



SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND TRIBAL ARCHITECTURE: LITERATURE REVIEW OF BHILS TRIBE IN BANASKANTHA

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Abstract:

In India, tribal people are mostly referred as Adivasis. They have been the most vulnerable community in India. Tribals are backward and poor and are mostly devoid of the common facilities like health, education etc. When the majority of the community of the world kept pace with progress of the world there were communities still living in peace with nature with their traditional values, customs and beliefs. The tribal communities in India have developed their identity in close vicinity to the natural resources around which they have developed their cultural traditions, economy, social life, religious myths and techniques of production. Over time, they have built a symbiotic relationship with the local environment and the nature surrounding them. For them land is not merely a source of livelihood rather a representation of their cultural identity and existence. Hence, there is a lot to study and understand from the way tribal people interact with the land and surrounding and the influence of their culture on their lifestyle, architecture and settlement pattern.

This study focuses on studying the tribal community called Bhils residing in the Banaskantha district of Gujarat. The Bhils are known to be excellent archers coupled with in-depth knowledge about their local geography. The study is qualitative in nature and mostly theoretical and based on literature review and direct visit to the site. The study was conducted over a period of five months from August 2021 to December 2021.

Keywords: Tribal Architecture, Settlement Pattern, Bhils, Vernacular Architecture, Culture.

Introduction:

a. History of tribal settlements in India

Tribal settlements, villages and towns are the three main components of India's social formation. However, due to some common characteristics, it is not easy to draw a clear distinction between tribal settlements and

villages, and between villages and towns. In some parts of the country there are large tribal villages that are not much different from multicastric non-tribal villages.

A tribe consists of people and families who have common yet unique culture, tradition, beliefs, social and political identity. They are traditional division of society and may be connected with each other through blood or through religion, economy or language.

According to the Article 46 of the Indian Constitution, "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation."

b. Gujarat and its tribes

Located in West India, Gujarat is a state that has a diverse landscape, vibrant culture, a wide range of cuisines, and a stable economy. Education, tourism, tradition, and the people of this historically significant Western Indian state are well-known. Gujarat is home to a variety of tribal populations over its length and width.

Gujarat is home to five million tribal people who live on the slopes of the Aravalli, Vindhya's western flank of Satpura, and the northern sides of the Sahyadri, which includes sections of Vadodara, Surat, Sabarkantha, Broch, Banaskantha, and Panchmahals. Siddhi, Rabari, Bhils, Ahirs, and Bharwads are the region's major tribes. Each sect has its own history, customs, habitats, and cultural ethos.

c. Bhils, one of the oldest and large spread tribes of Gujarat

BhilsThe Bhils are considered as one of the oldest tribes in India and are one of the major tribes in Gujarat. In the earlier times they even ruled certain parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Malwa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. They are a cross-section of the great Munda race and a wild tribe of India. The Bhil tribe is a part of Dravidian tribes found in the West Indies and may belong to the Australo-Melane tribe group. The language they speak has Dravidian origin.

Location:

The Bhil tribe is spread over central and western India in the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra states. Few villages of the tribe can be found in Northern and Eastern parts of the country. Maximum Bhil population is in Madhya Pradesh. While in Gujarat they are spread over in Banaskantha district.

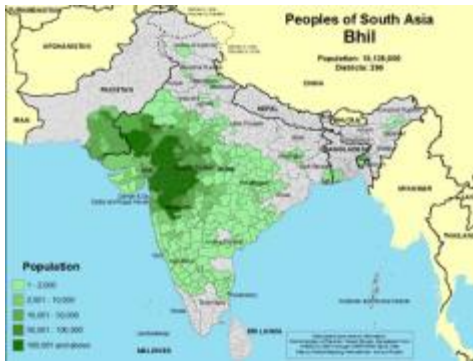


Figure 1 Distribution of Bhil Population in India
Source Census

Largest States
(only 15 largest shown)

Madhya Pradesh
5,893,000
Maharashtra
2,561,000
Tripura
3,100
Chhattisgarh
1,000
Uttar Pradesh
500

Gujarat
4,159,000
Dadra and Nagar Haveli
11,000
Delhi
1,800
Telangana
600
Jammu and Kashmir
300

Rajasthan
4,033,000
Karnataka
6,200
Odisha
1,300
Jharkhand
600
Uttarakhand
200

Figure 2 Population of Bhils in India
Source Census

Population: According to the census of 2001, the total population of Bhils in India is 12,705,753. They account for almost 10% of India's tribal population and are the rank 2nd in tribal population in India, first being Gond. The population of Bhils in Madhya Pradesh is highest and from time and again there have been demands to create a Bhil Pradesh, separate from Madhya Pradesh. Some historical records show proof of such a state pre-independence.

Religion: 97% of the Bhils are Hindus. Most of their traditional practices have a great influence of Hinduism. Yet, the folks and mythological stories of the Bhil largely describe the tribe as an outcast of Hindu religion and outsiders of the Hindu community.

Bhils worship nature as God and their religion is animistic in nature. They are superstitious and strongly believe in supernatural forces. The Bhils recognize the gods and goddesses of nature and worship the various gods of the sky, trees, water and rain. Fire is considered sacred and totem animals include horses, tigers, wild boars, peacocks, and sparrows. Animal sacrifice is a common practice of the Bhil family.

Language

Throughout Bhili's geographic distribution, there are about 36 dialects, and its pronunciation varies by region. Bhili is based on Gujarati, but dialects of Bhili gradually merge into more widely spoken languages like Marathi in the southeast and Rajasthani in the northwest.

Wagdi is a dialect spoken in Rajasthan, Dungri in Gujarat and Mavchiin Maharashtra. The Dialects tend to change within a radius of 35-40km and Bhils from one region might have difficulty in understanding the language of Bhil from other region. The main language in Bhili is Gujarati which an Indo-Aryan language. Thus, Bhils have a different language compared to other tribes in India, who have Dravidian origin.

Bhili speakers have sometimes been treated as speaking major languages as their mother tongue, such as Marathi or Gujarati, making it difficult to estimate how many speakers the language has.

Research objective

The study revolves around two core objectives:

- a. To understand the living conditions of tribal community residing in India
- b. To understand the settlement pattern of tribal communities and factors affecting it

Research question

How to tribal live and what are the factors that affect settlement pattern in the tribal communities in India?

Research methodology

The study uses qualitative methodology to understand the settlement pattern through books, literature available, interview with the locals and personal observation done during the site visit.

The data is collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include responses from the residents of Bhil community in Banaskantha and government employees of the district. The secondary data sources include books, national and international journals, case studies and government report.

Review of Literature:

Based on the requirement of the study, we have reviewed national and international journals, book, and other online materials as part of the literature review. We have tried to understand several literatures to understand the recent development in the media as a discipline.

“Tribal communities have a much deeper and a live sense of nature, living organisms, climate and material”:
Veteran architect Narendra Dingle on architecture as an art – Maharashtra

There are 16 tribes in Nagaland, each with a different architectural tradition. Each of them efficiently responded to climate issues, linked with cultural needs, and created a training matrix for daily life. Like all traditional architecture, Naga's construction has evolved after centuries of trial and error. Inevitably, it deals directly with the local environment. Local forests and the earth make up the majority of building materials. And the house is shaped to withstand the cold and rain. The resulting lightweight architecture fits well into the earthquake-prone region of the northeast.

Sitting on the giant rocks of Parakanyur is an example of Elagiri's own traditional architecture, which has been passed down for generations. Govindasamy's dwelling is a testament to the tribal culture of Yelagiri Hills due to its unique structural design and construction techniques. Coolie's Govinda Sammy doesn't know when his house was built. "This has been our home for decades," he added. Tribal huts follow a set pattern and take 60 days to complete, says Lamasami, a villager in Parakanyur.

Research Findings

The entire way of life including the culture, tradition, livelihood, religious believes, social interactions and others of the tribal communities residing in India is developed respecting the nature around them. A symbiotic relation has been established between the people and the surrounding nature. Land is a symbol of their culture, their identity and their believes and not just a source of income. The Bhil Community in Banaskantha district in Gujarat also share a similar relation with nature and land.

Living Conditions and Social Organization:

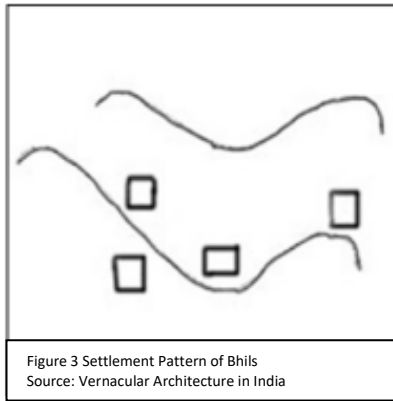
Bhils live in small houses in the outskirts of towns and very close to the forests. They have their own settlement and live together in groups. A fertile and cultivable land is one of the prime requirements for the community while choosing a location to settle down. All the settlements consist of group of huts standing alone in the middle of cultivated land. Traditionally they prefer living in small scattered hamlets occupied by families belonging to same clan.

They follow a hereditary monarchy system. The person from village's dominant or founding clan becomes the headman of the entire hamlet and it position passes on in the same family from generation to generation. The headman has multiple names like the panch, vasavo, tadavi, naik, mukhi, or others depending upon the locality and the regional language. Almost all the social and religious functions happen in the presence of the headman.

The Bhils form social groups on the basis of kinship, territory, culture contact, religious tenets and other factors. The social organization is characterised based on such social groups. Bhils do not believe in joint families and often live in nuclear families – husband, wife and unmarried children. They are very patriarchal in nature and high male dominance can be seen. The females do not have any right in the parental property. The males during their wedding are given a separate piece of land and house to start their own family and live independently. Some high status families also exist. Such families are usually compound and polygamous in nature and very limited.

Settlement Pattern

The tribe is very diverse and independent in nature. Each family enjoys its freedom and has a separate house and piece of cultivable land. This had led to a very unique habitat and settlement pattern. The settlement pattern of the tribe is highly dependent on the topography of the region, which in case of Banaskantha is mix of plains and low mountains surrounded with forest. It is also dependent upon social circumstances, occupation and ethnicity of the tribe.



The size of settlement in studied for this research was considerably small – around 100 houses spread across the few acres of land. The settlement as shown in the figure above was mostly linear and scattered. This depicts the non-dependence of families on each other. The houses are built in a close proximity to the land and at a considerable distance from each other. The settlement pattern of tribal areas is unconsciously planned and they keep growing according to the functional aspect. Thus, to understand the settlement pattern, function is to be studied as “function is an analogy

between social life and organic life” (Mandal, 2001). In case of Bhils, one major function to be considered is the occupation- agriculture. The people are engaged throughout the day in agricultural activities like ploughing, sowing, watering, harvesting of the land and spend a very limited amount of time at home relaxing. There is a very close and personal relation between the farm and the home. During the main season of agriculture, the people usually prefer to build a temporary shade and live in the farm only.

It can also be observed that rapid changes are coming in the settlement patterns with change in occupation, increase in literacy and active response of the tribes to social factors. These changes arise from the development paradigm and the new innovations, so that the growth in the field of social, economic and culture is experienced (Alit, 2004; Chiri and Giovagnorio, 2012).

The Pal and the Phala– The house



Figure 4 A Bhil Residence
Source- Tribes of India

Bhils live in small house made up of mud with a sloppy roof. Families of same clan or community live in small and dispersed hamlets known as phala. Several hamlets together form a village or pal. The village may be a multi-clan community.

Design of a Phala

Material

The design of a phala is very simple and so it the construction. The walls are constructed with local and natural materials like wood, mud, bamboo and cow dung. The roofs are sloppy and made from grass, thatch, leaves with the support of wood.

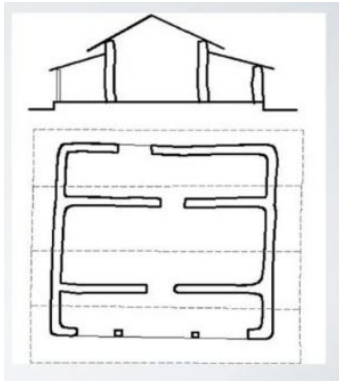
Plan

Figure 5 Plan of a Bhil Residence
Source- Tribes of India

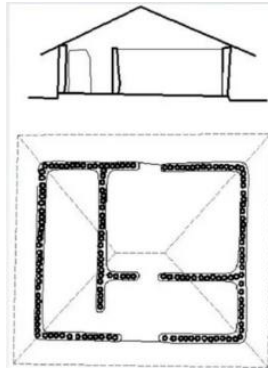


Figure 6 Spatial Organization of Bhil Residence
Source- Tribes of India

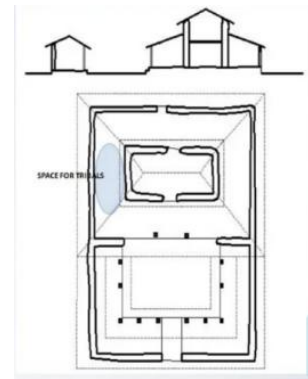


Figure 7 Open, Semi-open spaces of Bhil Residence
Source- Tribes of India

Bhil house is usually located at a height near some streams and forest, arranged in group or in rows. The house is generally rectangular in shape consisting of a spacious room and attic. A partition usually separates the living and the cooking space.

A Bhil house is enclosed from all the sides to ensure complete protection from animals and wildlife. They have only one opening- the entrance and do not have any windows. The space is designed to be utilized by both the family and the cattle. The semi open – open to sky or half wall area is. Semi open to open spaces are linearly arranged. Some of the houses are two-storeyed as well.

A bamboo fence often surrounds individual huts, again for protection.

Decorative Elements

The wall in the front of the house if decorated with traditional drawings like a men with bows and arrows, animals, birds, trees. They usually depict the relation of human with nature and also the courage of the men.

Sleeping mats, mats to sit on the floor are made from bamboo while clay is used to make utensils and other household things. Mud and earthenware jars and baskets are used to store things.



Figure 8 Drawings on the walls of Bhil Residence
Source- Tribes of India

The organization of a pal

A pal or a village is formed when group of huts or phalas come together. A Pal is usually made up of families belonging to a common clan. If a pal is multi-clan, marriages happen in the pal only. It is only in the case of uni-clan pals that marriages outside the pal are considered. Community interests are taken care of by each member of the pal. They address all the concerns and share the problems. Yet, in multi-clan pal, problems are solved, community living is practised but not at the cost of self-identity.

Close connection with nature:

The Bhils pay particular attention to the nature of the clan's presidency. There is no doubt that animals, trees and plants were born before humans were born. Early tribal people had atypical relationships with a variety of animals, trees, and plants (nature). Tribal attitudes towards nature are emotional rather than physical, and are very different from civilized ones. The relationship with nature is completely emotional and noble. It's like a mother and child. They do not consider nature to be theirs. They consider it their care. They are not thinking about their control over their lands or forests. You consider yourself part of it. Therefore, they do not accept sovereignty over nature. Their basic system is a historical basic system. This historical originality is evidence that they are the sons of the nature of this earth in which they live. Trees-Plants and animals that are useful and useful in their lives, they should be respected and respected as members of the family, and should always be valued as their patron saint and worthy of worship.



Figure 9 Bhil Residences in close connection with nature



Figure 10 Bhil Residences in close connection with nature

Conclusion:

The overall understanding of the study conducted bring us to the reality that the tribal community share closeness to the nature and its nurture. They have a unique style of living a symbiotic lifestyle couple with closeness with the community they belong. This study has provided a deep understanding of the tribal communities, their culture, tradition, arts, mores and their existence with the nature as true self. An effort should be made to protect and preserve their art and architecture for a better sustainable tomorrow for these communities in India.

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