

Cholistani Hindu Culture: An Ethnography of Megwal Tribe

Abdul Razzaq Shahid¹ and Kashif Jamil²

Abstract

Few works are available on Cholistan but not a single work has yet been appeared on Cholistani Hindu Tribes. An attempt has been made to highlight the cultural anthropology of Meghwal Hindu Tribe of Cholistan. This paper is based upon observations, group discussions, and interviews of Meghwal Representatives. However, secondary sources have also been used where necessary. Cultural anthropology of Meghwal Tribe has been discussed under three sections: Rituals, Religion and Culture.

Keywords: Musrshid, Saraikiz, ChaninPir, HiloRani, Manga, Wata Sata, Barat, atma, parmatma

Introduction

Megwals are son of the soil whose forefathers were primarily cultivators on the banks of the river Hakra, with the drying of the river this area was deserted through desertification process and left only grazing land. Cholistan once was a cradle of great Indus civilization. Megwals still preserve their ancient culture. Though cultural exchange has affected their culture to some extent but they are still strict in their rituals and traditions.

¹ PhD, Associate Professor, Department of History, Islamia University Bahawalpur, Pakistan.
E-mail: dr.abrazaq@gmail.com

² Mphil, Lecturer, Department of History, Forman Christian College University Lahore, Pakistan.
E-mail: kashifjamil@fccollege.edu.pk

Megwals are also called Chamars (Rose, 1970; Din, 1904) They fall in the shudras according to structured system of Hindu caste. (Sherring, 1872). In past they use to live in Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Marwar, West Punjab and at the banks of sacred river jamna. (Jawad, 1988; Din, 1904) Bit by bit they spread in present Cholistan that was part of Ex-state of Bahawalpur (1727) May be this area was belong to Bikaner or Jaisalmer.

The claims of Megwals look true that they are living in Cholistan from last seven hundred years (Bachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) The census of 1901 of Ex-state of Bahawalpur proves that they were inhabitants of Cholistan (Din, 1904) There are two groups of Megwals in Cholistan (i) Sindhi Megwals (ii) Marwari Megwals. Although their *gots* (sub-castes) are same like *Gundhair, Lelahr, Jaipal, Parhad, Punwaar, Deha* etc. but they don't like to intermingle. Even Sindhi Megwals resident of *Drewar* fort do not intermarry with the Sindhi Megwals resident of *Yazman* (Bachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) it is an interesting fact that there are some cultural differences between Sindhi and Marwari Megwals. They are registered in union councils of present Bahawalpur, they were observed in union councils of *Mirgarh, Marot, Chanin pir and Drewar* fort. Majority of Megwals is founded in *Mithra Bangla* and *Drewar* fort, beside this they are living on *saraiki* belt of South Punjab of Pakistan, *Thar* in Sindh and Rajasthan in India.

By profession Cholistani Megwals are shepherds and cobblers. Their handmade shoes are still famous among the *Saraiki* people of Bahawalpur. Megwals are not refugee they are the ancient people of Cholistan. They are registered Cholistani voters and few of them got the land by govt. of Pakistan for agricultural activities. The Megwals who do not belong to above mentioned professions work as field laborer under the landlords (Din, 1904) but those who have shifted to civic areas they have adopted different professions like mason, carpenter, laborer, contractors, shopkeepers, mechanics etc. Majority of Megwals speak Marwari language.

Rituals

Megwals are still practicing the ancient tribal rituals/customs. It is to be said that sixteen rituals are practiced from birth to death in Hinduism. (Nathan & Foller, Tr. Mohsin, 2010)

Birth

The birth of boy is preferred as compare to girl in Hinduism because only a boy can perform all the death rituals of dead father. On the birth of boy Sindhi Megwals distribute sweet on 6th day of birth. Everyone can see the new born boy besides a widow or a person who's *murshid* (*spiritual leader*) did not allow him/her to visit. House is cleansed by a paste comprised on urine and shit of cow because It is supposed sacred and treated like mother in tribe. Pandit is called at home and a program of worship is arranged this is called *Geeta Pat.* (Das, 2008) Mother of new born baby is not allowed to take bath for first ten days. She takes bath at 11th day of birth of baby. The mother of new baby is not allowed to go outside the house for first forty days. This forty days period is called *chila katana*.

Cooking of any type of meat at home is not allowed in this forty days period unless family offers a goat to a *khaitpal* deity. Only pandit is allowed to suggest a name for child. At the age of 11 months mother takes her child to holy shrine of *hilo rani* where they offer a goat and 1st head shave of child is made and small pony keeps with it which saves it from demons and witchcrafts (Sirjun Ram, personal communication, August 14, 2012). On the shrine meat of goat is cooked and distributed. Here it must be noted that on the birth of a girl neither sweet is distributed nor offered a goat to deity.

In present scenario modernism is affecting their culture , it is observed that Megwals have started to offer a coconut instead of goat. This practice is going to be popular among those Megwals who are followers of *Rama Pir* and *Bhagat Kabir*, because most of Megwals believe that *Rama Pir* and *Bhagat Kabir* do not like the offering/sacrifice of goat (Das, 2008; Tr. Singh, 2011) Offering/sacrifice of goat is also observed in those Christians who converted to Christianity from Hinduism. Like the other Hindus, Megwals also dislike the circumcise of their children.

Marriage/Sagai

Bride groom are supposed *Ram & Sita* (deities) at the day of marriage in Hinduism. (Nathan & Foller, Tr.Mohsin, 2010) *Manga* or *wachola* plays a vital role in sagai or engagement. When family of bride groom look for a better match they have to contact to manga.

Both families of bride and groom do not talk directly, Manga works like a middleman between these two families. When both families get satisfied then they exchange gifts. Boy's family arrange program and practice sagai. They prepare food as they can afford easily and call all the relatives. Family members and friends also give the money as token of love to the groom, *tilak* is also applied on forehead of boy (Sahoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) same practice can be observed on girl's *sagai*.

A *lungi* is given to boy on sagai from girl's family as token of final selection, but boy's family put one rupee on the hand of girl for final selection. Girl's family also gives coconut and sweets to boy's family. Megwals do practice of marriage by *wata sata*. If there is no boy in girl's family then they sign an agreement that whenever there will be boy born in girl's family they will be authorize to get a bride from boy's family. This agreement is made for 20-50 years.

Minor age marriages are commonly practiced in Megwals. After marriage when they became adult then bride can go to groom's house to start a new life. Sindhi Megwals are of opinion that minor age marriages of all children at once decrease their expenses of marriages and protect them from illegal ways of sex (Tr.Singh, 2011) Megwals neither marry in the same sub caste (*got*) nor in paternal and maternal relations. After sagai both bride groom are not allowed to see each other till the marriage even boy can't go to girl's home town they even can't talk by phone. Megwal groom does not pay for bride as bhil does. (Sahoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012)

Marriage

For the fixing of date of marriage of bride groom both families visit to pandit or sometimes pandit is called at home. He suggests the best date and time for marriage. For the invitation of marriage pandit tie a thread on the wrist of heads of all families of tribe. After the fixing of marriage date bride groom stay in separate room at home. Due to poverty if separate room is not available in gopa/ hut then they stand *charpais* and prepare a separate place in Cholistan. During this period both bride/groom are not permitted to see any stranger. Groom keeps an iron stick and bride keeps iron knife so that they could be safe from witchcrafts.

Before marriage they are offered good food cooked in clarified butter. They apply paste of *haldi* for fair skin color. This paste is normally prepared at home (Laloo Ram, personal communication, August 7, 2012) On marriage day *mehndi(henna)* is applied on the right hand of each *barati*, it shows that they are from groom's side before going to bride's house boy worships Ganish deity. Women also go with *barat* and perform majority of marriage customs/rituals but Marwari Megwals and Sindhi Megwals resident of civic areas do not allow their women to go with *barat*. It shows their self esteem for their women.

Barat goes by tractor trolley and bikes etc. The bridegroom also go by tractor and men perform all the rituals in Marwari Megwals. Groom's family serves the food to tribe before leaving for *barat*. Mother sends *barat* with prayers. *Barat* is received by the bride's family. *Barat* does not go directly to bride's home rather it stays at some relative's home. But now this practice is going to end. At the time of *barat* both women of bride/groom sing songs like: O thanks lord you gave us such a wonderful son in law. (Kasoo Ram, personal communication, August 8, 2012)

Later seven married (not widowed) come and touch the forehead, arms, shoulders and knees of groom and give their prayers and wish blessings for him. But in Marwari Megwals this practice is performed by seven married (not widower). These seven women apply *mehndi* on the hand of groom and mother of bride applies *tilak* on forehead of groom and also serves a glass of milk. After this in the lawn of bride's house they fix the pieces of long sticks and they put a coconut in center and its lighted up.

Pandit starts *geeta pat* and bride groom take rounds around the fire. In first four rounds groom leads but in last round bride leads. But Marwari and colonial Megwals take four rounds around the fire two rounds are leaded by bride and rest of two leaded by groom. If couple is adult then they are allowed to stay together otherwise if they are in minor age then after marriage both will stay at their own homes and wait to be young. The family of bride shows dowry in the front of tribe. Normally *baratis* are served with the meat of goat but vegetable is also provided. Some interesting traditions/rituals are still in practice. One of them is called *Ghara Ghroli*. A taller girl from bride's side brings a pitcher of water and a taller girl from groom's side receives it. Marwari maegwals do this practice with taller boy.

Another custom is *dharma ki beti* a family from the town of groom's adopts bride as daughter and look after her as real daughter. But in marwari Megwals and residents of colonies are giving up this practice due to modernism and poor economy.

The family of groom scarifies a goat in the name of *khaitpal* deity before the fifteen days of marriage. At the day of marriage both fathers of bride and groom practice a special *vart*(fast) for the blessing of couple (Adoo Ram, personal communication, July 25, 2012)After the arrival of *barat* at home back once again groom takes bride to her home and returned after one or two days this custom is called *maklava*.

Dowry

Although dowry is considered curse in modern age but in spite of this it is practiced almost in entire South Asia. Prior the marriage Sindhi Megwals buy too much dowry. Somewhere this range reaches to 0.5 to 1.0 million. (Sachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) They buy furniture, crockery, blankets, jewelry home appliances etc. Before giving this dowry to groom's family it is shown to whole tribe. Sometimes relatives financially supports to buy the dowry. Too much dowry gives a great honor and respect to bride in groom's family. Marwari Megwals spend on marriages according to their financial position.

Divorce

Polygamy or divorce is strictly banned among the Megwals. But sometimes it is practiced in case of childlessness or death of wife but in case of second marriage first wife stays with husband. It shows great self esteem. In case of death of wife husband can remarry both in Sindhi and Marwari Megwals. There is no concept of divorce in Megwals But the Megwals who have shifted in city areas free their wives after divorce or give open option to wife to stay or either go to her parents. It shows the influence of Muslim cultures. If husband dies then his widow will remarry with husband's brother, if dead husband had no brother then they look a better match in paternal relatives. If nobody founded for her then a married brother can marry her to save the respect or honor of family. It shows a self-esteem for women. In this procedure they do not take rounds around the fire. Simply both sit in front of tribe/*panchayat* and man wears a scarf to widow and accepts her as his wife, this practice is called *chadar dalna*. (Preetam Das, personal communication, August 8, 2012)

Death Ceremonies

With minor differences death ceremonies are almost same in both groups of Megwals. Pandit is called immediately in the tribe after death of somebody. Dead body is bathed, confined and buried. Women are not allowed to go to graveyard. Red color coffin is reserved for women and white for men. After the death they try to bury the dead as soon as they can because they are of opinion that *atma* (soul) should meet *parmatma* (lord) soon.

After the death of any family member rest of family do not cook food at home for three days. Their relatives provide food to them, but in Sindhi Megwals they do not cook the food at home from death date to *kiria* approximately for 10-11 days. If somebody dies in the period of *punchuk* then they also bury 1-4 dummy dead bodies with the original dead body. The older son of dead person practice fast called *apwas* and also performs other rituals. *apwas* continuous from death date to *kiria*(10-11) days. The older son who does practice of *apwas* survives only on milk for 10-11 days. Before the *kiria* family performs *geetapat* 18 times from death date to *kiria's date*. Before one night of *kiria* they worship whole night.

Megwals do not put anything with the dead body. They do not take rounds around the grave to break up with dead wife/husband but they put some pot of food and water for birds on the grave. *Pandit* suggests the date for *kiria* and normally it starts at 5-6 am. They make a hole by digging in ground and an earthen lamp is lighted up outside the hole. *Pandit* reads verses from holy scripture loudly and in between older son inserts water in hole with the coconut and all the participants also insert the water in hole and also give some money to *pandit* and he drops some water on feet of participants to protect them from demon attacks. After this procedure a dummy dead body is inserted in watered hole and all the used articles in this procedure are inserted in to the hole and filled it with soil.

Last *geetapat* is performed for the comfort of dead at the end. The fruits and other edibles are presented to deities and a little share is inserted into sacred fire and it is to be supposed that deities have accepted their sacrifice/offerings. *Tilak* is also applied on the forehead of participants of the program and also served with fruits and milk.

Devi ka dan (offerings to deity) is practiced, they distribute rice among the nine virgins and supposed that deities / *devis* have accepted their offerings. They also give share of insects, birds, aunts.

The family whose member has been died is not allowed to participate in the other religious festivals like *holi*, *dewali* for first year. In the end of *kiria* food is served to participants it comprised on rice, cooked goat meat with *chapatti*. *Pandit* wears a turban to the older son in the presence of tribe and announced as new head of family. The *pandit* also allows cooking at home for the family.

Religion

Hinduism is an ancient religion of the sub-continent. Followers of different religions came in Cholistan in different period of time and the ruins are still there at *patan minara*, *sui vehar*, *marot and drewar fort*. (Alzabair, 1974) Hindus were founded in Cholistan before the establishment of ex-state of Bahawalpur (1727). After the partition of Pakistan and India Cholistani Hindus preferred to stay in Cholistan, but landlords and business class of Hindus migrated to India. Cholistani Hindus could not migrate to India due to lack of political awareness and education. The followers of Jainism and Buddhism also migrated to India at the time of partition of Indo-Pak. Majority of Hindus worship the different incarnations of *bhagwans*. (Preetam Das, personal communication, August 8, 2012)

Sindhi Megwals of Cholistan worship different deities like *RamaPir*, *goga*, *Krishan*, *Kali Mata* and *Shri Chand Ram*. They do not have permanent worship place or *munder(temple)* because they are nomadic and wander in whole Cholistan. They make worship place at home called *matha taiken* Marwari Megwals worship the *mortis* but Sindhi Megwals do not believe in *mortis*. (Bachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012)

Vow/Manoti

The practice of vow is very common among Cholistani Megwals. They vow to *RamaPir*, *Krishna*, *Hilo rani*, *Chanin Pir*. They make first head shave of their children on the holy shrine of *hilo rani* and sacrifice a goat. They believe that *RamaPir* does not like the sacrifice of goat so that's why they offer a coconut and some other articles.

Apwas/Vart/Fast

Cholistani Megwals practice *vart* at first night of moon according to Hindu calendar 11th night, 14th night and when there is no moon in the sky. They do not eat/drink anything during the *vart* for 18-24 hours. During the *vart* they do not sit on *charpai* (bed) don't sleep, and don't wear shoes. They prefer to worship whole night. Some *varts* are practiced on specific festivals like *holi*, *dewali* or in hard time, for good business and some other purposes. At the time of marriage both fathers of bride/groom practice special *vart* for the blessing of bride/groom. When father dies, than older son practice *apwas*. During the *apwas* he survives only on milk. (Mohabat Das, personal communication, August 8, 2012)

Cow's Honor

Killing of any animal/bird for the sake of food is supposed a sin in Hinduism.(Nathan & Foller, Tr.Mohsin, 2010; Tr.Singh, 2011) *Lord Krishana* was fond of cow and its milk and sometimes used to call it mother (Ibid) that's why cow is supposed sacred among all the Hindus. In many imaginary pictures of *Lord Krishna*, cow can be observed with him. In Cholistan all Hindus show great respect for cow they do not abuse or hit it like other animals. If cow is killed by someone intentionally or unintentionally it is supposed a biggest sin. Guilty person is terminated from tribe/community and socially boycotted by the tribe. The one and only solution is taking bath in sacred river Ganges it's called *ganga ashnan*.

When a person comes after *ganga ashnan* he is welcomed by the whole tribe with great honor he is dressed a turban by head of tribe, sweet is distributed. After this ceremony he can start his routine life in tribe. With the paste of cow's shit and urine Megwals cleansed their houses especially kitchen, lawn, worship place etc. when a cow is crossed by a bull its offspring does not cross by the same bull (Sachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) it shows great respect and honor of *gao mata*(mother cow).

Visiting Holy Places

Cholistani Megwals also visit the holy places/shrines like other religions. Although majority of holy places of Hindus are in India but some are in Pakistan. Many Cholistani Megwals visit holy place of *Tando Allah yar* in Sindh on annual festival of *Rama Pir*, who is supposed an incarnation of *Bhagwan*. People come along with their offerings, do special worship and practice of *vart*. Another holy place is *sadhbela* in Sukkhr. There are many temples of different deities in Sindh. Cholistani Megwals and all Hindus visit *Schoo satra Ram's* shrine in *Rohri* and *Hinglaj munder* of Lasbela Baluchistan. Here it is a sacred stream of *agore* many local Hindus believe that *Shri Chand Ram* visited this place and took bath in *agore* stream. Many Hindus drink its water and carry with them it's called *gngajul* or *amrat*.

Cholistani Megwals and other Hindu communities have started to celebrate the festival of *Rama Pir* in Cholistan near the shrine of *Chanin Pir*. A temple of *Shiv G(deity)* is situated in the *Chawkwal(Punjab)* 18 miles to south. In famous folklore of *Mahabharata* it is mentioned, a close water pond is also there and it is believed that after the death of his wife *sati* he wept too much and pond of tears was created there. Some ruins of ancient temple is discovered in drewar fort, it looks it belongs to *Shiv G(deity)*

The biggest *munder* of *Krishana* is situated in *Sadiqabad(Punjab)*. Festival of *guga* is celebrated in Bhawalpur and the biggest *mundir* of tiger goddess is situated in Bahawlnagar. Cholistani Megwals also visit holy shrines of *Chanin Pir*, and *Hilo Rani* the famous shrines of Cholistan.

Festivals

There are many religious festivals practiced by Cholistani Megwals like *dewali*, *holi*, *deserhra*, *raksha bandhan* etc. but Cholistani shepherds almost miss/deprived from these festivals because they live with their livestock in Cholistan sometimes for weeks, but rest of Sindhi Megwals celebrate all these festivals with great enthusiasm.

On *Rakhsa bandhan* sister ties a thread on wrist of brother and brother made a commitment with sister for her security and protection. Brother and sister also exchange gifts on this occasion. Different myths are famous in Cholistan regarding this festival.

One of them explained that when *Indra* deity fought with *Bali deity* then wife of *Indra* tied a thread on the wrist of *Bali* and accepted his as brother. Another story tells that when Alexander the great came in Cholistan and fought with Raja Porus, he was unable to get victory over him then his wife tied a thread on the wrist of Raja Porus then Raja Porus surrendered due to this relationship. Both stories are famous among the Cholistani Hindus. (Ramesh Jaipal, personal communication, August 2, 2012). *Desehra* is also celebrated among the Hindus of Cholistan. Nine worshipers spend nine days/nights in worship and practice special *vart*. At the 10th day tribal people greet them offer gifts and edibles to them. Sometime on this event first head shave of new born children is made.

Holi is celebrated to recall the memories of *Prhlad bhagat* it is supposed the biggest festival of Hindus. Likewise *Dewali* belongs to an obedient son *Rama* whose father *Dasrath Ram* sent him for exile of 14 years in jungle. It is celebrated for the joy of return of *Rama* in his kingdom.

Avagon

It's commonly said among the Megwals that '*karm he dharm hay*' which means "good act is a religion" (Das, 2008) Megwals believe that if somebody has done good acts in previous life then he/she will get a good life in next birth but if the previous life of someone is not good then in next life he/she will be born in the form of bird. Animal, insect and will be punished. (Ibid) sometimes a soul entangled badly in this cycle.

Caste System

Normally Hindu society is a structured society. Although the system of caste is rejected by the constitutions of India and Pakistan but it exists and practiced socially. There are four main castes in Hinduism. It is believed that *Brahmans* are created from mouth of *Brahma* deity, *Khastris* from arms, *Waisha* from legs and *Shudras* from feet (Lal, 2008; Das, 2008; Tr.Singh, 2011; Stacy, n.d.) one theory says Aryans introduced the caste system they declared the lowest class Hindus as shudras: (Jean,n.d.) *Krishan Kirpa Morti* says in his book *rohaniyat aur ekisvi sadi* that Bhagwan never said that these four castes belongs to birth, rather it depends on personal characteristics and acts.

So he says that the system of caste is groundless (Morti, 2005; Tr.Singh, 201; Tr.Ahsan, 2007) but with the passage of time this system got stronger. Buddhism and Sikhism was also a revolt against the caste system of Hindus. Lowest class Hindus were not treated good so that's why gradually in different periods of time they embraced other religions to get a good status in society. (TaraChand & Ahmad, n.d.)

On 12 Nov 1957 forty one lowest castes got the status of schedule caste of Pakistan. Megwals are also included in them. But in spite of this in the structured society of Cholistan Hindus each caste/tribe supposes itself superior then other caste/tribe. Even Megwals do not intermingled in *Bhils* and *Bawarias* and none of single tribe likes to have social relationship with each other. In fact the system of caste is creating many differences among these Hindus. But gradually after getting education Hindus of different caste/tribe are gathering for their problems on a single platform.

The Impacts of Islam and Christianity Upon Megwals

Cholistani Megwals embraced Islam in different periods of time. Muslim *tablighi jamats* (preaching groups) and Christian missionaries admire the Megwals, they treated them with love instead of discrimination. In *Mithra Bangla* almost fifty Megwals converted into Islam. Megwals are inspired by teachings of saint *sufis*. They like one of saint sufi Taj Muhammad and Megwals hanged up his picture in their *gopas* (thatch house). Many Hindus embraced Islam under his custody. A Muslim landlord of *Mithra Bangla* offered land for cultivation to Megwals without any payment for appreciation or token of love. Many Christian missionaries are also working for their education but up till now only few of them embraced Christianity.

Culture

Language

At the decline of Mughals and before the establishment of ex-state of Bahawalpur Cholistan was a part of *Bikaner* and *Jaisalmer*. *Rajasthani* was the ancient language spoken here because the whole area comprised of Rajasthan. *Hakara* or *Sarsvati* river dried up in 1200 B.C. so the cultivators of this region adopted new professions. Megwals speak Marwari language but due to influence of *Saraikis* now they are able to speak *Saraiki*, *Punjabi*, *Urdu* language.

Here DD Kosambi's theory proves true that when two cultures come closer the strong culture impose its language on the weak culture and gradually accepts its customs (Kosambi, n.d.)

Food

Present Megwals do not eat porcupine, pigs, jackal, fox, reptiles like the Bawaria tribe. They like to eat chicken and goat. Some of them are also vegetarians. They cook meat of goat especially on marriage and *kiria*. But followers of *Rama Pir deity* like to have vegetables and dairy products. Cholistani Megwals who are shepherds and wander in Cholistan like to eat simple *chapatti* with red chili.

Dress

All Cholistani Hindus men wear almost same dress either they belong to any caste/tribe. Men wear *dhoti* and *qameez* and turban. When a child comes to age of 10 he starts to wear a turban if he does not wear it is supposed that he is uncivilized or disobedient. Women like to wear *ghagra choli* of sharp color. When these women see any stranger they hide their face by covering it with scarf. They always prefer to wear their cultural dress even on festivals and marriages. Up till now they could not inspire by dresses of other cultures.

Jewelry

Women are fond of silver jewelry they like to wear ear rings, nose ring, *pazeb*, necklaces (*hasi*). Married women wear *kangans* in both hands. Teenage girls like to have multiple holes for wearing maximum ear rings. Marwari married women wear white bangles in full arms but unmarried wear in half arms. In some Marwari Megwals unmarried can't wear white bangles. These are minor regional differences in Cholistan. Nose stud or *papa* is wear by only married women. This jewelry is not commonly available in market its designed by some Hindu jewelers.

Housing

Before 1904 Cholistni Megwals use to live in small *gopas* and it was said that when a Megwal sleeps in his *gopa* then his feet remain outside the *gopa* (Din, 1904) but in this modern age now they started to live in paved houses in city areas. Some of them decorated their *gopas* and use them like a drawing room. They also reserve some space at home for worship and cooking too. Both places and whole house is cleansed. There is no trend of toilet system in Cholistan. They are habitual to go for toilet in open desert twice in a day at early morning and late evening. Men go to opposite direction from women for toilet use.

Family System

In this modern age Megwals are still bound in joint family system. An old man who is normally father or grandfather is supposed head of family. Normally a family comprises of eight to twenty members. One family was observed comprising of fifty members. Each married couple prepares food for one day on its turn. In the same manner they distribute the duties of family to all the members. Women are observed active in home affairs. Sindh Megwal women do not work with their men in the fields but Marwari Megwal women still work with their men in the fields due to poor economy. Economy is affecting their practices. All the family issues are solved by the head of family.

Panchayat System/Jirga/Judiciary

A strong *Panchayat* system is observed in Sindhi Megwals. They do not go to police station for their problems. They have their own *Panchayat* system and the decision of *Panchayat* is considered as ultimate decision. *Panchayat* comprises of some seniors and intellectuals of tribe. If any member of tribe does not accept decision of *Panchayat* he is socially boycotted.

When any issue is presented then *Panchayat* investigates it they hear the view of both parties. After looking in to the matter and neutral analysis they announce their ultimate decision. The Punishment depends on the nature of crime. Sometime guilty is fined only 1 rupee for disgraceful.

Sometimes guilty picks a shoe with his teeth. In case of rape his face is painted black and wear a couple of shoes in neck and sit on donkey's back and terminated from tribe lastingly. This is only one of reason that Megwals marry their children in minor age to avoid illegal way of sex.

In few cases they put hand on *geeta* or cow to prove their innocence. Sometimes *panchayat* socially boycott somebody/family for a specific period of time (Bachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) Megwals claim that none of a single report is registered in any police station due to this strong *panchayat* system.

Trend of Education

The inhabitants of Cholistan train their children to look after and increase the livestock instead of education. Now government of Pakistan has done some suitable arrangements for their primary and secondary education. Christian Missionaries are also working in this regard. So now Megwals started to go to schools but mostly Megwals raise a question that what will they do after getting education? (Arjun Ram, personal communication, July 25, 2012)

Folklores

The famous and important folklores of Cholistani Megwals are *Ramayana*, *Mahabhart*, *RamaPir*, *Saieen Baba*, *tiger goddess* etc. *Parans* also comprise of folklores. But in this modern age they do not have time to transfer folklores generation to generation. Now the trend of folklores is going to end only few Megwals are in Cholistan who remember these folklores.

Sports/Pastime

The sports and pastime activities are common both in Megwals and among people of Punjab. On the festival of *ChaninPir*, they took part in the race of cycles, motorbikes, and camels. They also like wrestling, *kabadi* football, *bazo pakrna*, weight lifting, *ada khada*, hide and seek *kokla chapaki* and *wanjoo*.

Handicrafts

Sindhi Megwals resident of *drewar* fort are famous for shoe making. Cholistani women prepare different articles like hand fan, *changair*, baskets, *flasian* with the hair of camels, sheep and goats. They also prepare bed sheets, blankets, crockery of baked clay. These women are expert in stitching and embroidery work. They also prepare beautiful *lungis*.

Superstition

Following superstition are observed in Cholistani Megwals'

- Life of Cholistan depends on rain Cholistani Megwals go to different shrines like *dodhlan wala*, *thigri shah*, *chaninpir* along their offering for rain. Some time they decorate a bull and leave it alone to be prey by beasts (Bachoo Ram, personal communication, March 6, 2012) Presently they distribute the meat of bull among the poor for rain.
- When marriage date is fixed Cholistani Megwals bridegroom keeps the iron article like knife and iron stick. It is believed that if they will keep these articles they will remain safe from witchcrafts.
- On the event of *holi*, program is started from that house in which a new baby is born. Somebody keeps the child in arms and sit in the *chauth* and rest of people make shadow of sticks on the child and it is believed that this child will be safe from blindness and witchcrafts.
- On lunar eclipse they offer some butter to their cow to be safe from its bad impacts(Malik Ram, personal communication, August 8, 2012)
- On the event of marriage bride groom always take rounds around the fire at midnight or late night and it is believed that they will suffer if they will take rounds around the fire in daylight.

Politics and Cholistani Megwals

Government of Pakistan did some suitable arrangements for drinkable water and proper education. Megwals are more active and educated then other Hindu tribes of Cholistan. They raised voice for separate electorate, now they are participating in local level politics. Political activities have created a courage and self confidence in the tribal people.

Conclusion

Cholistani Megwals and Muslim *saraikiz* have exchanged their customs/practices. Present Megwals learned to believe in oneness of God, visit of holy places, believe in saint *sufis*, grave worship from local Muslim *saraikiz*. Muslims of Cholistan borrowed the superstition beliefs, *basant* festival, *Qulkhani*, *chalisvan*, putting water cup and edible on graves from Cholistani Megwals.

Journey of *barat* by tractor trolley, women accompany in *barat*, after fixing the date of marriage to have an iron articles for protection from witchcrafts, *saraiki* language all these things are adopted by Megwals from Muslim *saraikiz* of ex-state of Bahawalpur.

All different Hindu tribes of Cholistan started to assemble on a single platform for solution of their problems by putting aside their internal discrimination and caste system.

References

- Alzabair, (1974) Asare Qadeema Number, Bahawalpur, Urdu Academy.
- Chand, Tara and Ahmad, Masood Muhammad(n.d.) Tamadan-e-Hind per Islami Asrat, Lahore, Majlis-e-Tehrik-e-Adab.
- Das, Dhanan J, (2008) Shrimad Bhagvad Gita, Lahore, Nagarshat Publishers.
- Din, Malik Muhammad, (2001) Gazetteer of Bahawalpur State 1904, Lahore, Sang-e-Meel Publications.
- Foller, Jiniani and Nathan, Jagan, (2008) Hindumat Translated by M.H.Mohsin, Lahore, Ilmo-Irfan Publsiher.
- Ibbetson, Denzil, (1998) *Punjab ki Zati*, Translated by Yasir Jawad, Lahore, Fiction House.
- Jean, Baron, (n.d.) Diamond and Dust, India through French Eyes, London, John Murray.
- Kosambi, D.D, (n.d.) The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline, n.d. Vikas Publishing House.
- Lal, Master Pyaray and Haldrice, W.J, (2008) Rasoom-e-Hind, Lahore, Majlis-e-Tehrik-e-Adab.
- Morti, Krishan Kirpa, (2005) Rohaniyat aur aikisvi sati, Karachi, Bhakti Widant Book Trust.
- Narain, R.K, (2007) Mahabharat Translated by Naeem Ahsan, Lahore, Nagarshat Publishers.
- Rose, H.A, (1970) A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and NWFP. Vol.II, (n.d.)Language Department Punjab.
- Sarsvati, Dianad Swami, (2011) Rig Ved Translated by Nehal Singh, Lahore, Nagarshat Publishers.
- Sherring, M.A, (1872) Hindu Tribes and Caste as Represented in Benaras, Calcutta, Thakar Spink and Co.
- Stacy, Allen, (n.d.) Visiting India, London, B.T.Bastford Hd.