles) and bichhwai (for toes), (from taagri to bichhwai, all made of

silver) in case of married women; and ear-ring, karuli of gold or silver and pazeab or paswai of silver (for female children) are the most popular ornaments for the Jat ladies. The Jats hold that the ornaments above waist should be of gold and below it that of silver. There is a special ornament, called chaand (crescent) of gold, presented by the maternal uncle to his bhanja at the latter's birth. Now the silver ornaments are going to go and a set or two of gold are gaining ground.

Food and Drinks

The Jats are normally vegetarian and take seasonal cereals, fruits, vegetables and pulses. One of their folk song, however, gives a graphic description of their month-wise traditional menu:-

Chait piyari Kanak, Kakkari, Kohla, Kaddu, Baisakh piyara masaa, thanda, baingan bharta, Jeth piyari thandaee, rabri, sattu, piaz, nindra, Saadh piyara neembu, namak, aam tapka. Saman piyari swalhi, parai, gulgatai, purai, kheer, Bhadwa piyara daliya shakkar, cholara, bhindi, tindai aur ghata. Asoj piyari gheeya tori, Katak piyara seet, dahi mattha. Mangsar piyari Kachri, dakal, gaajar, bajra, bathu, gudari. Poh piyara ganda gur, aalu, tilkuti aur tiotha.

Mah piyari goje khichri, Phagan piyari mazak, malish, thatha. Teej teohaar piyarai halwa, chillai, kheer, Mall piyarai ghee, dudh, dupalka, mahalpura, prantha Biyah piyarai ladu, jalebi, satpakwani, Ghee boora milai na, janet kar le thattha.

Interestingly, they still prefer daliya or khichri in the evening, as mentioned by Panini also, probably to provide relief to the digestive system. Nevertheless, the present generation has a growing tendency towards non-vegetarian food, tea, coffee and alcoholic drinks, especially on festive occasions. Sweets and drinks are purchased mainly from the market. They are, by all means very fond of huqqa smoking. Biri and cigarette also find a favour with them.

Natural Environment

In fact, the Jats, as in the rest of the sub-continent, so in Haryana, which constitutes "the great central water-shed between the Indus basins and the Ganges", have been, since ages past, occupying the most fertile lands. Her bracing winter, which can hardly be rivaled, more than atones for a hot weather which is one of the worst in northern plains. The inland position of the State, combined with the sandy nature of her soil and the barren rugged low offshoots of the Aravali ranges in her southerly parts, gives rise to great extremes of temperature. In the cold weather, hot days are followed by severe cold night; and the winter of a temperate climate is followed by a more than tropical hot weather marked by drying and dreary loops, which in turn is followed by drenching sultry rainy season, sometimes causing ravaging floods. Like a black-smith, who hardens

iron by continuously heating and cooling it, nature in Haryana treats the mettle of men, "Such a climate breeds a hardy martial race" and the wars, within and without, always found the Haryana Jat peasants equally capable of enduring a winter in the mud of Flanders, or a summer in the sands of Mesopotamia and the Great Desert of Africa, or the marshes of Malaya and Indonesia, Burma and Bangladesh, or equally braving the biting and benumbing chilly winds of the Siachin glacier and snowy peaks of the Himalayas.

Social Divisions, Hierarchy Stratification

The Jats enjoy the same proprietary position in Haryana as their Sikh brethren in the Panjab, the Hindu Jats in the Agra and Meerut divisions of Western U.P, the Rajputs in Rajasthan and Maratha in the Maharashtra. Among the Varnas they claim to be and are ranked as Kshatriyas. "The social standing of the Jat is that which the Gujar, Ahir and the Ror enjoy. They stand at the head of the castes who practice Karewa or widow marriage which distinguishes them (even now) from the Rajputs and the Brahmanas and the Banias." Nevertheless, social superiority and inferiority connected with economic and political superiority and inferiority have become, by and large, a matter of the past. They are basically pragmatic and liberal in their approach to life and matters mundane. The Jats eat, drink and smoke without any hesitation, with the Gujars, Ahirs, Rors, Rahbaris, Khatis, Lohars, malis, nais and Kumhars. So much so that "in the Conference at Rampur (Delhi) in 1933 at the contribution of the Arya Samaj speakers against untouchability the Chamars vowed not to eat fish and meat, and most of the Jats then drank and ate at the hands of the Chamars, but unfortunately the former stood subsequently boycotted by the Brahmins for violating the caste rules". The Jats do not demur eating, drinking and smoking with the Brahmins and Rajputs but for the latter's got-up arrogance of superiority. There are no castes that tolerate inter-marriage with other caste-people, except Jats, who do it only in Karao, which is not to be confused with widow-remarriage and who do not give their daughters to others.

Interestingly, like the Kshatriyas, the Jats maintained the Brahman (and even now) both materially and as a member of that religious order which it is their primary duty to maintain. Wherever the Jats migrated and settled, they took the Brahman (the buffalo and huqqa) with them; and was often given a gift of land out-and-out or in dohli which is normally cultivated by the owner who makes over the produce to him, who also receives certain acknowledged fees from the jikman (yajyaman) for officiating and performing rituals and ceremonies for them. The Jats claim to be superior by virtue of their race (Aryan) and the Brahman by virtue of the religious functions he discharges. It is, however, important to note that the Jats, as a proprietary class, economically and politically dominate the Brahmins, but they are not their superiors in the Social Status.

There are some political and social divisions among the Jats, viz. Dahiya and Ahutania or Hautania, the politically rival groups; Deshwali and Bagri, the Shibgotri and Kasabgotri, Deshwala (Parwai) and Pachhadai, Hele and Dhe. The Deshwali, Shibgotri (Sivagotri) and Hele (Halla) claim to be as real or autochthon of the ancient Madhyadesha, whereas the Kasabgotri (Kasyapgotri), Bagri and Dha are considered immigrants from the West. They generally did not intermarry. The Jats in the east of the Kamuna river are normally known as Parwai and those in the West of it as Pachhadai. Whatever might have been the relations of all these groups in the past, but now consequent upon increasing impact of sanskritisation social intercourse among them is markedly taking place.

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