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GONDHALI TRIBE IN MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract:

According to the report of National Commission for De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, 2017, there are 36 nomadic tribes and 14 de-notified tribes in Maharashtra. In the present research paper, out of these 36 nomadic tribes 'Gondhali' tribe has been introduced historically. The present research paper is primarily based on secondary information sources. Therefore, researcher has constructed a descriptive format through semantics. Also, on the basis of secondary information, it has been concluded that the 'Gondhali' tribe is prevalent in Maharashtra as a nomadic tribe, who make a living by worshipping the Goddess and performing the 'Gondhal' religious rites. The 'Gondhali' tribe has two main sects namely Kadmarai and Renurai. Although the Gondhali tribe is included in the list of nomadic tribes of the Government of Maharashtra, the current 'Gondhali' tribe's nomadic nature is not perennial but seasonal. At the same time, 'Gondhali' tribe is a predominantly follow Hindu religion. Therefore, the present culture of the 'Gondhali' tribe is a mixture of Hindu and nomadic tribes.

Keywords: Gondhali tribe

Introduction:

According to the Renke Commission of 2008, the population of one thousand nomadic, Vimukta castes and tribes in India is around 15 crores, while the population of nomadic and Vimuktas Jatis in Maharashtra should be around one crore. Maharashtra has a total of 36 nomadic tribes and 14 de-notified tribes and over 200 sub-castes. The means of subsistence of these tribes are mainly based on animal husbandry, traditional art, divination, hunting, doing business, begging, and physical labor.

There are many groups or peoples in Maharashtra who make a living by begging in the name of gods and goddesses. These include Bhope, Aradhi, Mariawale, Vasudev, Waghya-Murali, Jogati, Gondhali. Some of these communities are living a stable life in the villages while some are constantly wandering. The present research paper focuses on the 'Gondhali' community, who is

worshippers of the Goddess of Maharashtra and perform Gondhal religious ritual.

Gondhali tribes in Maharashtra:

The Gondhali community is mainly known in Maharashtra as an artist tribe worshipping the name of the Goddess. In Maharashtra, the Gondhali community is mainly divided into two sub-castes. Such as, 'Bharadi Gondhali' and 'Gav Gondhali'. 'Bharadi Gondhali' is a people that constantly wanders from village to village and begs in the name of Goddess, while 'Gav Gondhali' is a community that has been living a stable life for generations under the auspices of village carts. Both Bharadi Gondhali and Gav Gondhali claim their own independent existence. Although the two groups have similarities in the name of 'Gondhali', they are different in the way of begging in the name of Goddess, they do not have marriage relations in any way. 'Gav Gondhali' is known as the devotee of the village goddess, while 'Bharadi Gondhali' is known as the wandering devotee of the mother.

The Bharadi Gondhali is mainly found in Marathwada and Vidarbha in Maharashtra, while the Gav Gondhali is mainly found in Western Maharashtra. Regarding where the Gondhali tribe is mainly found in India, Enthoven R. E. states that "Gondhali tribe is found in all the Central Provinces except Gujarat, but Gondhali Tribes are found in large numbers in the Central Provinces of Colaba, Satara, Khandesh and Kolhapur." Sayyad Siraj Al-Hassan has mentioned in reference to Gondhali tribe that, "Gondhali -a class of Marathi beggars, musicians and dancers, to be found in all the Districts of the Marathawada, but especially in the District of Osmanabad. They take their name from their professional dance, gondhal." R. V. Russell has reported on the Gondhali tribe, "A caste or order of wandering beggars and musicians found in the Maratha Districts of the Central Provinces and in Berar. The name is derived from the Marathi word gondharne, to make a noise."

"In Maharashtra, Gondhali community is known as an artist community. He is a devotee of Tulja Bhavani of Tuljapur and Renuka Devi of Mahur. He recounts the myths of the deities in a specific style, recalling Tulja Bhavani and Renuka with the accompaniment of *Tuntune* and *Sambal*. The turban is worn around the neck, the body is red in color and has a golden border, and the turban is adorned with a turban. He earns his living by begging on the contract of *Tuntune* and *Sambal* from house to house. Especially the festival of Dussehra has a lot of respect for Gondhali peoples. For ten days after the marriage, he appears before the Goddess every day. Sambal glorifies the Goddess by playing devotional songs."

The Peoples of Maharashtra, Anthropological Survey of India, Volume XXX, Part One states that, "The traditional occupation of this community is to sing the songs praising the goddess bhavani on the occasion of marriages. This is known as gondhal and is performed on the some auspicious day after marriage. The name Ghondhali is derived from word gondhal a dance and song number performed on the eve of a marriage ceremony among the Hindus of Satara and adjoining areas. The

Ghondhali are called to worship goddess bhavani of Tuljapur to get the blessings of the Devi for a happy and peaceful marriage. Thus, the worship of goddess Ambabai is the traditional occupation of the Ghondhali. They were a wondering community and living in the state of Maharashtra.”

The Gondhali tribe is a minority in Maharashtra, it is definitely a minority. But in each of the four or five villages, a family of the Gondhali community lives to worship the goddess. The Gazetteer issued by the Government of Maharashtra states about the Gondhali tribe, “the origin of the Gondhali tribe is unknown. The names of men and women of Gondhali tribe are similar to those of Marathas. The surnames of the Gondhali peoples are Bakre, Bhandre, Dhupal, Dungu, Gaikwad, Ghatekar, Guradkar, Jadhav, Jagtap, Kate, Kolhatkar, Marathe, Maherkar, Palaskar, Renke, Shinde, Supalkar, Tarte, Tite, Tipke and Ubale. People who have the same surname do not marry each other. Their dialect is Marathi. Renurai and Kadamarai are two divisions found in the Gondhali tribe but they do not intermarry. The social status of the Gondhali tribe is considered to be lower than that of the Kunbi community. The Gondhali tribe worships the Tuljabhavani Goddess of Tuljapur, while the Gondhali tribe worships all the local deities and observes all the customs, traditions and fasts of Hinduism. The Gondhali tribe has a traditional caste panchayat to settle social and family disputes, and the head of the caste panchayat is called Patil or Choughula.”

“In many of the castes of both the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka, as 'Kulachar' the practice of Gondhal is still prevalent. Gondhal is a religious ritual which is performed on the occasion of marriage and other ceremonies. The Goddess is praised and worshiped through this Gondhal program. Also, Gondhal is created on the occasion of ritual worship. This ritual is performed by the people of Gondhali caste. In this Gondhali community two sects like Kadmarai and Renurai are seen who have been serving God for generations.” Enthoven R. E has stated about Gondhali tribe, “Gondhali state that, the founder of their caste were the sage jamdgni and his spouse renuka, and that they came into the Deccan two or three hundred years ago from Mahur and Tuljapur in the Nizam's Territory, which are their original place of residence.”

Gondhali is a devotee of Renukamata and Tulja Bhavani. It is said to have originated from sage Jamadagni and Renukamata. They believe that Mahur is their origin. For this, they believe their story in 'Renukamahatmya'. They believe that the sages Jamadagni and Renukamata came to the Deccan from the Nizam's territory of Mahur and Tuljapur two to three hundred years ago. (Formerly Tuljapur was included in Karnataka province) Gondhali also says that Mahurgad in present day Maharashtra is his place of origin.

Regarding sects of Gondhali tribe, a nomadic scholar Ramnath Chavan says, “Renurai Gondhali is considered to be the rightful worshiper of Renuka while Kadamrai is considered to be the worshiper of Tuljabhavani. Although both the goddesses are the same, the Gondhalis have divided them according to their sub-divisions. The Gondhalis of both sub-divisions worship both

Tuljabhavani and Renukadevi, but both Kadamrai and Renurai consider themselves independent and separate. These two used to have such a strong sense of superiority that there was no intermarry relations between them.”

“In the monarchy, The Gondhalis were living under the protection of the kings. They were appointed to unravel the secrets of the enemy or to spy on them. They were devotees of the goddess, therefore they could get easily access anywhere and they spy on enemy groups. They were rewarded for their spying. The language of the fingerprints was considered to be his artistic capital in espionage. At that time, they had a place of honor in the army.” However, in later times, when the monarchy came to an end, due to lack of royal patronage, these people wandered from village to village as a means of subsistence. “In Maharashtra, Gondhal is spread among all castes and tribes, even in Rajputana and Mewada, the glory of Chandi devotion has been there since before the 12th century. Like Aradhi, Davari, Gondhali in Maharashtra Charan and Charani are famous in Rajputana and Mewada, they have done the work of public awareness, espionage and messenger.” This helps to make it clear that the nomadic tribes who depended on their traditional skills for their livelihood had an important place in the monarchical period, as it was on the basis of these skills that the nomadic tribes helped the kings and emperors during the war.

Enthoven R. E stated that, “Worship of Goddess Bhavani of Tuljapur was widespread in Deccan at the beginning of 17th century and this worship was mainly prevalent in the then Maratha community. The songs sung by the Gondhali tribe were very popular.” Also Manohar Laxman Varadpande has expressed his opinion regarding Gondhali tribe that, “The singing and dancing in front of the God is called Gondhal and people who do Gondhal are called Gondhali.”

During the Shivaji Maharaja period many caste were famous for worship, public awareness, enlightenment, divination, entertainment, espionage, messaging etc. such as Waghe-Murali, Aradhi, Davari, Makadwale, Sapgarudi, Nandibalwale, Madari, Katputliwale, Gondhali etc. “Even Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, under the inspiration of Bhavani, accomplished the great task of establishing Swarajya. Even during the Shivaji Maharaja period, Gondhalies did the work of saying heroic ‘Powada’. In this way the Gondhal had national significance. Maharashtra will never forget the debt of these Gondhali people who contributed to the establishment of Swarajya.” During the Shivaji Maharaja period, Gondhali caste was known not only for worshiping Goddess but also for gathering secret information from enemy groups and exchanging messages.

Gondhali caste is considered to be an important caste in Shivaji Maharaja period. The Gondhali caste seems to have gained special importance during the Shivaji Maharaja period. This is because of the role played by Gondhali peoples in the establishment of Swarajya. During the Shivaji Maharaja period, the Gondhali tribe was famous for presenting ‘Povada’, encouraging the establishment of Swarajya and narrating epics. Since the means of subsistence of the Gondhali tribe

were of worship and recreational nature, the Gondhali people were entrusted with a special function during the time of Shivaji Maharaj. During the Shivaji Maharaja period, Gondhali people used to roam everywhere to entertain the society with their art. As the Gondhali caste was popular as a recreational caste, the Gondhali people could easily enter the enemy's group and along with the recreational activities, the Gondhali people could convey necessary information from the enemy group to Shivaji Maharaj, thus giving special importance to the Gondhali tribe during Shiva period.

“Even though the Gondhalis belong to the nomadic tribes, the Gondhalis do not roam the villages with their families like other nomads. Only a few people have to wander around because of the mess. ‘Gondhali’ is considered to be an important part of the Gavgada. In the rural areas, respect is given to the Gurav community who worship the deity in the temple as well as to the Gondhalis and has access to all public places of Hindus.”

Ananda Lal has said about Gondhali tribe, “Gondhali is a community in Maharashtra, India. Their occupation is to sing songs of the Goddesses of Maharashtra. Their songs are usually the mythological stories of their Gods. They use *sambal*, a set of drums tied to their neck and rested on their thighs to bring rhythm to their songs.”

Gondhali community is a Hindu society. He celebrates Hindu festivals. Even though he is a devotee of Tulja Bhavani and Renuke, images or masks of Hindu deities can be seen in their temples. Gondhali is respected in every festival of Hindus. In the festivals of Dussehra, Diwali, Rangpanchami, Akshay Tritiya, Holi and fair of Gavdevata, the festival is not celebrated without playing the *sambal* and *tuntune*. In Maharashtra, Gondhal is a common practice in almost all Hindu society. In this Gondhal, mainly mythology is presented. Instruments are used, and people who perform the ritual of gondhal are called gondhali.

Conclusion:

The Gondhali tribe is known in Maharashtra as a nomadic tribe who make a living by worshipping the Goddess. Although the Gondhali tribe is included in the list of nomadic tribes of the Government of Maharashtra, the current Gondhali tribe's nomadic nature is not perennial but seasonal. At the same time, as the Gondhali tribe is a predominantly Hindu religion, the culture of the Gondhali tribe is a mixture of Hinduism and the culture of nomadic tribes.

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