

Acculturation and Local Dominance: A Study in the Context of Rabaris of Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

A person or group can become more or less accustomed to particular beliefs and practises of a culture that is not their own through the process of cultural contact and exchange known as acculturation. When one group moves from one place to another, this process becomes functional. In such a circumstance, it is inevitable that immigrant groups will progressively acquire cultural aspects of the host culture while retaining parts of their own. This illustrates the extent of their integration into a new community and the preservation of their distinct culture. Acculturation has been a social phenomenon for several migrant populations in India. The Rabaris were originally a nomadic tribe prominently inhabiting the regions of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Punjab in India. They were engaged in camel and cattle herding. The origin of Rabaris is often traced from Iran via Afghanistan and Baluchistan. It is believed that they migrated to India in the 4th century. The belief of Rabaris about their origin takes a mythological turn and reflects the actual impact of adaptation of cultural traits of Hinduism, which is inherent in their belief and overall culture. The Rabaris of Gavviyar Village in Surat are a small settled group engaged in pastoral pursuits. This paper attempts to highlight the extent of acculturation among Rabaris and the impact of the local dominance on their lives.

Keywords: acculturation, local dominance, change, migration

I. INTRODUCTION

The term “acculturation” was coined by John Wesley Powell in 1980 in his book entitled “On the Study of Indian Languages”, in which he defined it as the process of psychological changes brought on by cross-cultural imitation. The attitudes and behaviours of people from one culture change when they interact with people from another, usually the dominant or host culture. Acculturation is the term for this process. The two cultures will inevitably converge to some extent as they interact and affect one another in various ways. Assimilation, on the other hand, defines the process by which people from the minority culture gradually merge in with those from the dominant culture until they fully accept it. The primary emphasis of acculturation is the group level.

The most widely used definition of acculturation is “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. . . . under this definition acculturation is to be distinguished from . . . assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation” (Redfield et.al., 1936)

Another definition of acculturation given by the Social Science Research Council in 1954 was culture change brought about by the fusion of two or more separate cultural systems. Acculturative change can result from direct cultural transmission, from non-cultural causes like ecological or demographic change brought on by an invading culture, it can happen gradually like internal adjustments brought on by acceptance of alien traits or patterns, or it can be a reactive adaptation of traditional ways of life.

The term psychological acculturation was used by Graves in 1967 to describe how an individual participating in a scenario of cultural interaction can experience changes as a result of both the external culture and the evolving culture of which they are a part.

Acculturation is the method we believe to be the most generic and thus the optimum. The term acculturation is preferred over assimilation because it recognises the reciprocity of the affects that different cultural groups have on one another during acculturation. The fact that acculturation involves many different processes and outcomes and that groups and individuals within them choose various coping mechanisms for the acculturation experience, only one of which may be assimilation, is a second factor. Additionally, the consequences of these various acculturation strategies may differ.

People may respond differently to their shifting experiences because situational factors might change the experience and trajectory of acculturation. Although anthropologists first suggested the idea of acculturation as a group-

level process (Redfield et al., 1936), early discussions of the idea also acknowledged it as an individual-level event. (Thurnwald, 1932).

The Rabaris were originally a nomadic tribe prominently inhabiting the regions of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Punjab in India. They were engaged in camel and cattle herding. The origin of Rabaris is often traced from Iran via Afghanistan and Baluchistan. It is believed that they migrated to India in the 4th century. The Rabaris of Gavviyar Village in Surat are a small settled group engaged in pastoral pursuits.

Gaviyar village is located in Chorasi Block of Surat in Gujarat. As per census report of 2011 total population of village is 2585 with the male population being 1743 and female population being 842. With total population of 1300 as per field sources, this village is a multi-caste village consisting of Koli Patel, Yadav, Rabbari, Bharwad and Rathod.

	Caste	Total Population
1.	Koli Patel	650
2.	Yadav	260
3.	Rabbari	195
4.	Bharwad	65
5.	Rathod	130

Table 1: Caste-wise population distribution in Gavviyar Village (Source- Fieldwork)

The population of the Gavviyar village are involved in mixed economic activities. About 25% of the population is involved in business and service sector (Fieldwork). The Patels who are numerically more in the village are engaged in service and business sector. They possess majority of land and hence they simultaneously are involved in agricultural activities. Crops of rice and sugarcane are mainly grown in the village.

Yadav are the migrant group. These migrants don not have their own land and often work on day-to-day basis in the village. Bharwad are the pastoral group who are mainly engaged in rearing of cattle in the village. Rathod are the native of the village. They work as labourer in nearby industries and on agricultural fields of the village as per need. The Rabaris of the village are primarily engaged in cattle rearing.

Rationale of the Study

This study was initiated as the transition of Rabaris from a nomadic community to a settled one during their course of migration from Rajasthan to Gujarat gives indication of the culture change that the community has gone through. The main aim of the present study is to determine whether the Rabaris have adopted the cultural elements of other Hindu castes of Gujarat and to study the impact of local dominance which have acted as a catalyst for acculturation.

Hypothesis

The culture of Rabaris has changed as they migrated from Rajasthan to Gujarat due to acculturation. The impact of local dominance is reflected in the adopted cultural elements, and there is a considerable impact of local dominance which regulates the social behaviour of Rabaris in the village.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The conventional approach to assessing how one group of people's culture has changed as a result of exposure to another group is to first try to determine as closely as possible what the former group's culture was like before coming into touch with the latter. After that, comparisons between the pre-contact culture and the modified culture can be done to determine the areas and intensities of the change. Reconstructing the pre-contact culture, or the baseline culture, frequently must rely largely on scant historical evidence, which is insufficient.

Comparing the modified culture of the group undergoing acculturation with that of the group it is moving towards can help reduce the difficulties of understanding cultural contact and change. The absence of a thorough, impartial portrayal of the Patel and Rabaris group is one of the key challenges. In this study, both approaches will be used in an effort to maximise their respective strengths and minimize their shortcomings.

Primary data were collected during fieldwork in which technique of observation, interview and schedule were employed. The sample size out of total numerated population of 1300 and 257 households in the Gavviyar village was 25 households of the Rabbaris and 25 households of the dominant Patel caste in the village. The method of purposive sampling was used for the selection of households.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study revealed that the community of Rabaris are recognised in both categories of Scheduled Tribe and OBC by the Government of India. The criteria used to designate a group as a scheduled tribe are signs of primitive characteristics, distinctive culture, geographic isolation, reluctance to interact with the larger population, and

backwardness. Although not explicitly stated in the Constitution, this standard has gained widespread acceptance. People from the Rabari, Bharvad, and Charan communities who lived in huts—tiny, mud-built hutments—in the Gujarati regions of Gir, Barda, and Alech received ST designation from the national government in October 1956. Except these Rabbari communities all other Rabaris living in North-Western India or elsewhere are recognised under OBC category.

The Rabaris of Gujarat has migrated from Rajasthan. And they are mainly settled in the area of Jamnagar, Mehsana and Saurashtra in the state of Gujarat. The Rabbaris of Gavviyar village in Surat has migrated from North Gujarat. They are not the natives of this village. They were the nomads who were given land in this village out of compassion of a Patel Sarpanch who helped them to get settled in the village. This happened approximately 35 years ago. The Rabbaris of the village have come from Mehsana. There were no Rabbaris in Southern Gujarat. But in search of employment and education many individuals from the community have moved to all the parts of the State.

The Rabbaris relates themselves with other pastoral caste of the India and believe them to be the part of their extended community. They are often referred as the Rewari or the Desai in Gujarat, Dewasi in Rajasthan and they believe the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh are also their extended part. Nomadic societies survive by their ability to adapt to their physical and cultural environment. According to Frater, in the past, subgroups broke off and moved to new niches when one environmental niche could no longer support the number of herders and herds. Rabaris maintained varied levels of interaction and mutual influence with their neighbours, from whom they inherited aspects of their comfort both physically and culturally. They simultaneously worked hard to preserve their unique cultural character.

Origin, Acculturation and Genesis of a Mythical Image of Rabaris

The scant account of historians about origin of Rabaris establishes their migration from Iran via Afghanistan and Baluchistan. These nomadic cattle and camel herders were nomads and they did not possess any land. In search of green pastures for their cattle to graze on they moved from one place to another. In earlier centuries there were no borders so migration of diverse population from Middle Asia via land route was a very common occurrence. In 14th century they migrated from Rajasthan to Northern Gujarat.

The majority of Rabari, who comprise 133 distinct subcastes, practise Hinduism. According to their creation myth they were created by Goddess (Parvati). According to one version of the narrative, she washed Shiva's sweat and dust while he meditated and created a camel out of the dirt (in another version, he creates the first camel for her as an amusement). But because it kept escaping, Parvati made Sambad, the first Rabari, to take care of it. The Rabari, who perceive themselves as the herds' custodians rather than their owners, thus regard keeping cattle as a sacred occupation. The Rabari also think of themselves as Parvati's chosen offspring. This is the reason that there is a clan among Rabaris named as Sambad and they are considered as the first clan and hence are highly revered in the community. Unsurprisingly given their bond with the Mother Goddess, Rabari social structure is matriarchal, with women conducting most of their business affairs and managing their villages, while men are in charge of the animal herds that form the only true Rabari assets.

This myth now has a geographical limitation as it does not extend beyond Rajasthan. The Rabbaris of Gujarat trace their ancestry from Dwarkadhish or Lord Krishna. Their response statement toward questions regarding their origin in association with the myth of Lord Shiva and Parvati was negligible. All the respondents were not aware of this myth and in the place of this they shared their own belief that they were the descendants of the lord Krishna or Dwarkadhish. Dwarkadhish is the local name given to the Lord Krishna in Gujarat. There is a very famous temple in Gujarat. Dwarka is considered as one of the four pilgrimage centre of Hindus. So, the local dominance of Gujarati belief in the Lord Krishna has changed their belief in the origin myth from Lord Shiva and Parvati. This is also the reason that they believe that all pastoral groups are extension of their community. Be it the Bharwad of Gujarat or the Yadav of the Uttar Pradesh who were originally a pastoral group. The Rabaris of Rajasthan believe in the story of creation from Lord Shiva and Parvati and they have various versions of this story.

In Gujarat most caste has their own society in which members of their caste and in that society that caste group is numerically preponderant. Like nearly 4 km away from Gavviyar village there is Rabbari society in which 200 families live of the same community. The term 'society' is used in a layman's term in Gujarat. It is used like community.

The Rabaris are very compassionate toward their own members. If a member of Rabbari community of a different village doesn't have enough to survive on then even in that case the members of Rabari community from different village are supposed to help that person out. This is the strength of their communal solidarity. They give shelter and other facilities to even strangers of their own community if they feel the need is genuine. And there has been several such cases in the village. Hence, they believe themselves to be very generous and kind.

Among Rabaris children are told about their ancestors. The children of a household know the names of the ancestors up to five generation. This has become a part of their enculturation process in which they are taught about their community and traditions and Gujarati culture. Rabbari communities has their own devi sthan (Deity Sacred Place) either at Gujarat or Rajasthan. They visit this holy place where their clan deity resides once every year.

During the time of election, the Rabbari solidarity reflects because in such times personal disputes are not considered important. If there is a representative from a Rabari family who is a candidate for sarpanch then no matter how many enemies he has in his community, all members will only vote for their own community. There is kind of caste council consisting of five members. This group solves day to day disputes of the Rabari people. The agawan or the

compensation is fixed in terms of providing graze to the cattle of the involved family, or providing grains to the birds or giving donation to the temple.

At present there is a very peaceful and cordial relation between the locally dominant caste of Patels and Rabaris. Rabaris believe that they owe everything to the Patel because it was their ancestors who gave them shelter in the village and helped them to get settled. This indebtedness overpowers every other emotion for Rabaris and is reflected in the level of their respect for the Patels.

Rabari men wear white clothes and women used to wear black clothes. There was a scientific reason behind the choice of colour of their day-to-day clothes. The white colour can be seen even from very far. Earlier when rabaris were nomads they used to be in the field during day time grazing their cattle. So, for finding these men the choice of clothes used to help people to recognise them for very far away. Similarly, as they were nomads moving one place from to another in search of green pastures for their cattle in the desert of Rajasthan, so it was natural that they did not find much water sources. As black clothes hide the dirt hence women chose to wear black as they did not have enough water to wash their clothes on daily basis. But now they relate black clothes with the clothes of the widow which is an adapted cultural element.

Patanvadi Rabaris of North Gujarat used a floral pattern in embroidery for the first time which is a direct cultural adaptation of Gujarati tradition as they used to do that for the trade purpose. This pattern of adaptation illustrates long term, culture contact and integration into surrounding societies, including urban societies. A different pattern of adaptation to regional style was followed.

IV. CONCLUSION

The impact of acculturation on Rabaris are evident from the changed elements of their material as well as non-material culture. Clothing, Embroidery, Belief and enculturation were the key elements that were briefly discussed above to show the contemporary lifestyle of Rabaris and the traits that they have acquired over a period of time due to cultural contact with other communities. In course of their migration they acquired cultural traits, both abstract and concrete, from their neighbouring communities. The impact of local dominance can be seen in the cultural aspects that have been absorbed, and there is a significant effect of local dominance that regulates Rabaris' social behaviour in the village in terms of reverence shown to members of other caste.

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