CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SAHARIYA TRIBE

The Sahariya: A Primitive Tribe

Upto the Fourth Five Year Plan some common schemes were introduced for tribal development. But the achievement was not very significant in relation to the needs for developing of a particular tribal population. Considering backwardness of the tribal group and their culture, Government of India took further need-based action from the Fifth Plan onwards, and major thrust was laid on intensive care for the development of the tribal areas and tribal groups, in India. This strategy for integrated development led to the launching of the tribal sub-plan concept in the Fifth plan period.

Of the 677 lakh (1991 census) scheduled tribe population in the country, considering the socio-economic levels of different tribal groups and on the basis of reports of the Dhebar Commission and study team on Tribal Development Programmes (P. Shilu Ao team), it was suggested to give more emphasis on the extremely backward tribal groups, which were given a name of ‘Primitive Group of Tribe” as coined by P. Shilu Ao team. A workshop on primitive tribal communities was organized by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in January, 1975. Another discussion was held in 1976. Thereafter, a detailed guideline was issued for identification of ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’. Three criteria have been followed for identification such as: (i) pre-agricultural level of technology; (ii) a stagnant or diminishing population. On the basis of these criteria different State Governments indentified and prepared the names of the ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’ and Ministry of Home Affairs have declared 52 scheduled tribe groups as ‘Primitive tribal Groups’. In Madhya Pradesh five tribes such as the Abujamarias, Baigas, Bharias, Hill Korbas and Shariyas have been selected as ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’. The Sahariya tribe has also been declared as ‘Primitive Tribal Group’ in Rajasthan State. It was decided to prepare separate project for paying special attention to these tribes.
Family-oriented schemes in the field of agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, forestry, cottage and small industry, were implemented to the ‘Primitive Tribal Group’ like the Sahariyas to cross the poverty line. In addition to previous list of 52 ‘primitive Tribal Groups’ additional 22 ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’ have been included afterwards. Later Kamar tribe from Madhya Pradesh was so far taken into consideration. Considering the major objectives in the tribal development during the Sixth Plan, special care has been taken by introducing some specific anti-poverty programmes for the tribal families who are by and large engaged in poor economic state.

The Sahariya is a little known numerically dominant tribe of Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh. They are mainly found in the districts of Shivpuri, Guna, Vidisha, Morena of Madhya Pradesh and Baran of Rajasthan.

The Sahariyas are mostly found in the historically famous dacoit-infested Chambal region of north Madhya Pradesh. The neighbouring people of the area were also afraid of dacoits. Though there were some cases of dacoity at nearby multi-ethnic villages but the poor Sahariyas were free from terror of Chambal dacoits. Of course, dacoits take shelter occasionally in the interior villages of Sahariya and obviously a few Sahariyas were suspected to be the informants of the dacoit gang.

The Chambal region lies on the northern part of Madhya Pradesh. This territory is lying between 23° 30’ to 26° 49’ N and 76° 6’ to 79° 38’ E with an area of 17,020 square miles. This region is surrounded by the states of Rajasthan in the west and Uttar Pradesh in the north-east. The southern and eastern parts of Chambal region are covered by the plains of Malwa and Bundelkhand regions respectively. North and north-west region is protected by the impenetrable barriers of the mountain and forest, while the southern and eastern regions are plains and easily accessible. Major part of the area is covered by thick forest and hillocks, which provide shelter to the tribals like the Bhil, sahariya, and Kharia. The Sahariya terrain, in general, is characterized by the hills and forests. Nearly half of contiguous Sahariya belt is covered by forest.
The Sahariyas were used to survive by hunting or gathering food even up to the early part of this century. Most of the people in the plains are non-tribals and they attract the Sahariyas for their settled way of life and have affordable opportunities to them for social interaction with the neighbouring communities. Ecological isolation also influenced the Sahariyas to remain as cultural isolates.

**Sahariyas and Their Habitat**

The Sahariya is an important numerically dominant primitive tribe of famous dacoit-horrified area of Chambal region. They are the autochthones of this region with a population of about three lakhs and mainly inhabited in the districts of Morena, Shivpuri, Guna, Gwalior and Vidisha of Madhya Pradesh and Baran district of Rajasthan. Other tribes like the Bhil, Mina, Kharia inhabiting in this area are very less in number.

The Chambal region falls under the broad geographical region of Udaipur-Gwalior region, which covers an area of about 1,67,872 kilometres. It comprises mostly the eastern part of Rajasthan, north west part of Madhya Pradesh which is contiguous to Malwa and Bundelkhand and a small part of Gujarat. From here starts the highlands of India with the Aravallis forming the core nad the Chambal-Singh basin forming the north-east flanks overlooking the Upper Ganga plain.

**Historical Background of the Area**

The area was settled by the pre-Aryan people such as the Bhils and its subgroups, as is evident by the relics of Virat (Modern Bairat in Jaipur), the capital of the Matsyas and the Push-Karanya (Ajmer) which is regarded as the oldest non-Aryan (Daitya Dundha) settlement and capital. The later period saw the rise of several *janapadas* and dynasties which were periodically under the great national empires of the Magadha, Kushan and the Gupta dynastries. The heroic Rajputs were able to maintain their strongholds, though they were periodically subdued by one another amongst themselves. Even the Mughals could hold their suzerainty for about two centuries by alliance or war, though, Mewar could retain its independence for long. With the decline of Mughal power (1709 AD) the regional chiefs like the Jats
became independent and Marathas emerged as a significant power and became more active in the regional politics. Till India became independent, these states served as a wedge against nationalistic movements and even at the time of independence these states had been given option to decide about their states. Gwalior and Dholpur along with two other states were merged to be amalgamated into Madhya Pradesh in 1956.

The Cultural Setting

Besides the physical framework, it leads to distinguish two regions of first order, the Aravalli uplands and the Chambal-Sindh basin which exhibit distinct spatial pattern of cultural features.

Most of the districts of the Chambal-Sindh region have lower density than the national average. The growth of population during 60 years (1901-1961) has been relatively low (53.3 per cent) compared to the national average (78.1 per cent). Probably due to low fertility of land, forest and undulating landscape people might have not been attracted to this area. This area has become a den for the famous Chambal dacoits. The villages in the region are larger in size both in area and population with significant sub regional variation. This pattern can be understood in the background of its natural conditions, historical setting and socio-economic features. In many villages there are remains of old forts or garhis with surrounding walls. Social and cultural factors have visible impact on the village morphology. Often the old site is crowded and congested, but small hamlets belonging to scheduled tribes and scheduled castes people or artisan castes or landless labourers stand apart from the main village site. This phenomenon occurs here in an accentuated form because of the feudal system which has continued for centuries. During recent decades a change is noticeable, particularly in the area where security problem is not serious.

Physical Features

The Chambal drainage system is older than the Yamuna. The plain area between the ravines of the Chambal and the Yamuna and between the Chambal
and the Kunjwari is under cultivation. Before the formation of the ravines, these tracts might also have been under cultivation, but today the whole tract is a wasteland and the cultivation is constantly shifting with the headward erosion of the ravines. The Kota plain formed by the Chambal and its tributaries, the Kali, Sindh and the Parbati, varies in length from 215 to 275 kilometres. The master stream of the region is the Chambal, which originates from Janpao spur of the Vindhyas near Mhow. The Sindh has its own drainage system which occupies the north east part of the region. Alluvial soils are important soil groups of the region.

**Physiography**

Physiographically, the Chambal-Sindh basin can be divided into:

1. **Middle Chambal basin**, which contains (i) Kota upland, (ii) Kota plain, and (iii) Morena plateau.

2. **Lower Chambal basin**, which includes (i) Morena plain, (ii) Karauli plateau, and (iii) Bharatpur plain.

3. **Sindh basin**, which comprises (i) Gwalior plain, and (ii) Shivpuri plateau.

   The area covers the districts of Morena, Gwalior and Shivpuri and acts as a wedge between the Chambal basin and Bundelkhand. Historically, the region is a very important area. Topographically, it is composed of lowlands and uplands which have a clear dividing line in southern part of Gwalior district. Sindh and its tributaries form a typical dendritic pattern. It has good soil and comparatively large area covered with forest.

   The Sahariyas mostly inhabit the territory which comes under the middle Chambat and Sindh basins. These areas are covered with deep forest and undulating uplands.

**Topography**

The Sahariya inhabited area lies at a junction of the Malwa plateau in the
south and the vast Gangetic plain in the north-east known as Bundelkhand region. Topographically, it falls into four divisions, the hilly tract in the west, the plateau in the south, the north plain and the eastern plain. The Sahariyas are mainly inhabited in the hilly tract and south and central plateau areas. Major part of Chambal region is covered by plateau area. The general height of the hilly tract is about 1000 feet above mean sea level. The rivers and streams have a northerly course to join river Chambal and Parvati while to the south of this tract the stream waters flow to the river Sindh.

**Geology**

Geomorphologically, the area presents very simple features. The hilly tracts in the western part are made up of sandstone which offers greater resistance to erosion. Due to long period of exposure to sub-aerial condition, the area of south-east Chambal region has been peneplained to a low level ground. Large area of the south of the district Guna is covered by Deccan traps and extended northward as the laterite.

**Flora**

The vegetation is of dry and deciduous variety. This is due to the nature of soil and partly due to the climatic condition of the region. The soil, particularly in the forested areas, is generally hard and shallow, while the average rainfall is only 77cm. So thick vegetation is not noticeable.

Nearly one-fifth of the area is covered by forests, but almost 70 percent of the forest is of poor quality and thin. The principal species of trees found in this area are Sernal (SalmaJia malaboricum), Karch (Sterculia ureusi), Bhilwa (Semecarpus anocardium), Babool (Acaric arbica), Khair (A. catechu), Ber (Ficus bengalensis), Jamun (Eugenic jamlocene), Mohua (Bassia latifolia), Pipal (Ficus religiosa), Gumhar (Gmeline arborea), Jamun (Syzygium cumins), Arjun or Kohe (Terminalia arjune), Kusum (Schleichere olecero), Sheesham (Dalbergia sissoo), Achar (Buchanania latifolia), Tendu (Diospyrus tomentose), Gurian (Lannee caromandelica), and Salai (Baswellia serrate). During the rainy season, grass and sedges are abundant.
Fauna

This region contains a large variety of wild animals, especially in the area covered by forests, shrubs and grasses. Among the animals commonly found are black buck, spotted deer, blue bull, panther, tiger, sloth bear, sambhar, jackal, langur monkey, jungle pig, wolf, and snakes. Wild games are mostly found in the reserve forest of Shivpuri and western part of the Guna and Shivpuri and southern part of Morena districts. Besides, a variety of birds such as the grey partridge, snipe, pheasant and peacock are found.

Climate

The climate varies with the natural divisions. The area experiences extremes of temperature during summers and winters. The district falls into the region of monsoon climate with well-known peculiarity of a marked rainy season during the late summer. The hot weather begins in March and continues till the onset of the monsoon in June. The mean temperature usually reaches the maximum in May with 43°C and hot wind blows during summer. In the winter the temperature often falls below normal. In the hilly tract the temperature often falls below normal. In the hilly tract the temperature is excessive in the hot season. The climate of this region is on the whole dry. The mean relative humidity is as low as 15 per cent in the summer.

The People

India, is a land of about 68 million (1991 census) including the tribal population, which is 8.1 per cent of the total population of the country. Out of total tribal population of the country, Madhya Pradesh comprises 15.4 million (23.3 per cent) of the tribal population. On the basis of numerical strength (1981 census) the Sahariyas comprise 2.3 per cent of state population and occupy the sixth rank in descending order out of 60 tribal groups who are living in the states. The Sahariyas are mostly concentrated in five districts of north Madhya Pradesh, where 86 per cent of their total population is inhabited. The remaining 14 per cent of their population is inhabited. The remaining 14 per cent of their population is scattered outside the core region. The sahariya is one of the tribes in the state whose population is about three
lakhs and is predominantly settled in Chambal area. This area is inhabited by 79 per cent of the Sahariyas and 21 per cent by other tribal population like the Bhil, Mina, Kheria, and Korku.

The Sahariyas are very close to natural habitat and their culture is influenced by its ecological and social surroundings. They are submissive, innocent, mild and shy. They like to keep aloof and isolated. They are not aggressive like the Bhils. Col. Tod (1914) has mentioned that Sahariya is the first settler of this region and claimed superiority over the Bhils.

Sahariyas at different places are known as Sour, Sonr, Sahariya, Seharia, Soria, and Sor. In Bundelkhand area the Sahariyas are called as Rawat, which is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Raja-duta’ (king’s messenger) or ‘Raja-putra’ (King’s son). Sahariyas of Malwa region are generally called as Sor or Sonr. The Sahariyas were also known as ‘Khuntia’ in the western belt of the region. Now they use ‘Saharia’ and ‘Rout’ as their surnames. The Sahariyas of eastern belt prefer to suffix ‘Rout’ as their surname instead of Sahariya. The women are referred as ‘Seharni’.

**Etymology**

About the etymology of Sahariya, various versions have been depicted. The name Sahariya means inhabitants of the jungle. The word derived from the Arabic word ‘Sahariya’ means a jungle. Some explain that the Sahariyas are the original inhabitants of desert land of Rajasthan and the word ‘Sahariya’ has been derived from the Persian work ‘Sehra’ which means desert. According to Sahariya informants, the word originated from ‘Saria’, meaning wandering. For their unsettled life and roaming in the jungles as collectors and shifting cultivators, they were known as ‘Saria’ which later transferred into ‘Sahariya’. Another version relates the name Sahariya with the word ‘Sehera’, a region between Chambal and the Yamuna. This region was inhabited by the ‘Sehera’ tribe and under the pressure of Muslim invasions; they migrated towards the jungle areas of western part. Later on the ‘Sehera’ was known as Sahariya. The Sahariyas are famous for good honey
collection. The local people say that the name Sahariya has been coined from the word ‘Sahed’ which means honey, since they used to collect honey regularly.

**Origin of the Tribe**

Crooke (1896) in the book Tribes and Castes of the N.W. Provinces and Oudh mentioned that the Sahara name is derived from the Arabic Sahara, meaning ‘a wilderness’. It may perhaps be conjectured that the name is connected with that of the Savaras, the name given by Sanskrit writers to the aggregate of the Kolarian of Dravidian tribes who dwelt in the highlands of Central India and included races like the Kol, Munda, Kurku, Bhil, Bhuiya and their kinsfolk. Some account of them will be formed in connection with the Soiris.

Sahariyas in 1881 census appeared as ‘Aboriginals’, ‘Animist’ in 1901, 1911 and 1921, thereafter a ‘tribal’. In 1901, the Sahariyas were described as a quiet and primitive tribe with many exogamous subdivisions, which however, are said to be totemistic and not social in origin. Again the Dhebar Commission declared them as primitive tribe in 1976. The Sahariyas of the present time are a distinct tribe. It is as endogamous group. Inter-community marriages among the Sahariyas are almost uncommon. Sahariyas of interior jungle area and plain area have no restrictions as far as marriage alliances are concerned. There are several territorial divisions operating as subgroups among the Sahariyas. Sahariyas of one tract usually do not marry the Sahariyas of other tract. Most of the marriage connections were held within a radius of about 15 kilometres. These villages interact with each other for economic, social and political function.

**Myth of Origin**

Regarding the origin of the Sahariya nothing much is known. While Brahma was creating the universe, he constructed a platform where all the people may sit. At the centre of the platform he asked one Sahariya to sit. As others came they began to sit and gradually pushed the Sahariya to an extreme corner. When Brahma returned, he saw the Sahariya at one corner, so he asked him, how he reached there. In reply he was told that others had pushed the Sahariya. Annoyed Brahma
said that the Sahariya was misfit and unable to live together with others. That is how Sahariya came to stay in forest.

**Migration**

The Sahariyas do not know from where they have come. The villagers said that Sahariya has been there since long and do not recollect their migration. According to Venkatachar (1932), Sahariya have perhaps migrated to India from the west. The sudden climatic changes resulted in the migration of the animals to more favoured regions and the hunters who hunted them also followed accordingly. These people largely lived on small game and supplemented their diet by gathering the forest products and digging up edible roots with hoes. The inhabitants are now represented by the Baiga, Kol, Sahariya, Bhil tribes of central India. In view of their antiquity and prolonged stay from time immemorial, tribes have imbibed to the place where they are found. In the past, the Sahariya village was inhabited entirely by the Sahariya people.

**Habitat**

Sahariyas are spread over five districts of Madhya Pradesh and in one district of Rajasthan. Topographically, the western part of territory is covered with mountain valleys, while plains in the south-east part. Sahariya villages are generally situated on hilly areas. Some of the Sahariya villages are located on valley sites. The houses are constructed in rows, one facing the other, forming almost a rectangular pattern. Sahariya settlements are constructed in a square or rectangular shape with one or two entrances; however, houses are also constructed separately without any pattern. A Sahariya settlement is known as Sahrana.

The Sahariyas have a definite pattern of settlement from others. The Sahariyas usually live in a cluster of huts on a hillock. In course of time, due to multiethnic settlements good number of Sahariyas have settled in plains and lived with other caste people in a separate hamlet known as sahrana. Each settlement has one or two entrances with a common sitting platform with hexagonal shape called as bangla. The village headman (Patel) makes his house in the middle of the settlement.
The Village

A typical Sahariya village is set against the background of hills and jungles with a stream nearby. The hills or highlands remain green with plants and other shrubs during the rainy season, but dry during the summer. The forest around the Sahariya settlement was pretty thick in the past but due to selling of firewood, unreasonable cutting of trees and shrubs, the forest has become less in size and its density.

Traditionally, the Sahariya houses are built on the slopes of the hillocks. The old people recall that in their childhood days there were vast stretches of land for cultivation but due to immigration, excessive encroachment and population, explosion cultivable land is not so easily available at present.

Sahariyas always like to settle nearer to water source and forests to get sufficient supply of wild roots, tubers fruits and vegetables. The site for settlements should be free from supernatural evil spirits.

Every village possesses a pasture land (Parua) outside the village settlement for grazing the cattle. Besides private wells, a few public wells are used by all members of the community. The dalits have a separate well. The Sahariyas are allowed to use the well of upper caste Hindus.

Sahariyas mostly inhabit at the hilly jungle area rather than the plains. Population of the Sahariyas is more in the villages in the western parts of the territory, than the number of Sahariya households in the villages of south-east parts. The Sahariyas live in separate hamlets in multi-ethnic villages. Sometimes, they also have two or more hamlets in a single village.

Usually, a Sahariya village is comprised of the members of the same clan. In course of time, people of other clans settled and they now live together. These people of other clans are mostly related. A few households belonging to other tribal groups like the Bhil, Lodha, Mina or other castes settled separately in the Sahariya village. Usually, a village contains 20-25 households. Since there is not much
cultivable land available in an area, the size of the settlement remains limited to adjust with the ecology.

A Sahrana means where the Sahariya families live in a cluster. Besides a geographical unit, it denotes a social as well as an economic unit. At the time of marriage and on festive occasions the people of a Saharana come forward freely and participate. Members of a Sahrana cooperate with each other and reciprocate at different occasions. A community hut, known as Bungla is executed in the centre of the settlement. This Bungla has round-shaped roof covered with tiles and open from all sides. This is the place where the Sahariyas sit together and discuss social matters. It is also used to accommodate the guests. The traditional Bungla is absent among the Sahariyas of eastern part of the area. In the multiethnic villages the Sahariya hamlet is referred to as Sahrana only, whereas isolated and mono-ethnic villages of the Sahariya are recognized by the name of the dominant clan.

Dwelling

Houses are very simple and constructed on a plain surface. Before selecting a site, the magician-cum-priest (jankar) is consulted for construction of a house. If it looks to be inauspicious, then the Sahariya would, immediately change the site and select a new plot. Before starting the work, haldi (turmeric), a copper coin and a coconut are put into a pit dug near the dwelling house. The work is generally started either on Sunday or Monday and lord ‘Shankar’ is worshipped.

The house (tapra) of Sahariyas is small and rectangular in shape, the walls are raised with bamboo knitted plates between the wooden pillars and walls are plastered with black soil and cow-dung. The roofs are of two-slope types, low and covered with grass or hand-made tiles (khapra). No windows are provided. Only one opening door provides ventilation to the house. The absence of plinth keeps the floor damp. A house is divided into two parts. One part is used for storage and the other part is utilized for cooking, sleeping and grinding purposes. Domestic animals like cow, bullock, goat, sheep, pigs and hen, are kept either at the backside of the hut or in one corner of the hut. A small open space in front a house is used as courtyard. In
every house there is a wooden platform (dhanchi), just at the entrance to keep the pitchers and firewood. The walls of the huts are very often decorated with lime. There is a common courtyard in every village. The houses are built up around the village courtyard or open ground. This courtyard is used for celebration of marriage and other ceremonies. A corner of a family courtyard is used for bathing, though usually they take bath at tank, well or a streamlet. A corner of the common room is used as fireplace. The Sahariya hut in a multi-ethnic village is not very spacious. Due to the shortage of homestead land and population growth, the new huts are constructed small in size, while the huts in remote areas are much bigger and spacious. The materials used for construction of hut depend on ecology also. The huts of Sahariyas in western part have stone walls with flat roofs made of small stone-slabs, whereas the huts of the Sahariyas in eastern part have mud walls with tiled roofs. Similarly, the Sahariyas who live in jungle area construct their huts out of bamboo and grass thatched roofs. A separate hut is constructed for the newly married couple nearby, as soon as possible.

The Sahariyas are poor. They possess a few cots (Khatiya), some utensils, iron implements, scanty clothes, light bedding and small granaries. The granaries are box type made up of mud with small opening at bottom and entrance at the top. These granaries (kothi) are used to keep wheat and grains. Each one contains 2-3 quintals of grains. Bamboo baskets (tukri) of different shapes and sizes are found in every house for daily use. One grinding stone is an essential item for a Sahariya. As weapons, the Sahariyas use the bolt spear, gun, axe and cutter.

Language

The most widely spoken language is Hindi with its dialectal variations like Brij Bhasha, Malwii and Bundelkhandi. During the period of 14th to 16th century a form of Hindi developed which is known is Brij Bhasha. Popularly Brij Bahasha is referred to as Khariboli in this region. It is a mixture of Rajasthani, Marathi, Urdu and local dialects of the tribes.
The Bundelkhandi is the dialect of eastern Chambal area, and Malwii is spoken in southern part. Though the tribals such as the Sahariya, Bhil and Mina speak local Hindi they have their own languages also. The Sahariyas who still inhabit the hilly-jungle area speak Sahariya language.

It is a common saying that dialects change after every ten kos, that is, 30 kilometres. The language is influenced by the Tawarghari of Morena. The variation is mainly based on phonetics. Devanagari script, however is used by the tribal and non-tribal people.

**Ethnic Environment**

In the Sahariya belt, a number of castes and communities are living together since last centuries. Out of two million total populations in this belt, 20 per cent are scheduled caste and six per cent are scheduled tribe respectively. About 50 communities are inhabiting this area along with the Sahariyas and have established various social and economic linkages with each other. Number of caste groups are residing in this region including the high castes like the Brahmin, Rajput, Jat and Bania the intermediate or the servicing castes mainly the Kirrar, Thakur, Teli, Mali, Nai, Kumbhar, Kachchl, Darzi, Ahir, Badai, Garasiya and Guzar, and the lower castes such as the Dhobi, Chamar, Mochi, Koli, Mahar, Dhanuk, Balmiki/Methar and Dhakar. The lower castes are considered by the upper castes as untouchables. The other religious groups like the Jain, Sikh and Muslims are also residing in neighbouring villages. People of different linguistic groups such as Panjabi, Marathi and Bengali have also settled in this area. Among the tribals, the Mina, Bhil, Bhilala and Kharia are though less in number, residing in the neighbouring areas. The Sahariyas, who are numerically dominant, are found almost in each village and live in separate hamlet with the other castes milieu.

So far no bio-anthropological work has been done among the Sahariyas. So it is difficult to establish ethnic relation with other tribe. However, in terms of morphology the Sahariya shows a close resemblance to the Bhils. Apparently, they are of medium stature with skin colour varying from brown to dark, they have thick...
growth of straight and dark hair with scanty moustache and beard. A few fair complexioned women are not uncommon among them.

**Food and Drink**

The wheat and jowar bread are the staple food of the Sahariyas. They also eat millet. They eat rice mainly during festivals. Their economic condition is so pitiable that during rainy season most of them cannot afford two square meals and depend on mahua and other forest produces to satisfy their hunger. Along with bread a little vegetable curry or dal is also taken. They occasionally take meat of goat, pig and deer. They hunt jungle fowl, bear, hare and also catch fish. Communal hunts are also organized during festivals and leisure period. The quality and quantity of food taken by a family, of course, depend on its economic status. There are seasonal variations as far as consumption of food is concerned. Usually, they take meals thrice a day, that is, morning, noon and night when they work hard in the fields. Scarcity starts from July to September when they have no work and have only one meal a day.

The Sahariyas are non-vegetarians. However, they do not eat the wild animals. At the time of marriage, only well-to-do families prepare meat. The preparation of meat is simple and cooked with chillies and oil. Sometimes small animals are roasted and eaten. Their daily diet is vegetarian. They use mustard oil or mahua oil (gulli) as cooking medium. Poor people collect wild leafy vegetables from the jungle. They also produce vegetables in the kitchen garden. During summer season fruits, roots and tubers are collected from forest and also consumed in a large quantity. The important fruits are mango, achar, guava, jamun, tendu, bel and ber. They use pulses like gram, maur and bean. Among the spices, turmeric (haldi), chilies, garlic, onions and salt are common.

Besides wheat bread (roti), they prepare a ball shaped wheat cake (bati) without sweet. A bati could be preserved for a week or so. In the village, wheat or jowar flour is prepared with the help of grinding stone (janta). Usually, Sahariyas do not consume milk. Only small children and ill persons are given milk. They rarely take ghee and lassi. Ceremonial diet consists of puri or chapatties, curry and sweets like
laddu. Sweet rice is a special item of a festive menu. Tea is occasionally taken by a few of them. The Sahariyas are addicted to smoking of bidi, chilam, ganja and cigarettes. They are much addicted to liquor. Liquor (mad/masala) is prepared from mahua flowers which are collected in the summer season. Liquor is distilled from the molasses too. All their social ceremonies and rituals are performed with liquor. Liquor is not only consumed as a drink but it has also religious values. Priest needs liquor for the village deities. Women also drink liquor during festivals and ceremonies. For the preparation of mahua liquor, the women prepare and dry a mixture of intoxicated bark, seeds and roots of some jungle plants.

**Dress and Ornaments**

The dress of the Sahariya men is simple. They require a small dhoti, saloako (shirt) and a turban (safa). Chappals are used rarely. The women wear colourful dress and ornaments. In general, dress and garments vary with the age and sex. It is customary for man to wear turban (safa). Whenever a man goes for marriage, he must have a turban - a symbol of status. The poor, who cannot afford to wear a full length turban (5 to 6 yards), use short length turban known as feta. Colour of the turban varies from white to yellow. Sahariyas of younger generation prefer to wear trouser and shirt. The Sahariyas of multi-ethnic villages put on dhoti in the style of the neighbouring caste Hindus. In the past, they used to wear dhoti above the knees. In addition to general dress, a man uses a chadar during winter. The dress of children is very scanty. Children up to the age of five year remain without clothes, Only a loincloth (langoti) is used by grown up boys. A grown up boy is provided upper garments at the time of marriage ceremony and festivals.

The dress of women mainly consists of a long skirt (lugda/ghaghara), upper garments (angi/choli/saluk) and sari. Use of choli is not common to young girls. The dress of a Sahariya woman is comparable to Rajasthani woman. But the Sahariyas who live in eastern and southern part of Chambal region wear sari instead of ghaghara. Usually, women wear ghaghara of red colour which covers half of the body up to the level of knees. A ghaghara requires cloth from eight to ten yards long and it has many folds. Two sets of ghaghara are sufficient for a woman. Grown
up girls wear small size ghaghara and choli. 'Choli' keeps half portion of the breast exposed. Nowadays, women have started wearing blouse which covers the body fairly well. The widow wears the same kind of dress as worn by other married women. Widows do not wear glass/silver bangles.

The ceremonial dresses of the bride and bridegroom are different. The bride wears a ghaghara of yellow colour which is more decorative and costly. The women of eastern part wear sari which happens to be of yellow colour.

The Sahariya women in general, use ornaments made of silver, brass, bronze, aluminum and glass while rich women use the ornaments made up of gold. Though Sahariya women are fond of ornaments, their economic condition not being so well, most of the women wear glass bangles (churi). Sahariya women decorate themselves with ornaments and flowers on the occasion of marriage and festivals. Women wear heavy rings on each arm (choora) and leg (bichia). The Sahariya women of remote area can be distinguished from the women of multi-ethnic villages by the number of bangles on their legs. The women of eastern and southern area do not wear such type of heavy bangles. Women of western part adorn themselves with Rajasthani style, whereas the women of Vidisha district adorn themselves with Malwa style. Unmarried girls generally do not put on the special type of bangles (kora) as it has also become symbolic of the married women. They also wear nose ring, nose pin, ear ring, finger ring and necklace of different forms and size. Women purchase these ornaments from the weekly markets, fairs and from vendors.

Tattooing is one of the traditional arts of adorning women in tribal area. Every Sahariya woman should have tattoo marks on her body. This is done by the Muslim as well as Sahariya women. The Pona Sahariyas (Sahariya from Rajasthan) are very efficient in this art. They believe that tattoo marks enhance beauty. With the help of a needle, tattoo marks are made on the body by using coloured juice of beeja wood. The Sahariya women permanently decorate their body by tattooing. Every married woman must have tattoo marks of different designs. Instead of tattooing all over the body, women of younger generation prefer tattoo mark on their arms only. Women decorate their hands and legs by applying mehendi (henna).
Personal Hygiene

Forest dwelling Sahariyas keep long hair. They do not shave regularly. The Sahariya men and women neither take regular bath, nor wash their clothes regularly because sufficient water is not available in the locality. Water scarcity is more acute during summer. For a bucket of water, they have to walk long distances. They are not very careful about their personal hygiene. Women go out for nature’s call early in the morning in the open fields. They use water after defecation. Children take bath irregularly. They go to village tank for washing their clothes and to bathe.

Occupation

At present, their principal occupation is agricultural labour as well as cultivation. They work as labourers in forest, road construction, and in farms. Their economy is from hand to mouth. The poor Sahariyas cannot manage to have even two square meals a day. Cultivation and agricultural labour are the main source of earning livelihood for them. Besides these, they also depend on forest produces. Selling of firewood is one of the main secondary sources of income for them.

Economic structure of the Sahariyas of unexposed area is mainly based on traditional system. They still depend on forest and practice the shifting cultivation. Of course, some of them have started cultivation. They also depend on subsidiary occupation like forest labour, hunting, fishing and gathering. They do not get the services of the artisan castes and menials. They depend on the services of menials of other neighbouring villages or go to weekly market to receive similar services. The barber, blacksmith, and potter are paid in cash for the services they render. Sahariyas of multiethnic villages have shifted their economy from the traditional system of barter to modern money economy.

Land

The Sahariyas are mostly landless. Few of them, however, possess small quantity of unfertile land. Those who had land in the past, either sold it or mortgaged their land to the landlords. Some of them could not refund the borrowed money and
ultimately their land was confiscated by the money lender. Economic condition of the Sahariyas are very pitiable. However, Government allotted land to the landless Sahariyas as a part of economic upliftment programme which has accelerated socio-economic transformation through settled cultivation. They earn their livelihood by engaging themselves as labour in agriculture, road construction and forest department. The Sahariyas earn a substantial portion of their income through collection of minor forest produces like, mahua, resin, gum, honey, chirongi, wax, tendu leaves and fruits. Average landholding per family is 2-5 bighas which is not sufficient for even a small family.

Land is a most valuable property and it provides social status too. A few Sahariyas have more than 10 acres of land. The area inhabited by the sahariya is either covered by forest or unfertile land with poor quality of soil, which is not suitable for good cultivation. The plots are so fragmented that a sahariya cannot look after the crops properly and often the crops are destroyed by the wild animals.

Soil

Soil types differ from one place to another. Roughly land may be divided into two types, that are wetland and dryland. Major portion of Sahariyas’ land is covered by dryland.

Crops

The main crops produced by the Sahariyas are wheat, jowar, makka (maize), tilli. Since the area is characterized by dry upland, only the kharif crops are produced by the people. Monsoon crops like paddy are produced in limited scale. The soil, where the Sahariyas inhabit is favourable to the crops like jowar, bajra and maize. During dry season, they also grow pulses, grams and millets (bajra). Recently they have started producing cash crops like dhania (coriander), jira, (cumin) til (sesame).

Yield per acre is not high because the land is not fertile and irrigation system is not yet introduced. The Sahariyas use cow-dung as manure. Cow-dung are collected and preserved in a pit for a year and used before ploughing. A few sahariya farmers
have also introduced chemical fertilizers and improved varieties of seeds for more yield.

Since the Sahariyas are inhabited in the hilly region and their cultivable lands are uneven, canal irrigation is not possible. However, wherever possible, the land is irrigated through tanks and wells by the indigenous water lifting apparatus known as charas.

**Agricultural Implements**

The cultivators including the Sahariyas use the simple agricultural implements that they have been accustomed to using in the past. Most of the agricultural implements are of indigenous type. Wooden implements are prepared by themselves. Of course, iron implements are made by the blacksmith (lohar) or purchased from the local markets. The main implements are plough (hal), harrow (bakker), kharpi, kudali, shovel, sickle, axe and winnowing fan. The plough is made of babul wood. The leveler is made of wood. Sickle is used for harvest as well as to clean the weeds. Besides above, spade, hoe and sickle are also used by them.

Grains are gradually stored in earthen containers made of clay mixed with hay. Such containers are known as kothi and capacity is between 2-10 quintals. Bamboo baskets are also used to store grains. Sahariyas use neem leaves as pesticides.

**Economic Calendar**

Sahariyas remain busy in cultivation throughout the year except summer. Agriculture season starts from middle of June, when the rain sets in and continues till the end of April, when the wheat harvesting work is over. After the first shower of rains, the land is ploughed twice to level the soil. Seeds of maize and jowar are sown after the second shower. The field requires to be cleaned off the weeds for better crops. The sowing process is done through broadcasting.

The maize crops ripe after three months of sowing and the harvest starts in the month of September and October. After threshing, the maize is stored in the
house. Some auspicious day is fixed for sowing, in consultation with priest. For the rabi crops, the fields are ploughed and leveled in the month of October and sow the seeds of wheat. The field is irrigated twice at an interval of 15 days. Harvest starts in the month of March and threshing is done by bullocks. The Sahariyas of eastern and southern areas take wheat as principle food whereas the Sahariyas of west take jowar and maize as staple food.

**Subsidiary Occupation**

The Sahariyas cannot solely depend on cultivation. Except few, most of them have marginal land for cultivation. Moreover, yield from the land is not sufficient for livelihood. They compel to supplement their primary occupation with some subsidiary occupation.

**Labourer**

The Sahariyas are mainly engaged as agricultural labour. Besides, they also work in forest, road construction and in stone field (khadan) as casual as well as on contract basis. The payment is made mostly on daily wage basis either in cash or in kind (wheat). The labourer takes advance payment in cash or kind before contract. There were instances where some kind of serfdom had forced several generations of Sahariyas to work to pay back the dues. The system of this kind of bonded labour is known as halibate system. Though bonded system of labour is now banned some Sahariyas are still engaged on monthly basis in the houses of landowners.

**Gathering of Fruits and Herbs**

The collection of minor forest products is also an important subsidiary occupation of the Sahariyas. The Sahariya territory is covered with forest and large number of fruit bearing trees. Collection of mahua flowers, tendu leaves, chirongi, other fruits, roots and tubers also subsidizes their income. They engage themselves in the collection of mahua flowers during the months of March and April. Mahua flowers are also used as food. Besides the food, these flowers are distilled and used as mahua spirits. Children who are engaged in the collection of mahua flowers and
tendu leaves earn good amount of money by selling these forest produces to the traders.

**Wood cutting and collection**

Another subsidiary work is the cutting and selling of fuel wood. When they are free from farm labour and are in need of money, both men and women engage themselves in this vocation. On headload of firewood is allowed to the Sahariya by the forest department. The women of most of the Sahariya villages collect the firewood tied in a bundle (bhari) and sell it to the nearby villages in the weekly market.

The Sahariyas are mostly settled near the forest and abundant wood is available around their locality. Whenever they need money, they go to the forest and bring head-load of bundle of firewood for selling. A headload wood costs Rs.10 to 12 only. Both men and women are engaged in selling of wood at nearby villages. Usually they are allowed to cut headload of fuel wood from the forest department. A family on an average earns Rs 60 to 100 per month by selling the fuel wood.

**Honey Collection**

The Sahariyas are good climbers and collect honey (sahed) from forest trees. They are such experts in honey collection that they can even climb up a tall tree and drive away the bees by smoking and squeeze out the honey from comb with their bare hands. Their children take honey as nutritious food.

**Hunting**

The Sahariyas are not expert hunters like the Bhils. It is surprising to know that they do not use the bow and arrow for hunting. Hunting is one of the traditional recreations of the tribe and partly meets their hunger. In the past, these people exclusively depended on forest. Hunting also plays an important role in their economy. They used the lithic hand axe even during the early part of this century. Nowadays, of course, the Sahariyas use gun for hunting. Besides, they use iron axe
(kural) whistle (chhiti), drum (bajna), and spear (ballob) as additional weapons. Animals are also caught as games by using traps (phanda) of different nets (jal) and baskets. Pits are dug in certain places from where these games are likely to pass. They are forced to pass through the pits by means of sudden drum beating. Dogs are employed to chase the games. Sudden attack on the game is their only device to catch animals. Jungle boars are mainly caught by using bomb (gola) which is covered with wheat paste (atta) and tempt the prey as bait. Usually they hunt the animals like hiran (deer), chital, suar (pig), chikara, samar, khargos (rabbit), hola, etc, during summer months. Hares are mainly caught by means of timki (a kind of sound making instrument), torch light and spear. Birds are trapped by using the traps known as tokli karko, solita karko and by shooting pellet through qullu (a kind of indigenous catapult). The prime hunter gets the skin of the game as an extra share.

**Fishing**

Fishing is yet another source of subsidiary occupation. Men, women and even children are equally interested in fishing. They do not know the use of net. However, a few Sahariyas of Morena district have been trained by the block and supplied net for fishing. Slowly but surely the Sahariyas are understanding commercial value of fishing. They generally apply crude techniques and simple way of fishing. They catch fish by using powder of chelha, golhar or bel bark on the surface of the water. This powder has mild poison and fish become restless. The Sahariyas beat them and take them out. During summer, when the water level of pools decreases they catch fish by drying the pool.

**Domestication**

Domestication is another subsidiary source of income. Cows, bullocks, goats, sheep, pigs and fowl are reared by Sahariyas. The poor Sahariyas cannot domesticate cattle, except the pigs and fowl. Cattle are considered as wealth of a family. The animals are reared for emergency purposes such as illness, marriage and death rites. So they can be pawned whenever money is needed. The cattle are
considered as assets. Sahariya boys work as graziers and are called as bardia or genware.

**Division of Labour**

Both Sahariya men and women work jointly to earn their livelihood. There is no hard and fast rule to distinguish the works on the basis of sex. However, generally women do the light work. Certain works are tabooed, such as the women do not plough the field, climb the tree, cut big trees and drive the cart. In economic pursuits Sahariya women seem to take an even more active part than men. It is considered that they have to attend all the feminine and domestic duties.

**Income and Expenditure**

Since the people are illiterate, it is difficult for them to estimate their budget. The Sahariyas know very little about what they earn and what they consume. Often, they forget the quantity of grain actually produced. They have also the tendency to minimize the income and exaggerate their expenses. Probably they expect that the government will provide them loan to compensate the deficit. All these factors contribute to this disparity in figures of production and consumption because of which the Sahariyas are never out of debt. Deficit budget compels them to go to moneylenders.

The poor Sahariya has no money but bullocks and agricultural equipments. So intensive farming of a piece of land is impossible by them, though agriculture is their main occupation. But, some Sahariyas keep the land as a fallow land for years together. However, they produce grains for their own consumption as well as render their labour force to others’ land. Since most of them are landless, they have to depend on other source of income. A few Sahriyas depend on sharecropping (adbatal) and also cultivate land on contract basis known as theka.

Income from animal husbandry is negligible. They have only goats, sheep, fowl and sell them during emergency. Seasonal migration is the barrier towards domesticating animals.
They work as labour which is another source of major income. Even those who have little quantity of land are engaged as agricultural labour. Majority of the Sahariyas are engaged as labourers to earn their livelihood. Agricultural labour being seasonal they get employment only during the agricultural season. The Sahariyas remain very busy from March to April and June to August.

Those who are landless or have a small piece of land go to forest and work as forest labourers. Some people also work under PWD for road construction. The Sahariya collect minor forest products to supplement their income.

Besides, some people earn their livelihood by working as skilled labourers like mason, engaged in construction works, for cutting stones, digging wells and tanks. Though the approved rate of daily wage is quite good but due to middlemen, the poor Sahariyas are not getting proper daily wages. In a Sahariya family, men, women and children earn collectively for their livelihood. Both husband and wife work together to supplement their income. An average income of the Sahariya’s family from all sources varies between Rs 300 and Rs 500 per month.

Sahariya life is simple. Their diet is equally simple and to some extent barely adequate. Their main expenditures are on food, clothing, fuel for lighting, household articles, liquor, social and religious ceremonies. Major portion of income is spent on food, followed by clothes. Sahariyas collect fuel wood freely from the jungle, but they have to purchase kerosene oil for lighting. From time to time they have to repair their houses and purchase the iron implements from the market and the expenditure is not much. Sahariyas mostly depend on indigenous treatment and believe in supernatural powers. If required they go to the village medicineman (sankar). Expenditure on liquour is one of the most important item. Since the preparation of liquor at home is banned, they purchase it from the shop and incur a good amount of money on it. Smoking bidi and chewing tobacco are most common for the Sahariya men and women and expenditures on these are not negligible.

Social and religious ceremonies are very important occasions of the tribal life. On the occasion of marriage they spend lavishly, for which they take loan from the
moneylenders. Huge expenditure on these special ceremonies is responsible for indebtedness. A Sahariya family always shows deficit budget. This proves that extent of indebtedness must also be wide. Heavy indebtedness also forces a Sahariya to work as contractual labourer. Earning from the contract labour system is less than that of the daily wage labour. Sometimes, they are bound to sell the property they possess.

**Indebtedness**

Indebtedness is one of the serious problems faced by the Sahariyas all over the territory. Except a few well–to–do Sahariyas, most of the Sahariyas have been found to be indebted. About 80 per cent families are indebted in almost all the villages. Usually, Sahariyas take loan from Rs 500 to Rs 2000 and spend mostly on social and religious ceremonies. They borrow money from moneylenders, landlords or shopkeepers. If a Sahariya is well-known and honest, he may be provided money – without witness and lease. But for unknown persons, one guarantor is essential to borrow the amount. Loans are generally taken for short-terms. The interest on the principal amount is to be paid on monthly basis. Sometimes the rate of interest varies from 25 per cent to 50 per cent depending on the condition of loan and relation with borrower. Though there are some cooperative banks which provide loan to improve the cultivable land on land mortgage basis, the Sahariyas are not interested to take loan from the bank, instead they prefer moneylenders, The system of borrowing money from moneylenders is simple and they get money against the mortgage of land, ornaments, cattle and utensils.

**Reference**