



Significance of Tribal People of Thar Desert

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ABSTRACT: The Thar is home to various ethnic groups, Hindu and Muslim mostly, who have developed very specific customs and traditions. Among them we find the Bishnois, protector of nature, the 'gypsy' (Banjaras, Bhopas, Sapera ..), the Bhils, known as fine archers, and the Garasias, Sahariyas and Rabaris.

KEYWORDS-Thar, desert, banjaras, bhils, garasia, sahariya, rabaris, tribes

I.INTRODUCTION

The Thar Desert, also known as the Great Indian Desert, is an arid region in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent that covers an area of 200,000 km² (77,000 sq mi) in India and Pakistan. It is the world's 18th-largest desert, and the world's 9th-largest hot subtropical desert.

About 85% of the Thar Desert is in India, and about 15% is in Pakistan.^[3] The Thar Desert is about 4.56% of the total geographical area of India. More than 60% of the desert lies in the Indian state of Rajasthan; the portion in India also extends into Gujarat, Punjab, and Haryana. The portion in Pakistan extends into the provinces of Sindh^[4] and Punjab (the portion in the latter province is referred to as the Cholistan Desert). The Indo-Gangetic Plain lies to the north, west and northeast of the Thar desert, the Rann of Kutch lies to its south, and the Aravali Range borders the desert to the east.

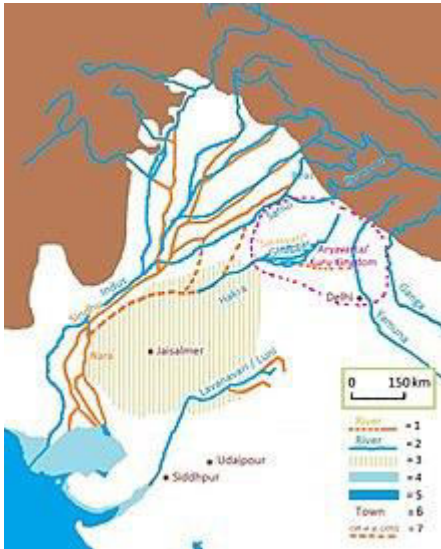
The most recent paleontological discovery in 2020 from the Thar Desert in India, dating back to 167 million years ago, pertains to a herbivorous dinosaur group known as dicraeosaurids. This discovery marks the first of its kind to be unearthed in India and is also the oldest specimen of the group ever recorded in the global fossil record.^[5]

History of desertification

Ice-age desertification

During the Last Glacial Maximum 20,000 before present, an approximately 2,400,000 square kilometres (930,000 sq mi) ice sheet covered the Tibetan Plateau,^{[6][7][8]} causing excessive radiative forcing i.e. the ice in Tibet reflected at least four times more radiation energy per unit area into space than ice at higher latitudes, which further cooled overlying atmosphere at that time.^[9] This impacted the regional climate. Without the thermal low pressure caused by the heating, there was no monsoon over the Indian subcontinent. This lack of monsoon caused extensive rainfall over the Sahara, expansion of the Thar Desert, more dust deposited into the Arabian Sea, a lowering of the biotic life zones on the Indian subcontinent, and animals responded to this shift in climate with the Javan rusa deer migrating into India.^[10]

Desertification due to drying up of Sarasvati river



Vedic and present-day Gagghar-Hakra river-course, with Aryavarta/Kuru Kingdom, and (pre-)Harappan Hakra/Sutlej-Yamuna paleochannels as proposed by Clift et al. (2012) and Khonde et al. (2017).^[a] See also this satellite image.^[1,2,3]

- 1 = ancient river
- 2 = today's river
- 3 = today's Thar desert
- 4 = ancient shore
- 5 = today's shore
- 6 = today's town
- 7 = dried-up Harappan Hakra course, and pre-Harappan Sutlej paleochannels (Clift et al. (2012)).

10,000-8,000 years ago a paleo channel of Ghaggar-Hakra River - identified with the paleo Sarasvati River, after confluence with Sutlej flowed into the Nara river - a delta channel of the Indus River, changed its course, leaving the Ghaggar-Hakra as a system of monsoon-fed rivers which did not reach the sea and now ends in the Thar desert.^{[11][12][13][14]}

Around 5,000 years ago when the monsoons that fed the rivers diminished further, the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) prospered in this area,^{[11][13][14][b]} with the rise of numerous IVC urban sites at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Banawali and Rakhigarhi (Haryana), Dholavira and Lothal (Gujarat) along this course.^{[15][web 1]}

4,000 years ago when monsoons diminished even further, the dried-up Hakra become an intermittent river, and the urban Harappan civilisation declined, becoming localized in smaller agricultural communities.^{[11][c][13][12][14]}

Geography



A NASA satellite image of the Thar Desert, with the India–Pakistan border



View of the Thar Desert

The northeastern part of the Thar Desert lies between the Aravalli Hills. The desert stretches to Punjab and Haryana in the north, to the Great Rann of Kutch along the coast, and to the alluvial plains of the Indus River in the west and northwest. Much of the desert area is covered by huge, shifting sand dunes that receive sediments from the alluvial plains and the coast. The sand is highly mobile due to the strong winds that rise each year before the onset of the monsoon. The Luni River is the only river in the desert.^[16] Rainfall is 100 to 500 mm (4 to 20 in) per year, almost all of it between June and September.^[3]

Saltwater lakes within the Thar Desert include the Sambhar, Kuchaman, Didwana, Pachpadra, and Phalodi in Rajasthan and Kharaghoda in Gujarat. These lakes receive and collect rainwater during monsoon and evaporate during the dry season. The salt comes from the weathering of rocks in the region.^[17]

Lithic tools belonging to the prehistoric Aterian culture of the Maghreb have been discovered in Middle Paleolithic deposits in the Thar Desert.^[18]

Climate

The climate is arid and subtropical. Average temperature varies with season, and extremes can range from near-freezing in the winter to more than 50 °C in the summer months. Average annual rainfall ranges from 100 to 500 mm, and occurs during the short July-to-September southwest monsoon.^[1]

The desert has both a very dry part (the Marusthali region in the west) and a semidesert part (in the east) that has fewer sand dunes and slightly more precipitation.^[19]

Desertification control[4,5,6]



Greening desert with plantations of jojoba at Fatehpur, Shekhawati



Checking of shifting sand dunes through plantations of Acacia tortilis near Laxmangarh town



Indira Gandhi Canal flowing in Thar Desert near Sattasar village, Bikaner district, Rajasthan



Due to severe weather conditions, few highways are in the Thar Desert. Shown here is a road in Tharparkar district of Sindh, Pakistan.

The soil of the Thar Desert remains dry for much of the year, so it is prone to wind erosion. High-velocity winds blow soil from the desert, depositing some of it on neighboring fertile lands, and causing sand dunes within the desert to shift. To counteract this problem, sand dunes are stabilised by first erecting micro windbreak barriers with scrub material and then by afforestation of the treated dunes—planting the seedlings of shrubs (such as phog, senna, and castor oil plant) and trees (such as gum acacia, *Prosopis juliflora*, and lebbek tree). The 649-km-long Indira Gandhi Canal brings fresh water to the Thar Desert.^[3] It was built to halt any spreading of the desert into fertile areas.

Protected areas

There are several protected areas in the Thar Desert:

- In India:
 - The Desert National Park, in Rajasthan, covers 3,162 km² (1,221 sq mi) and represents the Thar Desert ecosystem;^[20] it includes 44 villages.^[21] Its diverse fauna includes the great Indian bustard (*Chiotis nigricaps*), blackbuck, chinkara, fox, Bengal fox, wolf, and caracal. Seashells and massive fossilized tree trunks in this park record the geological history of the desert.[7,8,9]
 - The Tal Chhappar Sanctuary covers 7 km² (2.7 sq mi) and is an Important Bird Area.^[21] It is located in the Churu district, 210 km (130 mi) from Jaipur, in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan. This sanctuary is home to large populations of blackbuck, fox, caracal, partridge, and sand grouse.
 - The Sundha Mata Conservation Reserve covers 117.49 km² (45.36 sq mi) and is located in the Jalore District of Rajasthan.^[22]
- In Pakistan:
 - The Nara Desert Wildlife Sanctuary covers 6,300 km² (2,400 sq mi),^[23] it is located in is located in Mirpurkhas District.^[24] It contains the largest population of the endangered mugger crocodile in Pakistan.^[24]
 - The Rann of Kutch Wildlife Sanctuary located in Badin District is an Important Bird Area and Ramsar Site, with 30 species of mammals, 112 bird species, 20 reptiles, and 22 important plant species.^[25]
 - The Lal Suhanra Biosphere Reserve and National Park is a UNESCO declared biosphere reserve,^[26] which covers 65,791 hectares (254.02 sq mi) the Cholistan region of the Greater Thar Desert.^[27]

Biodiversity

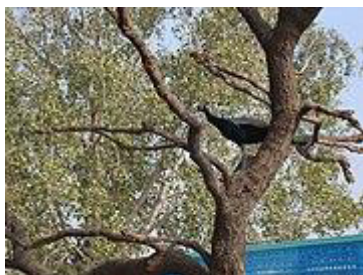
Fauna

Some wildlife species that are fast vanishing in other parts of India are found in the desert in large numbers, including the blackbuck (*Antilope cervicapra*), chinkara (*Gazella bennettii*), and Indian wild ass (*Equus hemionus khur*) in the Rann of Kutch. This may be partly because they are well adapted to this environment: they are smaller than similar animals that live in other environments, and they are mainly nocturnal. It may also be because grasslands in this region have not been transformed into cropland as fast as in other regions, and because a local community, the Bishnois, has made special efforts to protect them.

Other mammals in the Thar Desert include a subspecies of red fox (*Vulpes vulpes pusilla*) and the caracal, and a number of reptiles dwell there too.

The region is a haven for 141 species of migratory and resident desert birds, including harriers, falcons, buzzards, kestrels, vultures, short-toed eagles (*Circaetus gallicus*), tawny eagles (*Aquila rapax*), greater spotted eagles (*Aquila clanga*), and laggar falcons (*Falco jugger*).

The Indian peafowl is a resident breeder in the Thar region. The peacock is designated as the national bird of India and the provincial bird of the Punjab (Pakistan). It can be seen sitting on khejri or pipal trees in villages or Deblina.



Peacock on a khejri tree



Peafowl eating pieces of chapati in Tharparkar District, Sindh



Blackbuck male and female



The chinkara or Indian gazelle is found across the Thar Desert.

Flora



Khumbi mushrooms from Tharparkar, Sindh



Prosopis cineraria or khejri or kandi

The natural vegetation of this dry area is classified as northwestern thorn scrub forest (i.e. small, loosely-scattered patches of greenery).^{[28][29]} The densities and sizes of these green patches increase from west to east, following an increase in rainfall. The primary vegetation of the Thar Desert is composed of trees, shrubs, and perennial herb species, including.^[30]

- Trees and shrubs: *Aerva javanica*, *Balanites roxburghii*, *Calotropis procera*, *Capparis decidua*, *Clerodendrum multiflorum*, *Commiphora mukul*, *Cordia sinensis*, *Crotalaria burhia*, *Euphorbia caducifolia*, *Euphorbia neriifolia*, *Grewia tenax*, *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, *Lycium barbarum*, *Maytenus emarginata*, *Mimosa hamata*, *Suaeda fruticosa*, *Vachellia jacquemontii*, *Ziziphus nummularia* and *Z. zizyphus*.^[7,8,9]
- Herbs and grasses: *Ochthochloa compressa*, *Dactyloctenium scindicum*, *Cenchrus biflorus*, *Cenchrus setiger*, *Lasiurus scindicus*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Panicum turgidum*, *Panicum antidotale*, *Dichanthium annulatum*, *Sporobolus marginatus*, *Saccharum spontaneum*, *Cenchrus ciliaris*, *Desmostachya bipinnata*, *Eragrostis* species, *Ergamopagan* species, *Phragmites* species, *Tribulus terrestris*, *Typha* species, *Sorghum halepense*, *Citrullus colocynthis*

The endemic floral species include *Calligonum polygonoides*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Acacia nilotica*, *Tamarix aphylla*, and *Cenchrus biflorus*.^[31]

People

The Thar people are the natives of the area. The Thar Desert is the most widely populated desert in the world, with a population density of 83 people per km².^[21] In India, the inhabitants comprise Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Muslims. In Pakistan, inhabitants include both Muslims and Hindus.^[32]

About 40% of the total population of Rajasthan lives in the Thar Desert.^[33] The main occupations of the inhabitants are agriculture and animal husbandry.

Jodhpur, the largest city in the region, lies in the scrub forest zone at the desert's perimeter. Bikaner and Jaisalmer are the largest cities located entirely in the desert.



A girl from the Gadia Lohars nomadic tribe of Marwar, cooking her food.



Thar life



Desert tribes near Jaisalmer, India

Water and housing in the desert

In the true desert areas, the only sources of water for animals or humans are small, scattered ponds - some that are natural (tobas) and some that are human-made (johads). The persistence of water scarcity heavily influences life in all areas of the Thar, prompting many inhabitants to adopt a nomadic lifestyle[10,11,12] Most of the permanent human settlements are located near the two seasonal streams of the Karon-Jhar hills. Potable groundwater is also rare in the Thar Desert. Much of it tastes sour due to dissolved minerals. Potable water is mostly available only deep underground. When wells are dug that happen to yield sweet tasting water, people tend to settle near them, but such wells are difficult and dangerous to dig, sometimes claiming the lives of the well-diggers.^[citation needed]

Crowded housing conditions are common in some areas.



Huts in the Thar Desert



Johads are common water sources



Tanks for drinking water

Economy

Agriculture

The Thar is one of the most heavily populated desert areas in the world with the main occupations of its inhabitants being agriculture and animal husbandry.

Agricultural production is mainly from kharif crops, which are grown in the summer season and seeded in June and July. These are then harvested in September and October and include bajra, pulses such as guar, jowar (*Sorghum vulgare*), maize (*zea mays*), sesame and groundnuts.

The Thar region of Rajasthan is a major opium production and consumption area.^{[34][35]}



Bajra is the main kharif crop in Thar.



Mustard fields in a village of Shri Ganganagar district (Rajasthan, India).

Livestock



Thari cow breed originating from Tharparkar, Sindh, popular since World War I^[36]



Cattle in the Thar Desert
Agroforestry



Lopping of khejri tree for fodder and fuel[13,14,15] in Harsawa village

P. cineraria wood is reported to contain high calorific value and provide high-quality fuel wood. The lopped branches are good as fencing material. Its roots also encourage nitrogen fixation, which produces higher crop yields.

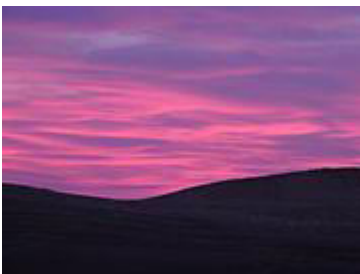


Tecomella undulata tree in the village of Harsawa
Ecotourism

Desert safaris on camels have become increasingly popular around Jaisalmer. Domestic and international tourists frequent the desert seeking adventure on camels for one to several days. This ecotourism industry ranges from cheaper backpacker treks to plush Arabian night-style campsites replete with banquets and cultural performances. During the treks, tourists are able to view the fragile and beautiful ecosystem of the Thar Desert. This form of tourism provides income to many operators and camel owners in Jaisalmer, as well as employment for many camel trekkers in the desert villages nearby. People from various parts of the world come to see the Pushkar ka Mela (Pushkar Fair) and oases.



Camel ride in the Thar Desert near Jaisalmer, India



Sunrise in the desert
Industry

The government of India initiated departmental exploration for oil in 1955 and 1956 in the Jaisalmer area,^[37] Oil India Limited discovered natural gas in 1988 in the Jaisalmer basin.^[38]

History



The Desert National Park in Jaisalmer district has a collection of 180-million-year-old animal and plant fossils.

Jaisalmer State's historical foundations are in the large empire ruled by the Bhati dynasty. The empire stretched from what is now Ghazni^[39] in modern-day Afghanistan to what is Sialkot, Lahore and Rawalpindi in modern-day Pakistan^[40] to the region that is Bhatinda and Hanumangarh in modern-day India.^[41] The empire crumbled over time because of continuous invasions from central Asia. According to Satish Chandra, the Hindu Shahis of Afghanistan made an alliance with the Bhatti rulers of Multan because they wanted to end the slave raids that were made by the Turkic ruler of Ghazni, but the alliance was broken apart by Alp Tigin in 977 CE. Bhati dominions continued to shift southwards: they ruled Multan, then finally got pushed into Cholistan and Jaisalmer, where Rawal Devaraja built Dera Rawal / Derawar.^[42] Jaisalmer was founded as the new capital in 1156 by Maharawal Jaisal Singh and the state took its name from the capital. On 11 December 1818 Jaisalmer became a British protectorate through the Rajputana Agency.^{[43][44]}

Because the kingdom's main source of income had long been levies on caravans, its economy suffered after Bombay became a major port, and sea trade largely replaced trade along the traditional land routes. Maharawals Ranjit Singh and Bairi Sal Singh tried to reverse the economic decline, but the kingdom nevertheless became impoverished. To make matters worse, there was a severe drought and a resulting famine from 1895 to 1900, during the reign of Maharawal Salivahan Singh, which caused the widespread loss of the livestock upon which the increasingly agriculturally based kingdom had come to rely.[16,17,18]

In 1965 and 1971, population exchanges took place in the Thar between India and Pakistan; 3,500 Muslims shifted from the Indian section of the Thar to Pakistani Thar, whilst thousands of Hindu families also migrated from Pakistani Thar to the Indian section

DISCUSSION

Rajasthan tribals constitute around twelve percent of the total population of the state. The tribes of Rajasthan, India constitutes of mainly Bhils and the Minas. Infact, they were the original inhabitants of the area where Rajasthan stands now. Apart from these main tribes, there are also a number of smaller tribes in Rajasthan. However all Rajasthan tribes share certain common traits, the variations being in their costumes, jewelry, fair and festivals, etc

Here are the main tribes and nomads of Rajasthan:

Bhils

Around 39% of Rajasthan tribals comprises of the Bhils. Dominating in the Banswara area of Rajasthan, the Bhils are believed to be fine archers. Infact, Bhil bowmen even found a reference in the great epics Mahabarata and Ramayan. The Bhils were originally food gatherers. However, with the passage of time, they have taken up small-scale agriculture, city residence and employment. The major festivals of Bhils are the Baneshwar fair (held near Dungarpur) and Holi.

Minas

The second largest tribal group of Rajasthan is that of the Minas. The original inhabitants of the Indus Valley civilization, Minas have a tall, athletic build with sharp features, large eyes, thick lips and a light brown complexion. They are found dominating the regions of Shekhawati and eastern Rajasthan. Minas solemnize marriage in the younger years of the children.

Gadiya Lohars

Gadiya Lohars are wandering blacksmiths that are named after their attractive bullock carts called gadis. Initially a martial Rajput tribe, they left their homeland when Emperor Akbar ousted Maharana Pratap from Chittorgarh.

Garasias

Garasias is a small Rajput tribe inhabiting Abu Road area of southern Rajasthan.

Sahariyas

Sahariyas, the jungle dwellers, is considered as the most backward tribe in Rajasthan. Believed to be of Bhil origin, they inhabit the areas of Kota, Dungarpur and Sawai Madhopur in the southeast of Rajasthan. Their main occupations include working as shifting cultivators, hunters and fishermen.[18,19,20]

Damors



Belonging to the Dungarpur and Udaipur districts, Damors are mainly cultivators and manual laborers.

Rajasthan tribes include the following also:

- Meo and Banjara (the traveling tribes)
- Kathodi (found in Mewar region)
- Rabaris (cattle breeders, found in Marwar region)
- Sansi
- Kanjar

III.RESULTS

Rajasthan tribals were the original inhabitants of the area now called Rajasthan. Every tribe, small or big, shares common traits.

Rajasthan tribals form approximately twelve percent of the total population of Rajasthan. In fact, they were the original inhabitants of the area presently called Rajasthan. The Bhils and the Minas are the principal tribes of Rajasthan, India. Amongst the smaller tribes are Sahariyas, Gaduliya Lohars and the Garasias.

The common traits shared by the different tribes of Rajasthan link their past together. Each tribe is distinguished by difference in their costumes, festivals and ornaments.

Some of the main tribes of Rajasthan are:

Bhils

Bhils, the principal tribe of Rajasthan, comprise approximately 39% of the total tribal population in Rajasthan. Banswara area is dominated by this tribal group. They were believed to be fine archers and some Bhil bowmen found a mention in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In order to maintain their number, the Bhils mingled with the Rajputs.

A number of Bhils gather at the Baneshwar festival held in Dungarpur. They rejoice by singing and dancing at the festival. Yet another festive time for Bhils is Holi. Superstition is deep rooted in the Bhil culture.[17,18,19]

Minas

Minas, the second largest tribe in Rajasthan, dominate the area of Shekhawati and other eastern parts of Rajasthan. They originally resided at the Indus Valley civilization.

Minas have tall and athletic built and sharp features including large eyes, light brown complexion and thick lips. Alike the Bhils, the literacy rate amongst the Minas is low. They are married in quite young years.

Gadiya Lohars

Originally a martial tribe, Gadiya Lohars derived their name from the attractive bullock carts popularly called gadis. Nowadays, they are nomadic blacksmiths. They left their homeland after Maharana Pratap was ousted from Chittorgarh by Emperor Akbar.

Garasias

Garasias, small Rajput tribe resides along the Abu Road area in southern Rajasthan. Marriage through elopement is an interesting custom followed by this tribal group.

Sahariyas

Sahariyas, the jungle dwellers, are found in Kota, Dungarpur and Sawai Madhopur areas of southern Rajasthan. Thought to be of Bhil origin, they are considered the most backward tribe in Rajasthan. Hunting and fishing are the main sources of earning a livelihood.

Damors

Damors, chiefly, cultivators and manual laborers migrated from Gujarat to Rajasthan and settled in the Udaipur and Dungarpur districts.



IV. CONCLUSION

Other tribes of Rajasthan include:

Meo and Banjara, the traveling tribes

Rabaris, the cattle breeders

Kathodi, inhabiting Mewar region)

Kanjar

Sansi[20]

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