

## A Study on Meena Tribe of Rajasthan's Socio-Cultural Organization

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### ABSTRACT

The Meenas have always been a patrilocal, patrilineal, and kin-based society. Traditionally, their area is divided into twelve territorial divisions known as 'Pals'. They reside in either tight villages or isolated hamlets called 'dhanis', which are unique in character. The village of Meena consists of people from a single 'got'. However, in a great number of villages, two or more 'got' of the tribe have settled. Thus, the village community is mostly tribal. Meena villages are traditionally settled on alluvial plains or semi-arid plateaus, with agriculture as their principal profession. The settlement and field borders clearly define the inhabited area. Meenas have traditionally lived in woods, villages, and mountainous places. They live in huts known as 'Dhodhe' or 'Jhopadi', built of clay, hay, and cow dung. They built their dwellings in deep woodland and steep locations to maintain solitude and avoid detection. Meenas' safe zones are called as Mewase.

**KEYWORDS:** Meena, Rajasthan, Mewase, Indian Tribes

### Introduction

The Meenas have historically been a kin-based, patrilocal, and patrilineal society. They reside in both small villages and remote hamlets known as "dhanis," which are uniclan in character, and culturally and historically divide their area into twelve territorial units called "Pals." Members of a single 'got' typically make up the village of the Meena people. Two or more 'got' of the tribe are established in several settlements, nonetheless. As a result, we may state that the village community is mostly tribal. The typical Meena hamlet continues its traditional pattern of habitation on either the semi-arid plateau or the alluvial lowlands, with agriculture serving as the community's main employment.

The lines between the farms and settlements clearly define the inhabited area. The Meenas have lived in jungles, villages, and mountainous areas for a very long time. They reside in houses built of clay, hay, and cow dung that are more often referred to as "Dhodhe" or "Jhopadi." In order to live in seclusion and make themselves difficult to identify, they used to build their homes mostly in steep and densely forested places. Mewase is the name given to these Meenas safe areas. But eventually, they moved to the plains to dwell. The village's layout indicates a lack of preparation. All of the homes were built next to an unpaved roadway that was around 10 to 12 feet wide and ran through the center of the community.

The Meena folks still live alongside other groups whose lands are close to the settlement. There was

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no caste group boundary in the region. Families of Meena whose farms are located outside of the village often leave the hamlet and build their homes in convenient locations on the outside. "Each 'dhani' is unique to one family group and is called by the name of its founder. A family that is not a member of that family group is not allowed to reside in that specific "dhani." Other than Meena, no other caste is permitted to build a "dhani" within the village limits. The smallest 'dhani' in certain communities has two dwellings built within it. This 'dhani' technique is still widely used in Rajasthani communities today. (Main Reference)

The social life of the community revolves on temples and shrines. The villages' centers are home to the temples of Hanuman (known locally as Balaji), Mahadeo, and Sitaram, while the periphery is home to the temples of minor deities. Large communities have seen the construction of Ayurvedic dispensaries and schools throughout the post-independence era. The local Vaidya is in charge of this dispensary. (SHM Rizvi, 1987)

The primary supply of water for drinking and agriculture comes from deep wells with high surrounding walls and brick lining. Electricity is currently used to irrigate the land as a consequence of developmental initiatives started in the years after independence. The locals get drinking water from the wells all year round.

If they live in the hamlet, members of the "untouchable" and filthy castes are the only ones allowed to use certain wells.

Additionally, the so-called "unclean" and "untouchable" castes utilize the water from the lowest point of any "stream" that is close to the hamlet.

Garbage disposal is unsanitary as it is just picked up outside the hamlet, putting everyone's health at serious risk. People relocate to the surrounding fields or forests since there is no idea of a toilet in a community. Every home gathers cow dung for fuel, which is spread over the whole hamlet. Around the local wells, the villagers bathe in the open air. These are only a few instances that demonstrate how filthy the isolated Meena villages are, which poses a serious threat to health-related problems.

Throughout a lot of Rajasthan. Access to basic and secondary school facilities has been established. However, it has been seen that the headmasters and instructors of these elementary schools often miss work and fail to carry out their responsibilities with diligence. Due to the lack of residential amenities, the majority of instructors travel great distances to work, which is the cause of this situation. Likewise, the closest institutions are often located 100–200 kilometers away from the villages, and there aren't many hostel amenities. Parents are deterred from sending their children to further their education by the high expense of living.

The Meenas villages contain members of a few other Hindu caste groups as well. These villages generally follow the Indian village style, which is compact living with planned houses. The Meena home typically has mud walls and a thatched roof. Thick mud walls enclose the middle section of the house's main quarter, which has a single main entrance. A 'Devasthan' is a location for the family diety, and the living room is where family belongings and food grains are stored. Kitchens with thatched roofs are built, and the number of hearths varies depending on the sort of household. The

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guys only sleep in their own apartments on really cold winter evenings; otherwise, they spend their free time in the "tiwari" and "bada." A large rectangular chamber called "Tiwari" is constructed next to the main building. The male Meena entertains all of the visitors on the wooden cots that are arranged in a row. Rooms are built in the "Bada," which is mostly a cattleshed, to store food grains, fodder, and farming tools.

Usually, it is located in the rear of the home. The "toup," a specifically built building to keep the feed, comes next.

The annual fuel, known as parunda, is kept outside the dwelling quarters and is mostly made out of cakes made from cow dung.

In a Meena village, thorny shrubs may be observed around the homes. homes composed of stones and earthen tiles (Khaprils) may sometimes be seen in a village, although "pukka houses" are quite uncommon in Meenas villages. Even so, they have begun building such in the urban areas. 'Hukkaah' welcomes neighbors and other visitors to the elevated platform known as 'Chabutara' outside the home, where societal issues and domestic issues are then addressed. These dwellings have extremely few windows, which prevents adequate ventilation and makes it easier for the residents to get various illnesses. Cleanliness receives less emphasis. One example is that when animals are kept near homes, the neighborhood becomes filthy and smells terrible. "Being busy in the agricultural chores, they sometimes neglect bathing, but now a days scenario has been quite changed as the Meenas have developed the habbit of daily bath." (SHM Rizvi, 1987)

The Villagers hardly ever use soaps. They give sacrifices to dieties like "Bhairon, Hanuman, and Kuladevi" in an attempt to treat the many ailments and diseases that are caused by these unsanitary surroundings. Even now, these customs are still widely practiced in indigenous areas.

Due to their poor financial circumstances, many Meena families often lay down on cots without mattresses or other bedding. However, urbanization and industrialization have changed the situation in recent years; many Meenas now look for work in cities and are financially stable, able to afford decent mattresses, quilts, and other furnishings, as well as, of course, stainless steel cookware and all the other necessities for a better life. The urban lifestyle may be to blame for this.

### FOOD HABITS

Although most people think of Meenas as nonvegetarians, there are really relatively few Meenas in certain locations who eat meat and drink alcohol. Other than that, cereals including wheat, millet, gram, maize, bajara, and pulses are part of their main diet. Since they are an established agricultural population, they often own dairy-producing animals including goats, cows, and buffalo. Thus, milk and milk products undoubtedly play a crucial role in their diet. "Rabdi" is their preferred dish. In many different recipes, butter milk is utilized widely. They have many favorite foods, including dalia, thooli, dal, baati, churma, Maalpua, kheer, and chane ki daal. They make maalpua, kheer, and chane ki-daal as prasad offerings to Lord Jagdish. A rice, ghee, and crushed sugar dish is prepared during the "engagement" and "tikka" ceremonies, to which a generous quantity of Khoya is added for flavor. In contrast to other pulse types, chane-daal is mostly utilized.

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In general, people depend largely on veggies that are produced in their own fields rather than purchasing them from the markets. Only on certain exceptional occasions do they purchase potatoes from the marketplace. Their breakfast, which they typically refer to as "Kalewa," includes "butter-milk" and raabdi together. Because of the urban lifestyle, some of them have also begun eating tea-biscuits for breakfast. "Baydu" is the phrase they use for dinner.

S.No.	Items Usually Consumed	Terminology
1.	Maize/Bajara flour cooked in Butter milk	Rabdi
2.	Maize flour cooked with ghee and water	Laapsi
3.	Bajara and pulse cooked in water	Bajara ki khichari
4.	Onion	Kanda
5.	Kadhi	Khaata

**Table 1 Food Habits of the Meena community**

Due of their abject poverty, Bhil-Meenas must eat a subpar food. According to reports, "for at least eight months or so, they do not receive a proper diet, so their children eat 'Mahua' and forest root shoots to satiate their hunger." Even yet, they remain robust and healthy. (SHM Rizvi, 1987)

#### **KUTUMB**

For both the individual and the community, the Meenas family organization is an important unit. It is the social organization's smallest organized segment. "The unit is usually a vertically extended joint family and is referred to as 'Kutumb' by them." (Rizvi SHM, 1987) Among them are elderly patriarchs who are brothers and children. The married daughter lives with her in-laws since the Meenas adhere to the patrilocal pattern of residency.

The home or the "ghar" is the sole place where widowed or divorced women may find refuge. Since the Meenas practice child marriage and only move the women to their husbands' homes after reaching puberty, it is typical for there to be child brides in every "Kutumb." Because we live in a matrilineal culture, men have the right to inherit. "There are two perspectives on the Meenas property: 'jagjagati' and 'Khetibari'. 'Khetibari' refers to immovable property, which includes agricultural land and its products, while 'Jagjagati' literally means movable property. (Col. Todd: 1914)

The Meenas have a sophisticated agricultural system and distinct land ownership rights. "Ideally, according to customary law, the 'thok' own the property rights, and each 'thok' land is identified by the erection of a 'thok' diety temple. The 'thok' land is divided into separate parcels. (SHM Rizvi, 1987) It may be leased by the tenant without "Thok's Patel's" approval. The Meenas had never sold the cultivable land before, but foreign organizations were the ones that brought this concept to the Meena Community. However, a Meena cannot mortgage or sell his land to a non-Meena. This

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legislation is customary. In actuality, this regulation prevents other tribes or cultures from invading the modern Meena settlements.

Questions about who owns a piece of land and what type of rights they have over it were given particular attention throughout the interviews. After extensive examination, the following points were discovered. Land was owned by the individual "thok" until the middle of the 1950s. The representative 'patel' was utilized to divide the product evenly among its growers. Numerous elderly informants still remember calling the region their "thok." Only when the Land Reforms Act was passed and the "zamindari" system was abolished was land divided among the village's individual families, which may have marked the start of individualized land ownership.

The two 'thok' of Nangal Meena village, Bhagirathi Meena and Sundar Meena, shared the community's whole land equally. They were the village's first residents. Due to the two 'thok's' eventual growth, the territory had to be divided among five 'thok', namely Dabro, Rakhla, Ghasika, Khojika, and Dakhmi. Similar to this, Akhoda Meena village's land was first split between two "thok," Ladya and Kankya. However, the arrival of more "got" people in the village forced a further partition of the land, which was then divided among 10 "thok." However, a Meena may currently and does assert his ownership rights over a portion of the village's land, and the concept of "thok" ownership of cultivable land is completely absent since a Meena cannot yet sell his property to a non-Meena without the approval of his "thok's patel." This may be a throwback to the property's earlier, more conventional ownership history.

Inheritance is often passed down from father to son.

The girls have no claim to a portion of their father's assets. The oldest son settles the obligation in the event that the father passes away without doing so, and he receives a sizable portion of the property as compensation. 'Patel' or 'Panchpatel' decides the share.

In addition to "khetibari," the Meena refer to personal belongings like clothing, decorations, carts, etc. as "jagjagati," which literally translates to "worldly goods." Such items belong to a certain person. Rarely do individuals own livestock, wells, farming tools, etc.; instead, living consanguines ('kutumb') or extended families ('ghar') do.

In Meena culture, "jagjagati" refers to duties due between people over items rather than the ownership of such things. As a result, these items are used together and evenly divided among the remaining sons after the death of the family chief. In the traditional system, inheritance—which has to do with the power to pass ownership from one generation to the next—is the main method of obtaining land. Because Meena is a partilineal society, the oldest son is given power. The formal tenure patterns seen across Rajasthan have a striking resemblance to the land tenure in Meena communities. It is true that, even though the right was now a right of occupation rather than complete ownership, the process of breaking down from collective to individual rights persisted throughout the British colonial era. The person became more significant in every way under this rule. The pattern of land ownership was impacted by this whole individualization process as well as related concepts.

'Kutumb' and 'ghar' own residential land.

Distribution is seen in material things and agricultural land. (SHM Rizvi, 1987)

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Until his passing, the father is the family's unchallenged leader. In the literal sense, he is the genitor and pater, meaning he must provide for his children's needs, including food, housing, and marriage. As long as he accepts it, the family's "jagjagati" may be distributed throughout his lifetime. He makes all of the household choices, including sending the daughter-in-law to her parents' house and purchasing a new pair of bullocks. Only when the head of the household passes away may the land be distributed among the male family members.

Even though these situations are uncommon, the oldest son assumes full responsibility for the father's duties following his death. This is symbolized at the "nukta" burial ceremonies when the "thok patel" ceremoniously hands the late father's headgear (pagri) to the eldest son. Everyone in the family witnesses this.

There is a specific code of behavior in the women's quarters, the area of the home where women spend the most of their time cooking and doing other household tasks. It is evident that the woman of the family head controls the inner quarters, even if this is not officially acknowledged. She plans the family's female members' schedules and gives them particular tasks to do both within and outside the home. The wife of the family's heir assumes complete authority inside the female quarters upon the death of her husband.

It has been noted that elderly widowed women have a subjugated and neglected life in the home and are seen as a liability by their sons. A lady can only really connect herself to her own decorations, which she gets from her father and in-laws. Her decorations may only be inherited by her daughters and daughter-in-laws upon her passing.

#### **KINSHIP AND FAMILY**

It is clear from the family's description that the oldest male member of the "kutumb" has authority, power, and position and is in charge of his "kutumb" member's socioeconomic welfare. By coordinating women's strength to ensure the smooth operation of the household, his wife assists him in this area. The facts mentioned above are supported by the kinship phrases that are common in the family circle. 'Kaka' is used to refer to the father and is often utilized for the father's younger brother. This supports the idea that a lady may lawfully wed her younger brother-in-law after becoming a widow. 'Kaka' is a popular kinship word used for father and father's younger brother, reflecting the societal legitimacy given to such levirate couplings. As a result, the father and his younger male siblings are categorized together and have a certain function and position. However, the older brother of the father, who is clearly more powerful and has a better position in the "kutumb," is referred to as "baba." This suggests that the fundamental responsibilities and distribution in the "kutumb" extend beyond a man's biological family to include the whole generation of children born from his own generation's sibs. As a result, each "kaka" has an equal impact on the children's socialization. The younger sister and daughters get the same treatment. 'Chhori' means little girl, and both are used to describe them. As a result, the paternal grandparents have the most prestige and influence inside the joint family and home. The natal family oversees an individual's ceremonies and obligations from birth to death in this patriarchal culture.

#### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRADITIONS: MEENA VIS-À-VIS NON MEENA**

Three major categories based on their "ritual purity" are suggested by the Meenas' social interactions

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with other non-tribal groups who reside in the villages. They are 'clean', 'unclean', and 'untouchable'. The physical separation between the three groups, particularly at feasts, reflects their social difference.

The Meenas keep their eating relationships inside their own group in daily life, while Meena-to-non-Meena dining relationships mostly surface during feasts. Non-tribal people often see the Meenas as being on par with the Hindu "varna" system's "clean" caste. The Brahmins, who maintain their top position in the village's social order, are among the "clean" castes that the Meenas eat from. Strict rules apply when it comes to smoking and sharing a smoking pipe, or "hukka." None of the other caste members in the hamlet share Meena's smoking pipe.

Meenas are the only ones who share the traditional smoking pipe, known as a "hukka" or sometimes a "bidi." However, while using water from the village wells, there is no differentiation between "clean" and "unclean" castes. The caste-tribe makeup of the villages of Nangal Meena and Tiddi is seen in table (6:5). (Indian Census, 2011)

S.N	Name of Communities	Traditional occupation	Nangal Meena Village (no. of house,)	Tiddi Village (no. of houses)	Ritual position
1.	Brahmin	Priest	2 (11)	5 (7)	CL.
2.	Balai (S.C.)	Ag. Labour	2 (9)	-	UCL.
3.	Bhangi (S.C.)	Scavenger	1 (7)	1 (2)	UNT.
4.	Chhipa	Dyer	1 (11)	-	CL.
5.	Fakir (OBC)	Mendicant and musicians	-	9 (47)	UCL.
6.	Khangar (OBC)	Skinner /tanner	-	2 (7)	UCL.
7.	Khati (OBC)	Carpenter	1 (11)	5 (9)	CL.
8.	Kir (OBC)	Leather work	-	4 (14)	UNT.
9.	Kumhar (OBC)	Potter	2 (17)	4 (13)	CL.
10.	Mahajan	Trader	1(16)	2 (6)	CL.
11.	Meena (S.T.)	Agriculture	69 (421)	105 (800)	CL.
12.	Nai (Muslim)	Barber/ surgeon	-	2(9)	CL.
13.	Nai (Hindu)	Barber/ messenger	1 (3)	1 (8)	CL.
14.	Rana (Muslim)	Musician	1 (2)	-	UCL.
15.	Thakur	Trade /distiller	-	1 (5)	CL.
			180 (1169)	138 (1136)	

Table 2: Caste- Tribe Composition of the Villages of Dausa and Udaipur districts.

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### Conclusion

The Meena tribe of Rajasthan embodies a rich socio-cultural heritage rooted in tradition, kinship, and a deep connection to land and community. Their patrilineal and patrilocal structure has shaped their social organization, where the 'kutumb' or extended joint family remains the primary unit of social and economic life. Their settlements, agricultural practices, and architectural patterns reflect a self-sustaining, close-knit society grounded in ancestral customs.

Despite their historical isolation and adherence to traditional practices, the Meenas have gradually embraced aspects of modernization, particularly through urban migration, education, and infrastructure development. However, challenges such as inadequate sanitation, limited access to quality education, and gender-based disparities in property rights still persist. Culturally, the Meenas maintain a distinct identity, from their food habits and rituals to their kinship norms and social customs. The persistence of traditional institutions like 'thok' and 'panchpatel', along with unique practices like 'dhani' settlements and caste-based social interaction, showcases a community that has preserved its identity while adapting selectively to change.

This study highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting tribal knowledge systems, land tenures, and social institutions in policy and development efforts. Supporting the Meena tribe's progress while preserving their unique heritage is vital to ensuring inclusive and culturally sensitive development in Rajasthan.

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