

# A Critical Study of Bhilo Nu Bharath or Bharath: An Epic of Dungri Bhils as A Tribal Narrative

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## Abstract:

India is a land of ethnic diversity. Tribal people had played a prominent role in the development of the country. Tribal people had a close relation with nature, their culture and myths. As far as literature is concerned, amongst Eight hundred spoken languages tribal literature manages to pave a way in between twenty-two official languages. Starting from the roots there has been continuous aversion for tribal literature and they were considered as marginalised and illiterate people. After throwing light on fictional myths in literature by researchers in the past few years, the emergence of tribal literature also came into existence. The purpose of this paper is to critically scrutinize the 'Bharath: an epic of Dungri Bhils as a Tribal Narrative.'

**Keywords:** Tribal literature, Folklore, Bhils, Adivasi, marginalized, customs and Traditions.

## Introduction:

Tribal people are found all over the globe and called by different names such as primitive, tribal, indigenous, aboriginal, natives and so on. India has been a land for numerous tribes. According to R.C. Verma, "They constitute about 8.08 percent of the total population. They would be about 6.78 crores out of the total population of 83.86 crores according to the 1991 census".

## Tribals in ancient times

Tribals are mostly familiar or called as "Adivasi" (it means the first settlers). And it is said that the history starts within the prehistoric period. In earlier times due to unavailability of the printing resources and lack of written culture, mostly their literature is found in folklore or oral tradition in order to reach the masses. As Nadeem Hasnain says, "*it has now become an established fact that the aboriginal tribes in India, in most cases, are survivors for the later Tribal Worldview prehistoric groups*".

As mentioned, tribal people belong to marginalized groups whose history is also dependent on mainstream history. The traces of tribal people and their cultures are found in different literature from ancient times. For instance, descriptions of the tribals have been found in the ancient texts such as The Ramayana and Mahabharata and Puranas by different names. In those texts they have been described as dasyus, kiratas, sabaras, and so on. In the Ramayana there has been description about a character named **Sabari**; she is the one who is offering fruits to Lord Rama. In Mahabharata we have the description of a character named

*Ekalavya*, who was a Bhil boy and who learned archery from Guru *Dronacharya* and offered his thumb as “dakshina.” The other ancient literary texts like puranas also give the description of tribal people.

### **Tribal literature in contemporary times**

Prominent scholars such as R.C. Verma, Ramachandra Guha, Meena Ramakrishna, K.S. Singh, L.P. Vidyarthi, Dilip D'souza, G.N. Devy, and others who have extensively written about the struggles of tribal people. Their literature provides valuable insights. In addition to these written works, oral traditions also serve as a rich resource for tribals. These traditions consist of songs, folktales, myths, legends, ballads, and epics, which contain historical accounts. Many writers, including G.N. Devy, Randhir Khare, Sitakanta Mahapatra, Ramanika Gupta, and others, have attempted to compile and document various narratives.

### **Tribal literature of Gujarat**

In the western parts of India in the adjoining territories of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and in territories of Khedbrahma taluka of Sabar kantha district Gujarat, the Dungri Bhil's live in strewed and isolated settlement in villages surrounded by hill tracts and forests. Bhil's are identified by different regional names in their villages. Mostly Bhil's are nomadic tribes who migrate from one place to another for their survival. Though they lost their actual locations they have managed to preserve their culture with the support of their faith.

Looking at the literature of Bhil tribes of Gujarat in the book named “*Oriental Memoirs*” by James Forbes in his third volume out of four written in 1834. We do find some traces of customs, beliefs, myths, and rituals of the tribal people of Gujarat.

In 1984 a whacking task was taken in hand by Dr. Bhagwandas Patel. By 2010 he had documented four major epics titled “Rathore Varta” which came in 1992, “Gujarat no Arelo” in 1993, “Rom Sitma ni Varta” in 1995, “Bhilo nu Bharat” in 1997. Apart from this there are numerous short oral narratives which are found in their literature. Starting from the roots there had been continuous aversion for tribal literature and only after throwing light on fictional myths in literature by researchers in the past few years, the emergence of tribal literature also came into existence.

In the preface to “*Bhilo nu Bharata* ”, Dr.Bhagvandas Patel draws our attention to the history of oral narratives in India and criticizes the fake usages of them in contemporary times. He talks of the grim reality in few of the compilations of oral narratives. He tries to bring out the root characteristics of Dungri Garasiya Bhils. With whatever reasons migrate elsewhere, they will continue their rituals, customaries, beliefs and their oral or written literature. He also adapts a few names from the original Mahabharata which in Garasiya's colloquial language are different. Their societal system is matriarchal. They even lack the appropriate interpreting apart from very little that is available. Their literature is to be seen and explored into their context and for that reason one would also require to understand their faiths, beliefs, rituals.

**Bhilo nu Bharata**: an epic of Dungri Bhils is a documentation of Dr. Bhagwandas Patel of a living folklore available in the oral narratives of Dungri Bhil's living in Khedbrahma and Danta district of Sabarkantha Gujarat.

It is notable that the chief characteristics of these narratives is the depiction of their cultures and specific traditions which have an avalanche of hidden meaning attached to it. Viewed in this context these texts are connected to their nature and costumes of living and have a hidden meaning or message attached to it.

The ethics and value system of the Bhil's are mingled in the form of these tales, revealing their world view to empathetic listeners and readers.

A critical study of this text depicts that the possessors of such rich works provide a deep inside into the customs and traditions of the Bhil tribal community of Gujarat. Prior to the invasions by the Britishers in India, tribal community was closely connected with the other communities in the country and it is believed that many dance forms have been originated by the tribal community, it is also believed that epics like Ramayana has been written by a forest dweller, as far as fiction works in India is concerned it is the fact

### **Influence of Mahabharata on Indian people.**

It is said that an epic is the poem of a century. But that is an understatement. Epics do not get written in every century, or what is written as epic, very long poems, do not necessarily acquire the status of an epic. An epic is that poem anywhere in the world and anytime in history which gets constructed at the beginning of a civilization. (Devy, G. N....)

No other literary work has left an influence on the people in the way which Mahabharata has done. In fact, no other literary works have a deep impact on the Indian psyche. "Bhilo nu Bharata" is a cultural monument which has been created by Adivasi or tribal people to carry their customs and traditions. One of the chief characteristics of folklore is transmitting their literature verbally and these tribal literature works not only transmit their work vocally but also creates memories. Their oral narratives use different themes traditionally to aid retention.

### **Characters in myth and Epic**

Their literature is not just a piece of writing but it is deeply indulged into the world of mythology. The critical study of the works takes the reader into the world of their customs and traditions where they give more important to the matriarchal society and for them there is no gap is between ancients the mortals and the world of reality and therefore mythology for them is not about the theology perhaps it for the everyday existence. Like many other oral narratives of mystical nature, "Bhilo nu Bharath" indulges the readers to a world where gods and goddesses behave as human beings, expressing human emotions as love, hatred, rage, and other passions. Here dead person, dreams, land, water, birds, animals are personified as they do speak as human beings. These narratives are not just to be considered as fabliau's but they act as a link between the ancient and the post-modern era. Their names are on the names of several gods and goddesses with their non tribal counterpart.

All the narrations began with the provocation and invocation to goddess Sharda, goddess of singing and knowledge, followed by a prayer to lord Ganesha, the god of wellbeing. Lord Ganesha also appears in the creation myths mentioned earlier as a character named Gunko. He is an offspring of Shiva and Shakti in Bhili version too. in their narratives we do find description of Khetlo, (the guardian deity of fields and farms), Chamunda, Amba, Jogani, Shiva, Lord Krishna, Narad, Krishna Avatar and Indra. They also worship some trees as well as their deceased ancestors.

### **Representation of Bhajan Varta (Folk Narratives)**

. These oral narratives are known as Bhajan Varta. Their folk songs are named 'Geetan' which are sung with the purpose of mere entertainment with manjeera and tambura. These songs are sung on special occasions like the birth of a new child, marriages, and festivals. Another form of folklore is '*Hag na Geeto*'. They have '*Vatavana na Geeto*' chanted to invoke the gods and goddesses and seek grace. They

celebrate their friendship and love with '*Gothiya na Geeto*' songs that are often sung in the bustling atmosphere of the fairs(mela). There are many songs which are recited by musical instruments and some not depending on the occasion. Their rhythm, dance and music are also an integral part of the songs. One of the most popular and interesting parts of their songs is Kikiyari. Which can be roughly translated as the chorus from onomatopoeia. Their songs can be divided into two categories. Spiritual or religious songs and songs for different occasions. Those who recite these episodes (Pankhudi) are known as sadhu. They are hardly found in one or two amongst eight to ten villages. Those who act as chorus are known as **Ragiyas**, people amongst them who say 'true' after important statements are called **Hunkariyas**, the audience is known as **Happalwala**.

Prior to the beginning of this bhajan varta; a mandap is created with white SAMA, a particular type of grass on the red coloured cloth. **Chandra, Surya, Pandavas, and Vasuki Naag** is painted on the mandap by the singers and accompanies and in these narratives a sweet revenge is taken in order to charge up the audience.

Following are the categories in which their bhajan varta(narratives) are classified:

- **Religious Ritual practices and myth reflective Narratives**
- Among these are:
  - Aravali Ni Pahad Ni Ashta, Devaliya Na Arela, Navalkh Devio ane Karmiro Aravalli Lok Ni Vahi Vato Bhilli Lokotsav , Gor Kobariya Thakor Ni Yarta , Devara Ni Varta , Onsdev Ni Varta.
- **Worship reflective discipleship reflective narratives.**
- Torirani ni Varta, Ruparani ni Varta, Halo Hura ane Satiyo Khatun, Ramdev ni Varta, Gopicand ane Bharhtari ni Varta, Lalu Arid ani Varta
- **Narratives during the matrimonial practices**
- Khutano Rajvi ane Devol, Gujuran Dhola, Maruni Nagji Dalji
- **Mortuary narratives**
- Jagde Paramar, Hapiyade Hokhli Honal Hodhi, Ramdev ni Varta, Gopicand ane Bharathari ni Varta, Hansdev ni Varta

These bhajan vartas are an integral part of their culture. Their main motto is not to depict the story but to strengthen their community beliefs and social system. One such tradition which we find in their narratives is to continue the tradition of guru and shishya through this a sacred religious atmosphere is created. After the supreme position of God, the prominent is given to the guru, they considered the guru as the Almighty. *"Bhilo nu Bharath"* illustrates the fact that Bhim, who had haughtily insulted **Balo Harguro**, Dropadi's Guru was made to eat fodder at the hand of her guru and was yoked to a carriage and was asked to draw it up to Hastinapur from the dhuni of the guru to amend his blunder. Besides that, the story of **Gadhrovasi**, Kunti 's guru, also accentuates the thrust of guru.

One of the prominent aspects in the *"Bhilo nu Bharath"* is once growth toward the spiritual path. one cannot attain salvation without surrendering one 's self in devotion. *"Bhilo nu Bharath"* emphasizes this aspect more elaborately. Kunti advises her sons, **"to embrace the path of bhakti. Sing bhajans in the accompaniment of cymbals. Pluck on your tambur."** One another occasion, she says, **"don't derelict from the path of bhakti and make your names immortal in the world. Only virtuous people can embrace bhakti, my sons. Only brave hearts can practice bhakti. It is like walking on a dagger's edge, falter a step and you 'll get pierced. Think twice before you decide, sons. If you 're really determined to practice bhakti, then only I 'll teach you, its ways."**

Almost every incident in “**Bhilo nu Bharath**” has essence of regional as well as local touch, which includes thing like flora, fauna, geographical locations which has zest of its customs and religious traditions. Even while adapting the themes of Mahabharata, we do find the magical essence of local customs.

One other characteristic of Adivasi or tribal literature is they give prominence to the matriarchal society, and this can be traced from the stories of Draupadi, Kunti, and Indrani. Even in their marriages the prime importance is given to the mother, she even has the right to keep all the assets which her daughter gets as a gift in the marriage. The name of the paternal clan continues even with marriage. After the death of the mother her ashes are kept in the house and worshiped as a Goddess named ‘**Hitdevi**.’

### Amalgamation of Customs and Traditions

These oral narratives not only depict the realm of myth but also have some fascinating fact. Bhilo nu Bharath depicts the rituals of final rite of a person Plight of Pandu, the sire of the Pandavas princes, which is like the ‘**Tales of Hansdev**’, which states that his soul was reincarnated as the black dog as Pandavas has not performed their last rite properly. He will perform a yagna called ‘**Sanetero**’. Both the above description states about the concept of heaven and hell which would be similar form their counterparts.

Another famous narrative which we find in tribal literature of Dungri Bhil is the story of Lord Krishna and his sister Subhadra. In the marriage of Shubhra Lord Krishna himself being brother wearing a gold sandal and a stick in his hand is going to ‘**Dhavelo Gadh**’ and ‘**Hastinapur**’ respectively carrying a coconut. Another description of tradition of marriage is found in the narrative of the marriage of Abhimanyu and Utra, where Bhima goes to Raja Virat to bring a marriage proposal with a condition that nine lakhs persons must attain the wedding ceremony. The tradition of Pithi in which the bride and groom will apply the paste of turmeric powder and some other herbs, that of singing of ‘**phatanas**’ aiming to tease each other’s relatives. Custom of touching ‘toran’ at the arch of the door with his sword is also mentioned in almost all the narratives.

### To conclude:

**The Dungri Bhils have developed their customs and traditions in the process of their social formation with the environment. No matter what reason they might migrate they will carry their customs and traditions along with them. Their value system, social practices, religion, attires and costumes are well described in these narratives which can easily decode it**

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