

**TRIBES IN TRANSITION: A STUDY OF THE BHILS OF RAJASTHAN****Kismat Katewa**

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**Abstract**

*The present paper is a descriptive study of the Bhil tribe residing in the southern part of Rajasthan. The paper studies the process of Sanskritization initiated by the Bhagat Movement among the Bhils and examines how Bhagat Movement has brought about alterations in the social, religious and economic spheres of the once homogenous community. The central theme of the paper is to examine the position of the Bhils before and after the Bhagat Movement and to evaluate the role of Bhagat Movement in uplifting the social, economic and the ritual status of the Bhils.*

**Introduction**

In every living society, there is always some movement from within and some movement from without, and therefore there is always some change. Study of social change, synchronically and diachronically among the tribes of India remains an important area of research. The tribal situation in India is not, in any way uniform, on the contrary it varies from one region to another depending on the nature and extent of contact a tribe has with the neighbouring communities and their participation in the wider economy and polity. In the context of India, the situation of tribes is changing, transforming and in many cases, it is in a state of transition.

Like many tribes in India, the Bhils of Rajasthan share a great deal of similarity in terms of acquisition of culture traits and patterns from the dominant caste Hindus. Over the years, the intensity of contact became deeper thereby providing sufficient scope for the flow of culture traits mainly through the process of Sanskritization. Finding the non-tribals more powerful, the Bhils considered them as their reference group and began to emulate their behavior in the hope that this would give them higher social status. The resultant effect is, the homogeneity and exclusiveness that once



characterized the Bhils gave way to heterogeneity and inclusiveness. Many customs and traditions transformed and new ones adopted marking the state of transition.

In comparison to the other tribes of Rajasthan, the Bhils have had long tradition of contact and interaction with the caste Hindus. While this has led many of them to borrow, adopt and assimilate with the dominant groups there is no uniformity in the level of adoption of all Bhil pockets. It may be mentioned that the Bhils are scattered over a large territory, including areas in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. In the context of Rajasthan, the Rajputs carried the flag in the contact with Bhils. They were then joined by other caste groups and the relationship perpetuated. The Rajputs, Brahmins and Mahajans chiefly carried their model of culture in far flung Bhil areas.

Religion perhaps is the key ethnic element of the tribal society. In their earlier form of religious life, the Bhils were animists drawing their belief from the natural world that surround their habitation. However, their interaction with the caste Hindus introduced them to a number of Hindu gods and goddesses. Finding the Hindus more powerful than themselves, they attributed the dominance of the Hindus to the power of the latter's gods and deities. This idea is particularly widespread among the Bhils living in the plains who influenced by the ideology of their powerful neighbours lay the blame for their backwardness, poverty and marginalization on the practice of animism. This line of thinking made them easy targets of Hindu reformers who were bent to draw groups at the margins of caste within the fold of Hinduism. Swayed by the promise of improved status and social prestige offered by the reformers, the primordial belief founded on animism gave way to the acceptance of Hindu deities, gods, and goddesses and thus emerged Bhagatism (Mann, 1989).

Bhagatism and Christianity<sup>1</sup> the new forms of religion among the Bhils- outdated the primordial animistic religion. The entry of the new religions altered the whole world view of the Bhil society. It stratified the original stock of tribal people into native or aboriginal Bhils, Bhagats and Christians. The day-to-day life of the people- food, dress, festivals and economy- underwent vast changes. The religious ethnicity that characterized the Bhil society in the past was gradually replaced

<sup>1</sup> The Christian Missionaries entered the southern part of Rajasthan during the Great Famine of 1899. It was during the famine that the Christian Missionaries rendered their services to the Bhils. The welfare activities carried by the Missionaries in the famine affected area attracted the Bhils towards Christian Missionaries and hence emerged Christianity.



by Bhagatism as a result of Sanskritization. The urge for improving the quality of life and gaining social prestige in the eyes of the caste Hindus largely contributed to the success of the Bhagat Movement among the Bhils of Rajasthan.

The resultant pattern of tribal organization evolved through the process of interaction and awakening was a heterogeneous structure that verged on disorganization. The tribe as a social group possessing a deep socio-religious affinity nurtured by the sentiment of oneness or “we feeling” got divided into three classes, viz. Original Bhils, Christian Bhils and Bhagat Bhils. Indicative of the sharp divide, the three social classes did not have relations or intercourse among them.

The Bhagats were encouraged to move out to the plains for better avenues and take up jobs other than agricultural labourers to uplift their economic status. The paper which is a descriptive study will be analyzing whether the Bhagats have a more diversified economy as compared to the rest of the Bhils. The question that arises here is; has Bhagatism propagated occupational mobility among the Bhagats and helped them in their economic upliftment?

The religious domain of the Bhils was immensely affected by Bhagat Movement. The paper will be examining the changes in the religious beliefs and practices of the Bhils brought about by Bhagatism. The change in the religious sphere can be examined by studying the emergence of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in place of the tribal deities and the religious practices, the alterations in the performance of life cycle rituals, such as birth, marriage and death ceremonies, and the role of the Brahmin in officiating marriage, birth and religious ceremonies. The study will also probe the role of the *Bhopa* amongst the Bhagats in contemporary times as an officiator in these life cycle rituals.

Another area of research would be to examine the social organization of the Bhils and the changes that occurred therein. Available literature reveals that Bhagatism stratified the entire community of Bhils into ‘Bhagats’ and ‘non-Bhagats’. The Bhagats considered themselves *ujle* or pure and treated the non-Bhagats as *mele* or impure. There was no commensal and connubial relationship between the two groups. The paper would be probing whether such a rigid hierarchy in terms of connubial and commensal relationship is maintained even in the present era.

The key question that arises here is what actually have the Bhagats gained after the Bhagat Movement? The aim of the movement started by Govind Giri was to bring Bhagats at par with the caste Hindus and enhance their social prestige. Is the Bhagat Movement successful in uplifting the



social status of the Bhagats? This query would be analyzed in terms of the perception of the Bhagats as well as the perception of the caste Hindus regarding the identity of the Bhagats.

### Bhils

The Bhils are the largest tribe in India followed by the Gonds and the Santhals<sup>2</sup>. Spread over large parts of western India, with concentration in southern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and northern Maharashtra; the Bhils numbered 12689952 persons as per the Census of India (2011). The Bhils constitute 44.38% of Rajasthan's tribal population enumerating 4100264 persons as per the Census 2011. The history of the Bhils goes back to the sixth century AD. They are mentioned in Sanskrit and Hindi literature; for example, the reference to them in *Ramacharit Manas* is well known. In the mid-1940s, the Bhil expressed a desire for a separate state but the demand could not be sustained. Even their native language, Bhili which belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages has now been replaced by Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and the regional dialects of the state in which they reside.

While early literature and mythological tradition suggest that the Bhils were one of the earliest settlers of the regions they inhabit (Tod, 1920), the absence of historical account has given rise to conflicting views about their origin. According to Major Erksine, Bhils seem to have entered India from the north-east several centuries before the Christian era, and were driven to their present abode during the Aryan invasions. In his view the Bhils migrated to India from outside. On the other hand, Colonel Tod in his *'Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan'* states that the Bhils were the original inhabitants of the south and south eastern Rajasthan and that a number of Rajput kingdoms were established after defeating the Bhil chieftains. According to Doshi, the term 'Bhil' is derived from the Dravidian equivalent of the word "bow", a characteristic weapon of the tribe (1971:4). Relying on information about the Rajput take over of the territories from the tribal inhabitants, Tod concludes, "These facts all tend strongly to prove that the Rajputs were conquerors and that the mountaineers, whether Kolis, Bhils, Mynas, Gonds, Sairias are the indigenous inhabitants of India." (Tod: 1920) This view was supported by Sherring (1881) and Russel and Hiralal (1916).

<sup>2</sup> The total population of Bhils is 12689952; Gonds is 10859422 and Santhals is 5838016 (Census of India, 2011)

**Bhagat Movement**

With the deepening of communication the Bhil's desire to borrow sanskritic traits of the Hindu upper castes increased. The rise of new religious and trading centres added impetus to the process. Rooted in the sanskritic traditions, the Bhagat (devotee) movement propagated Hinduistic values. Impressed by the dominant ideology the Bhils abandoned their traditional belief and adopted those of wider Hinduism and started addressing themselves as Bhagats. Bhagatism depicts socio-religious renaissance. Various sects of Bhagats came up with new philosophy having roots in Hinduism. Acceptance of the belief in karma, reincarnation, omnipresent and omnipotent single god, vegetarianism, ideas of pollution and purity, fasting, puritanism etc are some of the indications of the same. Mann (1982) views the Bhagat Movement as an attempt to hinduize the tribals, reform them and give a religious legitimacy to the upwardly mobile strata. The Bhils had their indigenous belief system which the Bhagats increasingly gave up, to attain respect from the caste Hindus who were mainly non-tribals.

One of the repercussions of the Bhagat Movement on Bhils is the rise of stratification in the community. The Bhagats, or the more hinduized among them, segregated themselves from the non-Bhagats in terms of commensal and connubial relationship. The Bhagats viewed themselves as socially superior on the ground that they had adopted the higher Hindu caste traits. In other words, the trend generated the process of disintegration of the community. The feeling of sub-ordination and super-ordination, resembling caste groups grew. The in-group feeling and endogamy of Bhagats grew so strong that they resorted to social boycott of anyone found violating the rules, defined for them, clearly a trait resembling the Hindu castes.

The Bhagat Movement which initially started as a religious reforms movement for the Bhils later took a political turn. Govind Giri, the founder of the Bhagat Movement decided to establish a Bhil kingdom. Supported by a large number of followers who considered him as their only saviour he became the Messiah of the Bhils. In 1913, Govind Giri along with his followers reached the Mangarh Hill which was situated at the border of Rajasthan and Gujarat, and consolidated his movement for Bhil kingdom. This move was strongly opposed by the feudal Rajputs and the British. His lieutenant Punja Dhirji secured Govindgiri's acquiescence to the policy of indirectly coercing the States of Banswara and Sunth either to remove the main grievances of the Bhils or they would





overthrow their authority and power for the restoration of the Bhil Raj as a panacea for the oppression and suffering of the Bhils. This resulted in an armed conflict with the states of Banswara, Dungarpur, Sunth as well as the British Government at Mangarh in November 1913. This changed the complexion of the socio-religious movement into a distinct political one. The demand for a separate state 'Bhilistan' by the Bhils of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra has not died down even in the present times. The formation of Telangana has fuelled the demand for *Bhilistan* once again.

### Origin of the Bhagat Movement

Govind Giri or Guru Govind was not a Bhil; he was born a *banjara* in Vedsa village near Dungarpur in Rajasthan in 1863. Govind Giri was deeply moved when he saw that the Bhils who traditionally owned land, forest and other resources did not have the basic necessities of life. He drew inspiration from Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati whom he met in 1881. He is also believed to be influenced by Swami Vivekananda and his Vedanta teachings. He started his reform movement among the Bhils in 1892. The movement had, as its religious centrepiece, the concept of a fire God, which required his followers to raise sacred hearths in front of which the devotees pray while performing the purifying havan called *dhuni*. Guru Govind lost his wife and three children during the famine of 1899-1900. This personal tragedy became a turning point in his life following which he completely devoted his time and energy for the welfare of the Bhil community. With his persistent efforts and spiritual guidance, a section of Bhils named themselves 'Bhagat' and stopped taking bride-price and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food and offering of animal sacrifice to the local deities. Bhils also began to bathe every day and sing sacred Hindu hymns. Guru also promoted agriculture and to live in peace with others, to abandon their exorcists and spirit mediums, to wear a yellow turban and *rudraksh* beads around their neck, and to fly a special flag over their houses (C.S.K Singh, 1995).

Bhil population of the states of Dungapur and Banswara in Southern Rajasthan became his followers. Guru Govind preached monotheism and moral precepts to the Bhils to convert them to mainstream Hinduism. Acceptance of the core belief in karma, reincarnation, omnipresent and omnipotent god was one of the key message that the Bhils received well. Success of Guru's Bhagat



Movement had also become a thorn for the Christian missionaries objective to Christianize the local community. David Hardiman states, “Perhaps the most important reason for the limited success of these missionaries was that they had in many cases been preceded by indigenous movements for social and religious reform which proved to have far greater resonance among the people. The most important of these was that of the Bhagats. These were adivasis who had developed a faith in Vaishnavite or Shaivite deities, and had reformed their lives accordingly. Commonly, they gave up meat, fish and liquor. They generally followed the Bhakti path of worship, singing bhajans which celebrated their devotion to their deities. The missionaries most affected by Govindgiri’s movement were those of the Irish Presbyterian Jungle Tribes Mission” (Hardiman, 2002:3).

It is important to note that this was not the only (or the first) 'Bhagat' movement but it was definitely the most popular one influencing the maximum number of Bhils. In the early 18th century, a Brahmin Vaishnavite mystic called Mavji had also started such reformist movement. Another such leader, who emerged in the late nineteenth century, was called Surnal Das. He was a Bhil of Lasodia, which was in Idar State on the border of Gujarat and Rajasthan. In his early life he had lived by robbery, but later repented and spent thirteen years redeeming himself through hard penance, which it was believed gave him miraculous powers. He called upon his followers to give up killing of animals, liquor consumption and practice of witchcraft, abjure robbery and violence and live by tilling the land. He taught them to worship the Hindu god Ram. Another Bhil leader Gulia (who later assumed the title of Maharaj: saint) started similar reforms campaign of religious nature. He asked the Bhils not to consume liquor or *tadi*. Influenced by his teaching, many Bhils became teetotallers. His good deed however became a problem for some. Smarting under the consequent loss of revenue from liquor sales, one of the dealers arranged to have Maharaj murdered. This act could not stop the movement. Another Hindu/Bhil monk named Viswanath Maharaj of Rewakantha also initiated a reformist movement. He is said to have given the Hindu sacred thread, *Janau*, to 75,000 Bhils who all became Bhagats or devotees. In line with the new belief they stopped drinking *haro* and *tadi* and took vows not to eat meat, drink tap water or consume foods prepared by a non-Bhagat. The devotees would visit Maharaj’s place once a year on foot and take Prasad (sacred offerings) from him (cited from Hardiman: 2002).

**Principles to be followed by the Bhagats**

The philosophy and principles of this sect are reflected in the following conditions imposed on the followers (Mann, 1989:240):

- The Bhagats have to abstain from all kinds of non-vegetarian food including eggs.
- Indulgence in lawlessness, violence and theft is to be avoided by Bhagats.
- All Bhagats have to abhor liquor.
- As part of noble way of life, the Bhagats have to adhere to the values of truthfulness and honesty.
- As per the philosophy of Lasodia, the Bhagats are encouraged to go in for celibacy.
- Polygyny is prohibited for a Bhagat. Otherwise, keeping more wives is a status symbol in the traditional system of the Bhils.
- A Bhagat is to wear saffron or red colour clothes in addition to branding the right arm with hot iron.
- A Bhagat family must maintain 'Dhuni' the sacred fire, and install a white flag in their home.
- In a sharp departure from their traditional practice the Bhagats must greet each other with the words 'Jai Guru Maharaj' or 'Jai Malik'.
- The Bhagat Bhils should not cremate but bury their dead.
- Bhagat women must remain in seclusion during menstruation.
- Bhagat men and women should observe regular fast and take daily bath
- The Bhagat should give up superstitious beliefs and adopt sacred songs different to their traditional ones.

**Effect on the Bhils**

One cannot fail to see the sharp imprint of Hindu influence especially on the exposed sections of the Bhil population. However, elements of Bhil religion are also visible particularly, amongst the less exposed groups. While Hinduism has significantly affected the Bhil's belief, taboos, supernatural





elements, diviners, temples, images, rituals, worship emotions, feelings, fear, awe etc. at the same time elements of animism persist in the society

Bhagatism brought in new ideologies such as 'purity' and 'pollution' on the one hand, and 'touchability' and 'untouchability' on the other, concepts that were unknown to the Bhils before their contact with the Hindus. Before the advent of Bhagatism, it could never occur to them that the distinction between human beings can be made in terms of 'pure' and 'impure' and 'touchable' and 'untouchable'. But with the coming of the Bhagatism new ideologies and caste like structures have emerged among the Bhils. Occupations are graded and families ranked in terms of purity and pollution, thereby demarcating areas and caste groups into 'untouchables' and 'touchables'. At the same time they rated others in terms of relationships with them. Like their Hindu mentors the Bhagats began to treat *Bhangi*, *Balai*, *Chamar*, *Gori* and *Meghwal* castes as untouchables. They also started evaluating their own position vis-à-vis their Hindu castes by the Brahminic standard of ritual purity and pollution. With certain castes they rate themselves as almost equal; while they accord higher social standing to others. The same standard of evaluation was applied to their fellow tribes. The Bhagats treat *Bhilala*, *Garasia*, *Mina*, *Patelia*, *Dhodia* and *Chowdhary* as superior to them, but the *Kotwalia*, *Kathodi/Katkari*, *Padhar* etc are considered as socially inferior (Russel and Hiralal, 1916). Needless to say, the superiority-inferiority scale is nothing but a replication of the principle of Hindu social organization (Mann: 1989).

For the more devout, lifecycle events like birth and death and biological processes like menstruation become occasions where pollution norms are played out. The period of pollution for men and women, whatever the case are clearly defined. The associated taboos and impositions too are laid down. For example, women after giving birth to a child are considered impure and are not allowed to enter either the kitchen or the temple. This norm has been borrowed from the caste Hindus. All these periods of pollution, nature of pollution, taboos, constraints and the occasion of pollution are on the pattern of Hindu caste. Even the ceremonies and rituals, as part of the process of purification, are no different from those of the Hindus. Bathing, including bath in the sacred Ganges, fasting and resorting to certain other practices, as practiced by caste Hindus, to escape from the state of impurity have become part of the Bhil way of life. Many Bhagats start their marriage with the worship of Lord Ganesh, the well known Hindu deity, which is again a practice emulated from the



Hindus. Other ceremonies such as *tel chadhana* and *pithi utarana* are also on the lines of the caste Hindus. The whole notion of *kanyadaan* which lays importance on the virginity of the bride is being practiced by the Bhagats as part of the Bhagatism. *Dapa* (bride price) is slowly giving way to *Dahej* (dowry). Married women among the Bhagats have also adopted the Hindu way of fasting. They observe *karwachauth* which is a fast kept by the married ladies for the longevity of their husbands. This is again a very important tradition among the Hindus and has now gained popularity among the Bhil women as well. The Bhils, who have adapted to the Brahminic model, have also completely abandoned non-vegetarian food and liquor.

In general, the tribes have always been impartial towards the sex of the new-born child and have always been liberal towards women whether it is in the choice of a life partner, work or any other decision. She has always been independent and have always had a say in the decision making process. But the influence of the caste Hindus have brought about new notions of gender in the liberal Bhil society. Birth of a son is now given preference over the daughter and the mentality of the Bhil is slowly getting inclined to the thinking of the Hindus according to whom daughters are a burden and sons are of supreme importance because eventually the male will be the one who will carry on their lineage or *vansha*. A barren wife is taken as unfortunate and even a curse. She is avoided in the early hours of the day and at the beginning of any new work. This trait is again a borrowing from the caste Hindus (K Mann, 1996).

According to Srinivas, "Sanskritization means not only the adoption of new customs and habits, but also exposure to new ideas and values which have found frequent expression in the vast body of Sanskrit literature, sacred as well as secular. *Karma, dharma, papa, punya, maya, samsara and moksha* are examples of some of the most common Sanskritic theological ideas, and when people become sanskritized these words occur frequently in their talk as evident amongst the sanskritized Bhils or the Bhagats." (Srinivas: 1956)

The Hindu influence on Bhil life and culture is again expressed through the celebration of festivals like Holi, Diwali, Raksha Bandhan etc. Like the other non-tribal Hindu castes of the region the Bhagats celebrate these festivals with gusto. However, certain philosophy and ideals, that underlined these festivals, may not be understood by them in the true Hinduistic perspective. Though traditionally mainly animistic in their belief, post Hinduization the Bhagats have taken to the worship



of Kali and Mahadeo, the favourite deities of the Rajputs. The Rajputs worship Mahadeo under the epithet of Eklingji, who is represented by an idol of four faces. The Bhagat Bhils have enshrined an idol of this deity in the village temple and propitiate it with milk and curd offering. Kali is offered animal sacrifice. Their practice of pouring liquor on the idol is also borrowed from the Rajputs.

Yet another influence of the ruling caste is found in the social structure and behaviour patterns of the Bhagats. The newer practice of veiling among their women folk appears to originate from their contact with the Rajputs. The Bhil marriage party going to the bride's village is also armed with guns, bows and arrows after the Rajput tradition. Certain sections of the Bhils have started adopting the Rajput rituals and traditions and even claimed their descent from Rajput lineage. Bhils who were following the Kshatriya model of Sanskritization even changed their surnames to *Rathod*, *Chauhan*, *Solanki*, which are primarily Rajput surnames. Bhils who had a cordial relationship with the Rajputs initially got into matrimonial relations with them which significantly added to their social prestige. In the beginning, as Tod wrote in 1920, the Rajput accepted food from Bhil of pure aboriginal descent and also those who were called *Ujle Bhil* ('pure/clean Bhil').

The Bhil polygamous family has also acquired a monogamous structure. In the domain of sex and marriage, the Bhagats have accepted new norms of sex and morality. Any breach in the new moral codes receives public condemnation in the Hinduized section of the community. Elopement, rape, abduction or extra marital relations witnessed a gradual decline. The Bhils look up to the Brahmins and the Rajputs as their reference groups. A unique feature of the Sanskritization process among the Bhils is that they are getting sanskritized under two models, one being the Brahminical model of Sanskritization and the other being the Kshatriya model of Sanskritization. Both the Brahmins and the Rajputs belong to the twice-born castes but they do have some major differences in their way of living. The Brahmins are pure vegetarians and abstain from liquor whereas the Rajputs are non-vegetarians and are very much indulged in consuming liquor and using liquor for some religious purposes as well. For example, the Rajputs worship goddess Kali by pouring the drops of liquor on her idol. The same practice is now followed by the Bhils. The Bhagats who are sanskritized with reference to the Brahmins strictly abstain from such practices. The practice of purdah has also been borrowed from the Rajputs where it was mandatory for the females to cover their head as well as their faces in the presence of any elder male member either of the family or of the village.



## Conclusion

Bhagat Movement also called as the socio-religious renaissance for the Bhils was dominant in the southern part of Rajasthan mainly in the districts of Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur and Chittaurgarh. The paper studies the Bhils of Banswara district where Bhagatism has a strong foothold even in the contemporary times. Taking into account the alterations in economic sphere due to Bhagat Movement, it was found out that majority of the Bhils have always been into agricultural farming and have been living a poverty stricken life. But after the advent of Bhagatism, the Bhagats explored other avenues of earning their livelihood. The Bhagats are more inclined towards education and strive to work hard for their economic upliftment as compared to the Bhils. The Bhagats are economically more sound and have a diverse occupational status like teaching, nursing, mining, business and some of them have even secured government jobs. It would be appropriate to say that Bhagatism has propagated occupational mobility and helped them in their economic upliftment.

The changes in the social sphere can be analysed by studying the pattern of stratification amongst the Bhils. The Bhagat Movement divided the entire Bhil community into Bhagats and Jagats. Devotees who follow the principles of Govindgiri are known as the Bhagats whereas the others who consume alcohol and eat non-vegetarian food are known as Jagats. The Bhagats consider themselves superior to the Jagats and this hierarchy is one of the main reason that the restrictions on the commensal and the connubial relationship between Bhagats and Jagats is still adhered to. The restriction is imposed because the Jagats are considered as impure and inferior as compared to the Bhagats and an alliance between Bhagat and Jagat is looked down upon by the Bhagats.

The alterations in religious sphere have been probed by analysing the changes in religious practices and beliefs. The Bhils before the origin of Bhagat Movement were mainly animists and believed in supernatural elements and the forces of nature. They had no elaborated religious practices and rituals. Bhagat Movement introduced the Hindu Gods and Goddesses amongst the Bhils. Bhagats now worship all the Hindu Gods most common being Lord Shiv and Durga. They celebrate all Hindu festivals and have adopted the rituals as well. The role of Brahmin has accentuated amongst the Bhagat households over the years. In the earlier times, it was the *Bhopa* who held supreme importance during birth, marriage and death ceremonies. The remarkable facet of the religious sphere is that Bhagats have not completely replaced the local deities with Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Their



belief in the local deities has not faded because of the introduction of Hindu Gods post Bhagatism. Is Bhagat Movement successful in enhancing the social status of the Bhils is the central theme of the paper. The Bhagats are one of the most respected tribal groups not just in Rajasthan but in the neighbouring states as well. The process of sanskritization that the Bhagats underwent did help them achieve a higher social status. Bhagats have a higher socio-economic as well as a higher ritual status as compared with the Jagats.

The higher status of Bhagats is evident by indicators like the entry of Bhagats in the Hindu temples, acceptance of food and water from the Bhagats by the other Hindu castes, Brahmin priest officiating at the ceremonies conducted by the Bhagats and using the community well. The Bhagat Movement might not have been triumphant in securing a place for Bhagats in the caste hierarchy but has undoubtedly played a pivotal role in enhancing the socio-economic and ritual status of the Bhagats.

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