



**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**Sahariya Tribe: Society, Culture, Economy and Habitation**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Sahariya tribe constitutes a prominent place in the tribal population of Madhya Pradesh although, it inhabits only in Shivpuri District, northwest Madhya Pradesh. This article aims to examine society, culture, economy and habitation of Sahariya tribe. The study was based on both empirical and secondary data. Sahariya population figures 11.27% in the Shivpuri District. Their habitats are located in the forest area, barren and stony land and they are still a primitive society. Even after a long span of India's independence, the people of Sahariya tribe are economically underdeveloped and socially backward, as our study reveals. There are several steps required to be forwarded to development of Sahariya tribe such as development of infrastructural facilities, establishment of educational institutions, medical facilities and small-scale industries, and overall providing them permanent habitats.*

**Keyword:** Sahariya; culture; economy; habitat; forest area; Shivpuri District

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**INTRODUCTION**

The term 'tribe' means a society or division of a society whose members have ancestry, customs, beliefs and leadership in common. On the other word tribes are defined as a group of people who have something in common such as an occupation, social background or political view point. Lokur committee appointed by the Planning Commission, Government of India, identified scheduled tribes are indicators of primitive traits, distinctive culture, shyness of contact with the community at large, geographical isolation and backwardness. Particularly vulnerable tribal groups characterise pre-agriculture level of technology, stagnant or declining population, extremely low literacy and subsistence level of economy (Planning Commission n. a.). Tribes represent to deprived and underprivileged class, worldwide. Dwelling in the forest areas, tribes depend mostly on the forest products and rearing animals for their livelihoods. In many areas, they are called nomads, moving from one forest to other. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by the President of India through an initial public notification or through a subsequent amending Act of Parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes (MOTA 2013).

India has diversity in the nature and in all walks of life – landscape, climate, people, economy, society, culture, religions, languages, food habits and habitats. It has very high ethnic diversity and habitation of the people of all races and religions. Except Pondicherry, Chandigarh, Punjab, Haryana and NCT of Delhi, all states and union

territories of India have tribal habitations. India occupies 10.43 crore (8.6%) tribal population and out of it, 10.03% tribal population lives in urban area. Tribal population varies from state to state in terms of their state and national shares. Lakshadweep obtains the highest tribal population (94.80%) of the total state population followed by Mizoram (94.43%). Both share 0.06% and 0.99% of the national tribal population, respectively. In terms of national share, Madhya Pradesh has the highest tribal population (14.69%) followed by Orissa, possesses 9.20% of the India's tribal population. Meanwhile, of the total population, Orissa has 22.85% tribal population and Madhya Pradesh obtains 21.09 tribal population of the total population. National decadal growth rate of tribal population was 23.66% (2011). The tribes are socially backward. Literacy rate is low, increased from 8.53% in 1961 to 58.96% in 2011. In Madhya Pradesh, literacy rate stands for only 50.6%. Meanwhile, infant mortality rate is high, registered 62.1 and child mortality rate is 35.8. Total working population is about 50%, of which 59.8% is rural and 42.6% is urban. Among tribal population, about 54.26% people live below poverty line (1999-2000), of which 56.26% people are rural and 52.59% people are urban. In Madhya Pradesh, it represents 44.7% urban and 58.6% rural.

The state of Madhya Pradesh has the privilege of having the largest percentage of tribal population; therefore, they form an integral segment of the society. Belonging to various ethnic groups, they are the most downtrodden, exploited and under privileged class of the society. The habitats of the tribal population are concentrated in certain pockets, which are hilly, forested and isolated. Consequently, there is lack of interaction between tribes and non-tribes. Even after 50 years of independence, it seems there are no obvious changes in the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people. We divide Madhya Pradesh into five tribal zones – central, eastern, southern, western and northwestern – according to geography and ethnography of tribes. The central zone characterises the habitation of Gonds, Korkus, Kols and Baigas. Oraons, Kanwars and Pandos have their habitation in the eastern zone. Muria, Maria, Halbas and Bhatras in the southern zone, and Bhils, Bhilalas and Barelals inhabit in the western zone. In the northwest part, Sahariya and Bhil tribes have their domination.

In this paper, we studied the Sahariya tribe of Shivpuri District, Madhya Pradesh. The main objective was to study society, culture, economy and habitation of Sahariya tribe. We also suggested several measures to enhance economy and social status of the tribal people.

#### **THE SAHARIYA TRIBE: NATIONAL SCENARIO**

The word 'Sahariya' is derived from the Arabian word 'Sehara' or 'wilderness'. The Muslim rulers called them 'Sahr' means 'jungle' and now they are called 'Sahariya' means the forest dwellers. Generally, the Sahariya tribe lives in the Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan states. Table 1 shows demographic profile of the Sahariya tribe. Total number of households was 134,040 and total population was 614,958 with family size 4.6 in 2011. Sex ratio 943 women per thousand men, literacy rate 42.1% and working population 44.9% was the major characteristics. Female literacy was registered less (32%) than male literacy (51.5%). Sex ratio was noticed decreasing as child sex ratio was found 932 (less than the average sex ratio). Out of the total workers, marginal workers were 35.9% (COI 2011).

Table 2 shows decadal growth of population. We calculated population data of the Sahariya tribe from 1961 to 2011. Data was gathered from the secondary sources (Censuses of India). Decadal growth of the Sahariya tribal population has been increasing continuously as the data shows and varies from 18.8% in 1961 to 36.6% in 2011. Between 1981 and 1991, population growth of the Sahariya tribe was 18.1 while during the other decades; growth rate was above 30%.

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of the Sahariya tribe, 2011

Variables	Number
Number of households	134,040
Total population	614,958
Family size	4.6
Sex ratio	943
Child sex ratio	932
Total literacy	42.1%
Male literacy	51.7%
Female literacy	32.0%
Working population	44.9%
Main worker	64.1%
Marginal worker	35.9%

Source: Secondary data from the various sources

**Table 2:** Decadal growth of population

Year	Population	Growth (%)
1961	174,320	-
1971	207,174	18.8
1981	281,816	36.0
1991	332,748	18.1
2001	450,217	35.3
2011	614,958	36.6

Source: Secondary data from the various sources

### SAHARIYA TRIBE OF SHIVPURI DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY

Sahariya is the main tribal community of Shivpuri district, constitutes 11.27% of the total population. Bhil and Bhilala tribes follow it (3%), live in the parts of Badarwas Development Block. They are in-migrated from Malawa and Nimad regions. Total area under the habitation of these tribes in Shivpuri District is only 102 km<sup>2</sup>.

The area stretches between 25° 21' - 25° 32' N and 77° 7' - 77° 32' E with total 10278 km<sup>2</sup> area. The landscape characterises hilly, stony and forest land and altitude varies between 250 m and 510 m. It lies in the Ajmer-Gwalior highland and naturally bordered by the Malawa plateau in the south and the Betawa River in the east. The Rajasthan state in the west, the Gwalior district in the north, Shyopur in the northwest, Guna in the south and Datia and Jhansi in the east are the administrative boundaries (Figure 1). Shivpuri district has total 1459 villages, of which 133 villages have desert climate and 15 are located in the forest area.

The whole district characterises semi-arid climate. Temperature remains high during the summers, seldom 44° C temperature was recorded during the recent past. Winters are moderate with average temperature 15° C. Precipitation, mainly rainfall is scarce, occurs only two months of the monsoon season, mainly by the southwest monsoon. Rainfall also occurs due to western disturbances during winter, locally called 'moutha' (Sati 2014). Climate has greater impact on livelihoods of the tribal people. It also influences their seasonal migration. Forest covers about 40% area with domination of deciduous broad leaf forests and plays a greater role in meeting daily food requirement of tribes.

### POPULATION PROFILE

We studied population distribution of the Sahariya tribe in Shivpuri District. They lived in 721 villages of the district and of which, 40 villages were fully inhabited by them (1991). In 2011, the number of villages increased to 1453 and number of households are 32278. Their population varies from one development block to other, influenced by the presence of forest and stone mines. Khaniadhana records the highest number of the villages (130) where Sahariya tribe lives followed by Pohari (126) and Shivpuri (107) districts. Narwar

District has 32 villages followed by Karera (52) and Pichhor (85). Table 3 shows population profile of Sahariya tribe (1991-2001). We analyzed censuses data of 1991, 2001 and 2011 to find out growth of population. About 78.3% increase in population was noticed during the last three decades. Block wise data shows that the highest growth of population was received in Narwar development block (156%) followed by 87.4% in Kolaras and 83% in Khanidhana. Shivpuri development block noticed the lowest 32.9% decadal increase in population.

Fig. 1: Location map of Shivpuri District, the habitat of Sahariya tribe

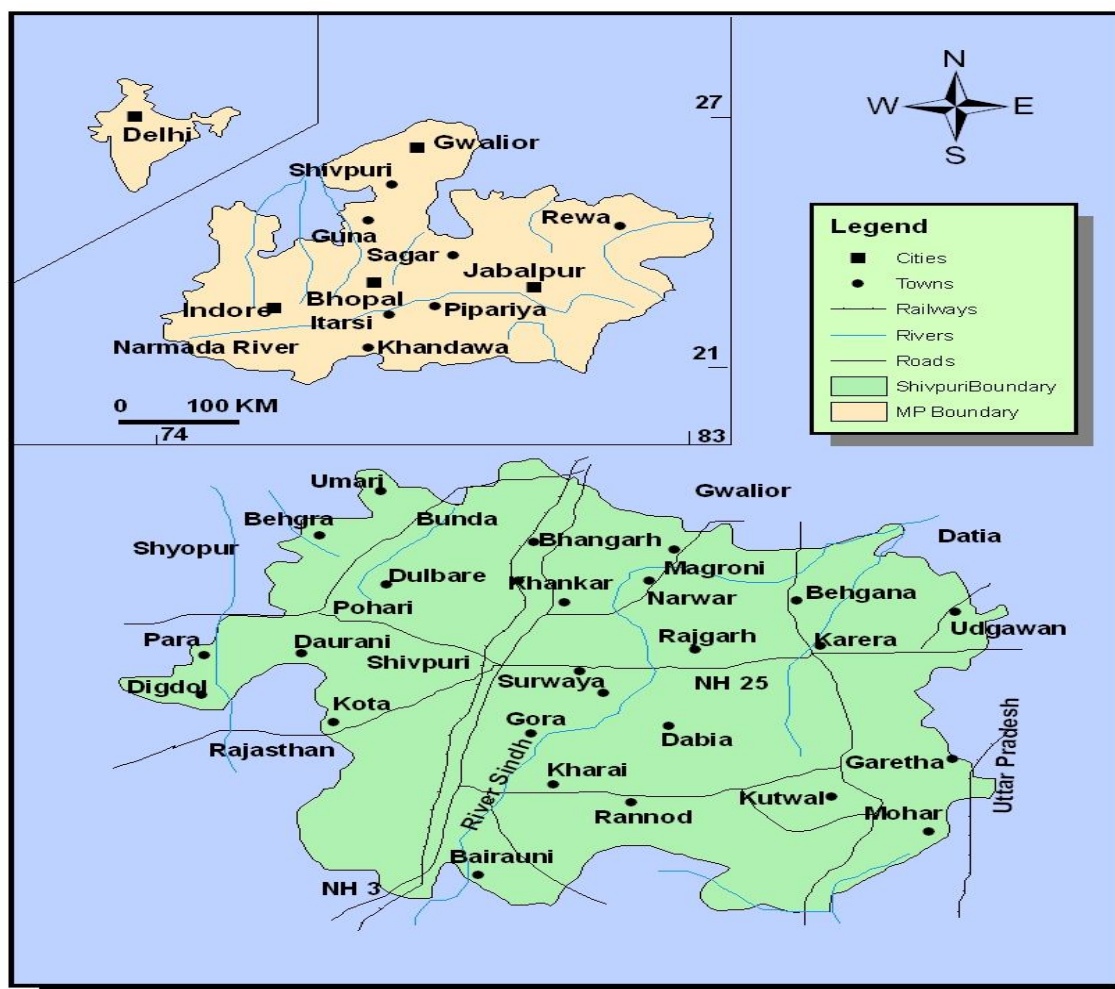


Table 3: Population profile of Sahariya tribe in Shivpuri District (1991-2011)

Development blocks	Total Population			Growth of Population 1991-2011
	1991	2001	2011	
Shivpuri	24,239	29,203	32,205	32.9
Pohari	21,447	26,560	36,415	69.8
Karera	7,451	9,747	12,815	72.0
Narwar	3,455	5,947	9,157	156.0
Kolaras	33,063*	46,027*	61,959*	87.4
Pichhor	17,045	21,357	28,052	64.6
Khaniadhana	21,064	22,552	38,537	83.0
Total	127,762	161,395	227,802	78.3

\* About 3% population comprises Bhil and Bhilala tribes  
 Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentage of respective totals  
 Source: Tribal Welfare Department, Shivpuri District (MP)

Literacy among the Sahariya tribe is very less. In 1991, it was only 10.7% that increased to 31.8% in 2011. Only 0.2% people were high school passed. We calculated working population of the Sahariya tribe (2011) and observed 45.9% total working population. Of which, 17.2% are cultivators, 40.6% are agricultural labours and 32.9% are marginal workers.

### **HEALTH CONDITIONS**

Most of the Sahariya are landless labours, working in stone mines and in farms of others. Poverty and malnutrition impede the tribal people. Their health condition remains poor. Lacking in healthcare facilities/centres further accelerate it. They have to walk miles to get medical facilities as they live in the jungle and isolated areas. The people mainly suffer from the respiration disease such as asthma, as most of them are working in stone mining. Our study shows that about 90% people died due to malnutrition and paucity in health centres. Similarly, every third worker, who works in stone mining has asthmatic problem. A large group of tribal people also suffer from leprosy.

### **HABITATION**

The habitats vary from khanda, patia, woods or grasses to brick houses, according to economy of people and distance of habitats from the towns. However, their habitats are isolated, located in the jungle or in stony and barren land, in the various ecological and geo-climatic zones, and are called Saharana. In Shivpuri District, the habitats are located in and surroundings of the Madhav National Park. They move frequently from one place to other in search of livelihood. Recently, their dwellings can be seen along the National Highway No. 3 between Shivpuri and Gwalior cities. Generally, they are landless workers, mainly working in stone mining.

### **CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

The Sahariya tribe follows the Hindu traditions; celebrates all fairs, festivals and customs. However, the people are conservative and orthodoxies. They speak a language, which is influenced by Hadoti dialect and live in a small family. The elder son lives separately after marriage and the younger son bears the family's responsibilities. Marriage is performed after attaining the age of 15 years, mainly through consensus between bride and bride groom. Gautra<sup>1</sup> plays a significant role in marriage ceremony. The main Gautras of the Sahariya tribes are 'Sohara', 'Gorchia', 'Dotiya', 'Chauhan', 'Seliya', 'Bakhuchia', 'Patodiya', and 'Goyaiya'. The Sahariya tribe restores the environment through worshiping local deities as 'Tejaji', 'Dhakar Baba', 'Durga', 'Hanumana', 'Lalbai' and 'Bejasa', and believes in obeahism<sup>2</sup>. The main festivals are 'Makar Sakranti', 'Savmi Amavasya' and 'Teja Dasmi'. The tribal people practice traditional herbal medicine to health cure. Hard working, the tribal people are well organized, live in a group, perform sacrifice of hens to satisfy their deity and worship their forefathers. They eat Go (a reptile) and sale its skin. Sehra is a famous dance, which they perform during the festivals.

### **ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Sahariya people are involved in the stone mining, agricultural practices as landless labours, collecting forest products for food and making handicrafts that exhibit their cultural manifestation. Collecting forest produces as tendu leaf, gum, herbs, honeybee and khair wood is another major break through for their economic activities. At the development block level, the tribe belonging to Shivpuri, Pichhor and Khaniyadhana developmental blocks are engaged in stone mining. The Government of Madhya Pradesh

<sup>1</sup> Family chronology

<sup>2</sup> A religion that involves witchcraft, originally practiced in Africa and surviving now in parts of the Caribbean



has given agricultural land in lease to some of them but most the tribal people are still working in the agricultural fields of the adjoining districts such as Gwalior, Datia, Guna and Morena, where they seasonally migrate during the sowing and harvesting seasons of crops. These landless labourers are locally called, 'Chaitua'.

Per day intake of food grains among the Sahariya people is below than the average. Sahariya takes seasonal 'Kandmul' wild fruits and vegetables found in the forest. Vegetable leaves of 'Senjna', 'Pheng', 'Bichotiya', 'Kanna', 'Bansi', 'Charetha', 'Chaurangi', 'Barsak', 'Lahaylai', 'Chaurai', 'Totam', 'Chemi', Bagor' and 'Rojan' are common food of Sahariya. Crushed dry 'Ber' with salt is popular food item. The main food grains are Jawar, Maize and wheat. Chicken, mutton, egg, pigeon, rabbit and fish are the main non-vegetarian dishes. 'Sawa' is the seed of the special grass, which grow in the jungle. Sahariya cooks delicious food from the seeds of these grasses. The seeds of the sawa grass are crushed to floor and chappatis are made. The sawa floor is also used to make 'kheer' and 'rabri'. Its floor has nutritional value, widely used by the other people during the religious fast.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The socio-economic status of the tribal people and their politico-cultural consciousness is remarkably low. Consequently, the benefits of development efforts could not percolate to them to the expected extent. To redress it, special projects and programmes have been formulated for the tribes and tribal regions, policies and approaches of development planning were modified to suit the needs of these people.

Our study reveals that the people of Sahariya tribe still live in the remote and forest areas. Their economy is primitive and they are the most downtrodden and the economically weaker section people. Because, they are not stable, always moving from one place to other in search of livelihoods, policy measures for their economic development could not take shape so far. The state government has set up the 'Sahariya Tribal Development Authority' with its headquarter at Shivpuri. Its main objective is to enhance the socio-economic status of the tribal people through framing and implementing several development schemes. However, like the other development programmes of the state government, this scheme also could not take shape. We suggest several policies measures for overall development of the Sahariya tribe such as a portion of arable land should be allotted to each family so that their unwanted movement can be stopped. Along with this, financial assistance should be given to them to construct permanent houses. They are uneducated people mainly because of lacking in educational institutions in the areas where they live thus, schools and colleges can be set up to educate them. Infrastructural facilities such as transportation, and food based small-scale village industries can be set up to bring them in the main stream of development. Their cultural heritage should be protected and for all above programmes, short and long-terms policies should be framed and implemented.

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