

Working Paper

A NOTE ON SARODI

- A Nomadic Tribe in
Vidarbha

February 1983

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In Vidarbha we come across many tribes living nomadic life. Sarodi is one of them well known for its peculiar characteristics of males following palmistry as their profession alongwith carpet mending and females trading in he and she buffaloes. A small study tour was undertaken and some Sarodi families were visited and some social workers were contacted to collect information about the ways of life of Sarodis. Preliminary observations are presented in this note. Even today they lead nomadic life and move over a vast area, even out of Maharashtra. Some years back, plots were given to them at some villages to settle down and change their way of life. Still male members of these settled families follow nomadic life for major part of the year; and female members work as labourers in the villages.

The Institute intends to study this nomadic tribe in more depth with special emphasis on their economic activities. A survey of sample families would be undertaken to understand their levels of living, ways of earning, consumption pattern and also to understand the economics of various activities, the Sarodis undertake for earning their livelihood. Efforts would be made to understand thoroughly the problems faced by Sarodis and propose solutions. In this context, various government schemes; work of the voluntary organisations and Social workers will also have to be studied in order to suggest effective schemes for improving the life of this tribe.

These schemes need to be integrated with the local regional plans. The Institute may take up a study of nomadics in Vidarbha on a wider scale covering most of the important nomadic tribes. On the basis of the experience of the study on Sarodis, such a wider study could be taken up. This preliminary note would be of interest to all those who are interested in the welfare of nomadic tribes and the comments on this note would help the Institute in carrying out in-depth study of these nomadics in a more meaningful manner.

Location :

Though almost all Sarodis follow nomadic life, they have base villages, where they return after periodic itinerary. In these villages they have their huts. As they had no landed property they cannot be pinned to these base villages for any reason. Sometimes the whole family is on move and some times only male members go on moving. But in any case at specific period i.e. in rainy season and on some festive occasions they are at their base villages. The base villages* are spread over in Yavatmal, Wardha, Nagpur, Akola and Chandrapur districts of Vidarbha.

* Following are some of the base villages :

Yavatmal District : Talegaon, Karli, Khairgaon, Dongar Kharda, Jodmoha, Kusal, Godhani, Andha Bori, Bodh Gawhan, Pimpalgaon, Kalamb, Karanwadi, Bhandari, Mhasola, Khadki, Khateshwar.

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Religion :

All Sarodis follow the Hindu religion and worship deities. The Khandoba a form of Shiv, Datta, Kanaknath, Goddess Bhavani are the main deities, which are worshipped in houses. Almost all Hindu festivals are celebrated.

Tattooing :

Among females tattooing is very popular. At an early age every girl has to undergo this painful treatment. Second tattooing is done in young age or after marriage. Forehead and forearm are the parts of body for tattooing designs of common birds, animals, flowers. Name of husband is tattooed by some girls after marriage. Tattooed designs are visible in green colour after some days after tattooing. These are supposed to be permanent ornaments, without any expenditure.

Marriage :

Selection of life partners is usually done with the consultation of elderly family members. The father of bridegroom has to pay about Rs.125/- to the father of the bride. This amount can vary according to the status of the bride's father. This is

Wardha District : Retha, Salod, Savangi, Asola.

Nagpur District : Takalghat, Khairi, Makardhokada, Udasa.

Akola District : Asra Pardi (Washim).

Chandrapur District : Bhivapur, Shastrinagar.

just opposite of dowry system. A priest must be there to perform the rites. Usually marriages are celebrated according to the Hindu system. Expenditure on marriages depends upon the financial position of the parties. It is learnt that recently they print invitation cards. Previously they used to extend oral invitations through friends and relatives.

Dress :

A male Sarodi is easily recognised from his peculiar shaped red turban with general round shape. On left and right sides there are two points. He usually wears a dhoti, a shirt and a coat. A big bag is held across the shoulder to collect grain and flour. When a Sarodi moves for practicing palmistry, he wears garlands of 'rudraksha'. His forehead is decorated with sandal wood paste. Ladies wear 9 yard sarees, similar to those of Vidarbha village women.

Household Materials :

Generally huts and residences of Sarodis are small and low in height. Every entrant must bow down while entering into it. Inside arrangement is peculiar. Small platforms are made with pieces of wood and banbooes to keep boxes, beds and other materials. This arrangement is for protection from damp floor in rainy season and from various injurious insects throughout the year. In front of the hut there is an open space covered

with grass. This is used for sitting and doing household work. For washing bodies, some huts have an enclosed space just nearby. Many of the Sarodis bathe in open.

As Sarodis lead a nomadic life, they possess simple and light materials. For cooking, they use aluminium pots. Water is stored in earthen pots. Peculiarly, every Sarodi family has some glasses, dishes and pots made of Kase, a mixture of some metals. They are now-a-days very costly, but have permanent value. These pots last long and are beneficial to health. These are immune to acidic reactions and hence they do not require periodic tin plating or coating.

Godadi :

Each and every Sarodi family has a peculiar piece of cloth viz. Godadi. Ladies prepare this godadi of different colours, giving it an appearance of a good design. It has many layers of cloth-pieces. This godadi is used for various purposes i.e. for guests, friends to sit on, to cover the body during sleeping hours, etc. As it is made of many layers of cotton-cloth, it is very useful for protecting the body from cold during winter.

Out of used and wornout clothes, some ropes are prepared, which can be used in various ways; for tying sheeps, goats, young calves and for fixing tents or canopy etc.

Fairs :

Sarodis have their special fairs in addition to general Hindu fairs. A fair is held at Khatেশwar-Jodmoha (Yavatmal) in the memory of Kanaknath (One of the nine Naths) on the 5th day of the second fortnight of Falgun month. It is estimated that about 3 to 4 thousand Sarodis from all over the Vidarbha assemble there and have a stay for 2-3 days. For the congregation common dinners are arranged from the funds collected through the Madedars or Patils of various groups. Another fair is held at Rotha (Wardha district) in the month of Chaitra in honour of the Goddess Ranomai or Renuka. This fair has also considerable attendance of Sarodis.

As almost all Sarodis lead a nomadic life, these annual assemblies at fairs facilitate Sarodis to meet their relatives, exchange important information and especially to have marriage negotiations. Due to this facility and opportunity almost all Sarodis do not fail to attend these fairs.

Tent Material :

For nomadic life a temporary shade is very essential. This must be made of very light material, which can be carried easily. The construction and demolition should be

done in short time. For the canopy usually bamboo sticks or small branches of trees are used as frame, which is covered by thick pieces of cloth. All these materials can be packed easily and carried by animals, with the Sarodis.

Camp Life :

After the rainy season by Dasera or Diwali Sarodi families start their itinerary in groups. Generally a group of 10-15 families live together. All required material is loaded on the buffalo-backs. A suitable site near a village or a rural centre is selected for camping for some days. Small canopies are soon erected to accommodate the family members. Usually such site is selected near an assured water supply. The whole group is on move for about 8 to 9 months. Before the commencement of the monsoon these groups return to their base villages. During this period of itinerary they move over a vast region.

Economic Activities :

I. Business in she-buffaloes

Purchase : Living of Sarodis is very simple. Their sources of income are scanty and hence wants and expectations are limited. Generally each Sarodi family possesses some buffaloes. No family, however, poor it may be, is

without a she-buffalo. It can be said that buffalo is the centre of their economic activities.

When Sarodis are on move from one village to the other they hunt for dry she-buffaloes. Owners sell out such animals because for them it is very expensive to keep and feed these animals till calving stage. Hence they are sold at low prices and are purchased by these Sarodis. Female members of Sarodi families feed these animals adequately, look after them carefully till the stage of calving. It is observed that for fetching grass a group of 4-8 females, with sharp sickles goes out twice a day, in morning and afternoon, cut the grass and carry heavy head loads to feed the animals. As far as possible green fodder is provided. For fetching such grass the women go far away. Sometimes they go out earlier in the morning by 4 a.m. and return before the sun-rise. Thus women folk exert physically very much to secure fodder. They never buy any fodder.

When the whole family is on move, such animals are also with them. When only male members are on move, purchased dry she-buffaloes are sent to their base villages through trucks, accommodating about 8 to 10 heads at a time. Thus, at the base villages or on move in camps, dry she-buffaloes are looked after very carefully.

Sale : Just before or soon after calving she-buffaloes are sold at higher prices. A difference between sale price and purchase price is the profit earned by a Sarodi. It is guessed that this difference ranges between Rs.1000/- to 1500/- per buffalo. For this profit, the Sarodi family, especially females, put in hard physical labour by providing adequate feed.

They sell such animals at livestock market-places held at Nagpur, Kalamb, Ghatanji, Arni and Digress. Those on move, sale them at livestock market-places on their route. Generally buying and selling business is conducted by females. Sarodis seem to have good elementary knowledge of animal diseases. They treat sick buffaloes by using simple medicines, including leaves of some trees, easily available.

II. Business in he-buffaloes :

Generally he-buffaloes die in young age. Economically they are supposed to be of lesser use than she-buffaloes. In non-rice track of Vidarbha he-buffaloes are not used for any specific use, as such they are usually disposed of at an early age at a considerably low price. Sarodis buy such animals while on move and feed them carefully, These animals are

collected till the livestock fair at Wani, held in March/April, where a separate site is provided for assembly and marketing of he-buffaloes. Most of the Sarodis sell he-buffaloes in this market. In Vidarbha the fair at Wani is supposed to be the biggest and famous for transactions in he-buffaloes and bullocks.

Male buffaloes are preferred and purchased by rice cultivators from rice growing regions of Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh plain in Madhya Pradesh. These animals are used for all agricultural operations and transport also. He-buffaloe is slow in speed but is stronger than a bullock and can carry heavier loads. They can easily stand the hard work to be done in knee-deep water in rice fields. As regards price, they are less priced than bullocks.

After the fair at Wani is over, and in case some animals are unsold the Sarodis attend livestock market-places in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and so on, till all the heads are sold out. Generally he-buffaloes are moved by trekking however longer the distance may be. The Sarodis accompany the animals on foot covering a distance of about 10-15 miles per day. By the advent of monsoon they return to their base village.

From this it can be inferred that the Sarodis are living links between the two regions. They are inter-state dealers; though their business is on smaller scale.

III. Palmistry :

Almost every male Sarodi practices palmistry. They learn this art in an early age from the elderly persons in the "Beda". All Sarodis are generally very talkative and possess sweet tongue by which they can attract customers. Immediately after an entry into a compound, Sarodi loudly states some bright past or future events about the house owner. In the beginning, people are reluctant to listen the forecast, they try to avoid him, but patiently and calmly by persuasion and with his sweet tongue, he overcomes the reluctant house owner. He praises the landlord and induces him to extend his arm and open the palm for reading and forecasting. Herein lies his skill. In return he gets some amount in cash or kind. Grain and flour are consumed or sold out and amount is accumulated and then remitted to the base village.

From the talk with some Sarodis it is learnt that they move over a vast and expansive area of India

including Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarath, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Nepal etc. for practicing this profession. In railways, they travel without ticket; sometimes reading the palm of the ticket collector or sometimes getting down from the train, if asked by the ticket collector to do so. Anyhow they manage to travel over a wide area.

Before leaving the base village a Sarodi obtains a certificate from the Sarpanch, the Police Patil or other respectable persons. All his particulars, including name, age, residence are mentioned in this certificate. These are very useful, when they are asked or interrogated by police officers in some matters. They never go out of the way and hence they can travel widely, on the strength of these character certificates. They also try to obtain some certificates from respectable persons about their skill and mastery over the art of palmistry and forecasting.

IV. Carpet, Tadhao, Blanket mending :

Sarodis are expert in mending old and torn carpets, blankets and tadhao. By doing this they earn money and bread. Generally farmers have to use big tadhao for transportation of cotton and grain. While handling

these carpets are torn, and as such they need repairs. Hence Sarodis get good business in Villages. For this a long and stout needle is used. This needle is generally fixed in his red turban. In return, sometimes Sarodis ask for bread or food also; that can satisfy his hunger.

V. Sale of dung manure :

Every Sarodi family carefully collects the waste of animals. During the course of a year considerable quantity of manure is stored. Needy farmers approach the Sarodi families and purchase the same. This is also a source of income.

VI. Sale of Milk :

Some of the Sarodi families who are leading a stationary life have other sources of income. As mentioned earlier, she-buffaloes are sold before or after calving; but steady families do not sell such milch animals. They keep them and sell milk to hotel keepers, at nearby rururban centres, where it is in great demand. Some Sarodi families attend nearby fairs, with milch animals and sell the milk to hotel-keepers and other persons, who need it most. In this business

they earn handsomely. At fairs there is great scarcity of milk; hence it is sold at higher price.

Remittance of Amount :

As mentioned earlier Sarodis move over a vast region practicing palmistry and carpet mending. Through these they earn money. It is quite risky to keep larger amount on person. So, as and when the amount is more, part of it is remitted to their relatives at the base villages. From a cursory inquiry, it is gathered that money orders are received from far away places, like Gauhati, Dibrugad, Shillong etc. An amount of the remittance varies from Rs.50/- to 500/-. In the sub post office at village-level the cash is limited. This is known to the Sarodi on move. Hence, when he remits larger sum he sends currency notes by registered and insured packet.

Changed to settled life :

A change in nomadic life is set in, on a very small proportion. At Kalamb, Karangaon and Bhandari villages of Yavatmal district and Makardhokada and Udasa of Nagpur district, some settled Sarodi families

are seen. But still male members follow nomadism for about 8 to 9 months. Females, old members and children enjoy a steady life. At these villages some small huts are constructed by them. But no permanent structure is seen. Even from these villages some families go on moving keeping their huts closed. Some families move on for years together and return after a gap of four to five years also. It seems that they take pleasure in moving over a wide area; perhaps some Sarodis may not even entertain an idea of a stationary life.

Summary :

Though the Sarodis lead a nomadic life, their activities are of great economic utility. They rear she-buffaloes in dry period with utmost care. Especially women take much care and provide the animals with adequate feed. They also get handsome return for their hard labour. In purchasing dry she-buffaloes and selling them at calving stages, they play significant role. Otherwise, these animals would have been neglected and perhaps sent to slaughter houses in young age. In a way their nomadism is complementary to settled life.

As regards he-buffaloes, they are inter-state dealers and living links between the areas. In this business they move over a vast region on foot, and visit villages, towns and market places in various states.

Sarodis also engage themselves in mending the carpets, blankets, tadhaos etc. They also earn by practicing plamistry.

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