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### **Culture, Custom, and Cuisine of the Meena Tribe**

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#### **Abstract**

*Man is a social animal, so he creates society by being inspired by his nature and needs. Since there are continuous changes in the tendencies, needs, and circumstances of human beings, that is why the nature of society also keeps on changing with the passage of time. The Meena tribe also created its own society according to its instincts, needs, and circumstances due to which there has been a continuous change and change in its thoughts.*

*The tribal Meena society was enmeshed in social evils, evil practices, and inhuman customs. Nata Pratha, Dapa Pratha, etc. bad practices prevailed in this tribe. Extravagance was increasing in death feasts, gangoj, and other religious-social ceremonies. Social evils like male sacrifice, animal sacrifice, divorce, polygamy, and mismatched marriages were prevalent in this tribe. History witnessed from the beginning that these people used to defend themselves and earn their livelihood by living in the rugged forests and mountains. Due to being autocratic and armed segment, their culture could not develop much. They had to work so hard to gather strength for the struggle that they could not focus their attention on other goals of life.*

**Keywords: Pala, Mewasa, Gotra, Zamindar and Chowkidar Meena**

**Nature of the Society:** The tribes generally lived away from civilization in forests and mountains which were known as Palas. Colonel Tod, while explaining the word Pal, has told that this word was used for the caste of hill tribes, which means the valley which is used for farming and defense. Hirachand Gauri Shankar Ojha writes that huts were built on the hills far from each other and many huts together were called Pal (Palli). On the basis of geography, the Meena tribe can be divided into two parts, namely- (a) Those who are living in the southern part of Rajasthan. Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, and Chittorgarh districts come in this area, and (b) Jaipur, Alwar Sawai Madhopur and Bharatpur districts come under them who live in the north-eastern part of Rajasthan.

Socially, the Meena caste is divided into twelve pals, thirty-two tads, and fifty-two hundred gotras (clans). Only one gotra or blood-related meena resides in a pal. At the present time, many castes and tribes of primitive castes have started living in these palaces

in more or less numbers from other places. There are thirty-two sects in Mauna Kshatriyas. At the same time, thirty-two sects are called Tade in the present time, of which fourteen are main (large) and eighteen are sub-tade (minor). A girl and a boy do not get married in the same clan (gotra).

Four clans are avoided in society. The members of all these clans are settled in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, etc. with different names and surnames. Members of the following gotras (clans) of the Meena tribe reside in the Bhopal division: Upara, Nananya, Kankarwa, Dumal, Ghungaria, Singadiya, Dhanawat Badawat, Diariya, Sastiya, Chauhan, Chulawat, Gunawat, and Tatu. The Meena tribe in Hoshangabad (Madhya Pradesh) is also called Maina and Pardeshi.

According to Major Pawlett, the Meena tribe is divided into two parts, as Zamindar Meena and Chowkidar Meena. When the Meenas became subjects of the Rajput kings and soldiers in their army, they may have adopted their clans.

### **Division of the Meena Tribe**

**Zamindar Meena:** In the thirteenth century, when the Meena tribe lost political power, the Meena society was alienated into various divisions. After their power was over, some of them did the work of farming and animal husbandry. A separate village named Beda Meena (Bara village) was established in the erstwhile Jaipur state for the Zamindar Meenas of Dhundhar. The names of Ranjit Singh Meena and Raghunath Meena are also mentioned in the reign of the Kachwaha kings.

**Chowkidar Meena:** The classification of Meena society was done during the time of the Kachwaha kings. The ruling class appointed them as the watchman of twenty-seven outposts. That is why they are called Chowkidar Meena. Nayabas Chowkidar (Nayabasi) located near Neem police station is the main place of this division.

**Padihar Meena:** They are particularly found in Hadauti region of the state (Southern Rajasthan). This region includes the districts of Kota, Bara, Jhalawar, and Bundi.

**Rawat Meena:** The word Rawat is considered to be the sign of a prestigious title in the category of Rao, Rawal, and Raja among the feudal lords. This title was given in ancient times to a special group of the Meena caste by the Rajput ruler because of their bravery. Rawat Meena is also found in large numbers in Ujjain and Indore where they are known as Deshwali Rawat or Maran.

**Meo Meena:** The main districts of this division are Alwar and Bharatpur of Rajasthan. Due to the residence of the Meo caste, this region was called Mewat. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, a crisis arose for the existence of the Meena tribe. Hazrat Sayyed Salar had an important contribution in making the Meenas in Mewat who were termed as half-Muslims. The gods and goddesses of Meo Meena are the same as those of the Meena tribe.

**Purana Basi and Naya Basi:** Purana Basi means that they have been settled since the old times while the Naya Basi came and settled later. Naya Basi Meena are highly concentrated in Naya Bass (Sikar district).

The Meena tribe had remained dominant in the social and cultural field. However, due to being away from city life and being surrounded by scarcity in the forests and mountains, they probably remained culturally backward. The main reason for this was that there was a complete lack of mobility in them. There was a lack of education in them till the first half of the twentieth century. In the Muslim period and at the time of the British Government, this tribe was declared a criminal tribe.

We can easily trace the innocent behaviour of this tribe through the ages. A typical example of goodness is that of the Meenas of Dhundhad, whom the Kachhwas not only gained power but also suppressed them for hundreds of years. History witnessed how the Rajputs tricked Alan Singh Meena into death. In fact, the ruler of Khohgang, Alan Singh had accepted the relationship of sister and nephew to the son of Narwar Naresh, Dulherai and his mother. He sheltered them and in the last Dulherai snatched the power and became the ruler by killing Alan Singh. Afterward, the economic condition of the Meena tribe became deteriorated. Later on, this tribe did heroic events and the reason behind the loot and plunder was not to fulfill their materialistic desires, but to show their power to the enemies.

The proof of their honesty is that they used to have the keys to the treasury of forts like Nahargarh, Jaigarh, etc. According to a popular folk tale, the son of a Meena chief of Nahargarh fort plucked a lemon without permission, and as a consequence his father without asking anyone chopped his son's neck with a sword. Colonel Tod has written praising their bravery.

RK Russell and Hiralal, while analyzing the social status between Rajputs and Meenas write that the Meena tribe had the highest prestige, respect and privileges in the family of Jaipur. As proof of this, he mentions the coronation of Amer ruler was done by the blood of the thumb of a Meena person of Kalikhoh.

The Hathai is a common place found in the residence of the Meena tribe. They used to make the same place their place of entertainment. They used to gather there after returning from the fields and having dinner (byalu). Here he used to discuss war, peace and political subjects. Hathais have been excavated from Majod and Booj (Thanagaji) tehsils.

**Marriage:** The Meena tribe is an agriculture-dominated community where both men and women have to share their hands in agriculture work. It is clear that the contribution of women in the economy of these tribals is considered important. The main types of marriage prevalent in the Meena tribe are as follows:

a) **Monogamy marriage:** Basically, there was a system of marriage in the Meena tribe and in the matter of marriage men and women were independent.

- b) **Polygamy marriage:** In ancient times, a Meena man used to keep more than one wife, in this he considered it his pride. Polygamy was also prevalent among the Bhil people.
- c) **Polyandry practice:** This practice is adopted in the Meena tribe when the ratio of women to men is less.
- d) **Marriage of wife's sister or sister-in-law:** Under this, on the death of the wife, marriage was done with her younger sister. This type of marriage was more prevalent among the Bhil community.
- e) **Devar Bhabhi Marriage:** If a woman's husband dies suddenly, she starts living with her brother-in-law as a wife. In ancient times, it was called Niyog Pratha which was done only to get a son.

The practice of examination marriage was prevalent in the Meena tribe. According to this practice, a triangle was made of wood and wooden birds were made in that triangle. This triangle was hung at the wedding venue. To prove that the groom was a hunter by profession, the groom used to aim at these birds with a gun and again hit them with a stick. Sundari dance is performed on the occasion of marriage.

In Meena society, the marriage ceremony is divided into three parts, namely-Sagai, Saptapadi, and Mukalawa (Gona). In the Meena society, most of the marriages in the villages were held on Akhatij (Vaishakh Shukla Tritiya) because at this time money comes from the sale of crops and the farmer does not worry about his work.

Widow remarriage was also prevalent in the Meena tribe. After the death of her husband, the widow was married to a close relative in the form of marriage (Nata). This remarriage was called palle-lagana or nata-karna in the mundane language of the tribals. Bangles were worn on the hands of the woman by the future husband and the girl used to take a fixed amount from the husband's family. A differently fixed amount was taken as tax by the village headsmen (panchs) in such ceremonies. The Reed ka Kar found in the state records of Bikaner state was a similar type of tax. After taking the fixed amount for remarriage, the family members of the deceased husband were given Bair Ka Kakad (enmity papers) as a symbol of separation. With this, the responsibility of the widowed woman shifted from one family to another. Colonel Tod has also supported this remarriage. In ancient times, there was a tradition of taking the bride's price before marriage, which was called 'Dapa' or 'Chari'. During the reign of Akbar, matrimonial relations continued between the Meena and Mevawati communities. Later on, the branch of Cheeta Meena that came out was the result of this inter-caste marriage.

**Costume, Ornaments, and Lifestyle:** The Meena tribe used to build their homes in hills and dense forests so that they could not be detected easily. These defence places were called Mewasa. They used to have mud houses around these nuts. A group of such houses was called Pala. Usually, Meena of the same gotra (clan) used to live in a pal, and that particular pal was also named after the same gotra. The twelve palas of this tribe have been described in several historical accounts. Among the Bhil Meena, the head of these palas was called Gameti. Inside the residence, large earthen chambers were made for the storage of grains,

which were called Oberi. These people used to fill grains for the whole year in these cells. There was a special type of cot outside the house for sleeping which was called dala. The height of their feet was four or five feet and the length was around eight feet.

The Zamindar Meena of Baragaon used to wear a white pagdi (turban) on the head, a dhoti (loincloth) below the pelvis and a chadar or tunic on the body. Turban was prevalent in Meenas of the Pachwara region while Amer used to wear Safa towards Jamwaramgarh, Chaumon, etc. Because of coming in contact with the Rajputs, the women of Chowkidar Meena also used to do purdah.

The practice of tattooing was also found in men and women. Women used to consider getting tattooed as a symbol of their beauty. It is said that in the past, to reduce their beauty (for fear of Rajputs), tattooing was done on the face of women. Gradually it took the form of a tradition. Women also used to tattoo scorpions on their foreheads. Apart from this, she used to get gold and silver chup in her teeth. Behind this was their belief that gold would go with their body at the time of death. The Meena women living in the rugged forests had a great interest in beautifying themselves. The superstition that prevailed among the tribals was that only tattooed women take to heaven after death. The more a woman gets tattooed, the more beautiful she is considered.

The main ornaments of men are Jhala and Murki (ear ornaments); Balewada, Baddi, Chain, Dora and Devta Phool (neck ornaments); Kade (hand ornaments); Biti and Rings (finger ornaments); and Chhailakam (foot ornaments).

The main ornaments of women are Borla and Tika (head ornaments); Naya and Kanta (nose ornaments), Bata, Oganiya, Jabjabi Jhurli Aran and earrings (ear ornaments); Hansli, Tinimania, Nomogari, Pachamania, Chain, Kanthahar, Gilsari Jholia, and Kanti (neck ornaments); Kade Poonchi Newri and Chuda (Lac), Nogri (hand ornaments); Challa and Hathphool (palm ornaments); Kandaura and Kankati (waist ornaments); Tanka, Amla, Kadla, Pati, and Kadi (feet ornaments); and Bichhiya and Bichuri (toe ornaments)

War dance is also prevalent among the Meena tribe whose purpose was to teach the art of war to the youth. Mahavirj's fair is considered to be a main fair for this community. According to the tradition that has been going on for decades, the people of the Meena caste live in the fair till the Rath Yatra of Mahavir Swami.

There are some communities in the Meena tribe of Rajasthan who consider it a sin to even touch alcohol, for example, the Meenas of Pachwara. This group does not use alcohol and meat. The biggest reason for the downfall of the Meena tribe was alcoholism. It was because of alcohol that Dungariya Mer had to lose his life and his kingdom.

They have a rich cultural heritage and a distinct lifestyle shaped by their traditions, beliefs, and occupations. The main words related to living in the Meena tribe are as follows:

**Aakdi:** It is a means of collecting the harvested crop.

**Chakla:** While taking out water from the well, it is used as a winch, through which a basket tied to a rope is lowered down and the soil, pebbles, stones, etc. is taken out.

**Chatu:** Wooden spoon from which vegetables, rabri, etc. are made.

**Chhajla:** It is made of sarki (upper end of kuchi), which is used for threshing wheat.

**Chora:** Son/Boy

**Datadi:** This is useful for making mud wall in the field.

**Dhera:** It is a tool for splitting the rope by force.

**Gela:** Way

**Ghan:** It is made of iron which is used to break the stones of wells and mountains, etc.

**Ghughta:** This was a tool used to dig a well. There is a basket in which the soil of the well is taken out after filling it.

**Gopia:** It is useful to fly birds in the fields while plucking the crops.

**Handi:** Earten pot

**Hasiya:** Harvesting tool

**Jantar:** Necklace (Mangalsutra)

**Jot/Plow:** It is a wide rope which is used to tie around the neck of bullocks while ploughing. It is tied by placing it on the juda (cultivation tool).

**Kaleva:** Breakfast

**Kharota:** A structure made for buffalo to graze fodder.

**Kotha:** This is made by mixing cow dung, black soil, and Tula, in which wheat is kept safe for eating throughout the year.

**Kuladi:** Hand axe

**Kunda:** is made of stone in which the dough is kneaded.

**Kurado:** It is used for chopping wood.

**Mogri:** It is a wooden tool used to beat flax to make rope.

**Mohari:** It is made of rope. It is useful for tying on the mouth of animals so that they cannot eat soil.

**Parinda:** Place to keep a pitcher.

**Peeda:** It is small in size like a chair (muddi), which is useful for sitting.

**Tadkey:** Early morning

**Tula:** It is used for making brooms and tying sieves and cots (palka) are made from it.

**Conclusion:** The Meena tribe is an indigenous community primarily found in the Indian state of Rajasthan. The Meena tribe follows a patriarchal social structure. The community is divided into several exogamous clans called gotras, and marriages within the same clan are considered taboo. The head of the clan, known as the chieftain, holds authority and settles disputes within the community.

The Meena society remained a victim of the said social evils because there was a complete lack of education in this society. The second reason for this was that they used to spend their life on the mountains covered with dense forests and trees, as a result of which they remained ignorant and could not develop.

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