

# SOCIO-CULTURAL ORGANISATION OF THE MEENA TRIBE OF RAJASTHAN

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## ABSTRACT

*Traditionally the Meenas are patrilocal, patrilineal and kin-based Society. They culturally and traditionally divide their homeland into twelve territorial units called 'Pals' and they live in both compact villages or isolated hamlets called 'dhanis' which are uniclan in nature. Generally the village of Meena community is comprised of the members belonging to a single 'got'. However, in a large number of villages two or more 'got' of the tribe are settled. Thus we can say that the village community is mainly tribal community. Agriculture being the primary occupation of the community, the typical Meena village follows its ancient pattern of settlement either on alluvial plains or on the semi-arid plateau. The habitation area is well marked with the boundaries of the villages and fields. Since age long Meenas have continued to live in the forests, villages and hilly regions. They live in huts which are more popularly called 'Dhodhe' or 'Jhopadi', is made up of clay, hay and cow dung. They used to construct their houses usually in dense forest and hilly areas so that they may live in isolation and could not be easily deducted. These safe zones of Meenas are known as Mewase.*

**KEYWORDS:** Tribes in India, Meena, Rajasthan, Mewase

However in due course of time they began to live in plains." The village layout reveals lack of planning. An unpaved street, nearly 10-12 feet wide cut across the village heart, beside which all the houses were constructed. The Meena families whose fields are near the village continue to reside with other communities. There was no demarcation in area for any caste group. Those families of Meena whose fields are situated away from the village usually shift from the village, and construct their houses on the outskirts of the village, at convenient places. "Each 'dhani' belongs exclusively to one family group and is known by the name of its founder. A family which does not belong to that group of family is not permitted to live in that particular 'dhani' Besides Meena no other caste groups are allowed to construct their own 'dhani' within the village confines. In some villages the smallest 'dhani' have two houses built in it. Even today this system of 'dhani', is prevalent in the Rajasthan villages." (Primary Source)

Temples and shrines form an important part of the village social life. Temples of Hanuman (locally referred to as Balaji), Mahadeo and Sitaram are constructed in the centre of the villages while those of lesser deities are constructed on the outskirts of the village. "In post

independence period, Ayurvedic dispensary and schools have been constructed in large villages. This dispensary is run by local Vaidya." (Rizvi SHM : 1987)

The deep wells which have brick lining and raised surrounded wall are the main source of water supply for drinking and irrigation. As a result of Developmental projects, launched in post Independence era, the land is now being irrigated by the help of electricity. The wells supply drinking water to the villagers throughout the year. There are some wells for the exclusive use of 'untouchable' caste group if they are residing in the village. And in case of a 'stream' near the village so called 'unclean' and 'untouchable' castes use the water from its lower point. The disposal of garbage is unhygienic as it is simply collected outside the village and thus poses a great health hazard for the entire villagers. No concept of latrine is there in a village so people move away from the human habitation to the nearby jungles or fields. The entire village is littered with cow-dung which is collected by each household for fuel. The village folks take bath in open around the village wells. These are the few examples to be cited to prove that uncleanliness prevails in the remote

meena villages causing a great challenge to health related issues.

In many parts of Rajasthan. The facilities for primary and secondary education have been made accessible. But it has been noticed that the teachers and headmasters of these primary School are generally absent and do not perform their duties diligently. The reason behind this state of affairs is that most of the teachers come to their work place from very long distance, as the residential facilities are absent. Similarly the nearest colleges are generally situated at great distance from the villages (ranging from 100 to 200 km.) and the hostel facilities are limited. The high cost of living discourages the parents from sending their children to pursue higher education.

Members of some other Hindu caste groups are also accommodated by the Meenas villages follow the general pattern of the Indian Villages which have a compact living pattern, with planned dwellings. Mud walls and thatched roofs are the typical features of the Meena house. There is a single main entrance to the central portion of the main quarter of the house, which is surrounded by thick mud walls. The living room is a place for the storage of family-goods and food grains also it has a 'Devasthan' a place for the family diety. The kitchens having thatched roofs are constructed and the number of hearths depends upon the type of family. The men spend their leisure time in the 'tiwari' and 'bada' and it is only during very severe winter nights that they sleep in their respective rooms. Beside the main structure, a big rectangular room 'Tiwari' is built. It has some wooden cots spread in a row and it is here that all the guests are entertained by the male Meena. In the 'Bada' which is chiefly a cattleshed, rooms for storage of food grains, fodder and agricultural implements are constructed. It lies generally at the back of the house. Then there is 'toup', a specially constructed structure to store the fodder. The yearly fuel, mainly consisting of cow dung cakes are stored outside the living quarters and called parunda.

Thorny bushes may be seen around the houses in a meena village. Sometimes in a village houses made up of earthen tiles (Khaprils) and stones may be found but construction of 'pukka houses' is very rare in the Meenas Villages. Although they have started constructing those in the cities. Outside the house, raised platform known as 'Chabutara' is constructed upon which the neighbours and

other guests are welcomed by 'Hukkaah' and then matters pertaining to social life and household problems are discussed. Windows are very less in these homes so proper ventilation is hindered and as a result the members of the house easily fall victim to several diseases. Less attention is paid towards cleanliness. Examples may be cited- by keeping the animals around the houses the area becomes dirty and full of bad odour "Being busy in the agricultural chores, they sometimes neglect bathing, but now a days scenario has been quite changed as the Meenas have developed the habit of daily bath." (Rizvi SHM : 1987) Soaps are rarely used by the Villagers. These unhygienic conditions results in the spread of various infections diseases for which they seek remedy, by offering prayers to the dieties like 'Bhairon, Hanuman, Kuladevi. These Traditions are' prevalent in the tribal villages even today. Due to their weak economic conditions several Meena families do not have proper mattresses etc. so they generally lie down on the cots without them. But now days situation has changed due to urbanisation and industrialization; a great number of Meenas seek jobs in urban areas and have become economically sound, now they can have proper mattresses-quilts etc and ofcourse utensils made up of stainless steel along with all the essentials needed for a better life. This may be attributed to urban style of living.

### FOOD HABITS

Meenas are generally considered to be non-vegetarian but actually there are very less number of Meenas of certain places, who consume liquor and meat. Otherwise their staple diet consists of grains like wheat, Millet, gram, Maize, Bajara and Pulses etc. Being a settled agriculturist community they generally have milk producing animals like cow, buffalo, goat etc. So it is certain that milk and milk products form an essential part of their diet. 'Rabdi' is their favourite food. Butter milk is extensively used in various dishes. 'Dalia, thooli, dal, baati, churma, Maalpua, kheer and chane ki daal are some of their favourite food items. To offer prasad to Lord Jagdish, they prepare maalpua, kheer and chane ki-daal. During 'engagement' and 'tikka ceremony dish made up of rice, ghee & crushed sugar is prepared to which handsome amount of Khoya is added for flavour . Chane- daal is mainly used as compared to other kinds of pulses. Generally they do not buy vegetables from the markets but rely heavily upon which are grown by themselves in their

own fields. It is only during some special occasions that they buy potatoes from the markets. 'Butter-milk' along with raabdi form an important part of their breakfast which is generally termed as 'Kalewa' by them. Under the influence of the city-life, some of them have also started taking tea- biscuits as a part of breakfast. Dinner is known as 'Baydu' in their terminology.

**Table No. (1)**  
**Food related terminology of the Meena tribe**

S.No.	Items Usually Consumed	Terminology
1.	Maize/Bajara flour cooked in Butter milk	Rabdi
2.	Maize flour cooked with ghee and water	Laapsi
3.	Bajara and pulse cooked in water	Bajara ki khichari
4.	Onion	Kanda
5.	Kadhi	Khaata

Bhil-Meenas rely upon a low-standard diet because of their object poverty. It has been stated that "for at least eight months or so they do not get, proper diet, so their children consume 'Mahua' and roots shoots found in the forest to satisfy their hunger. But even then they are healthy and strong." (Rizvi SHM : 1987)

### **KUTUMB**

The family organization of the Meenas is a significant unit for the individual and for the community as well. It is the smallest organized sector of the social organization. "The unit is usually a vertically extended joint family and is referred to as 'Kutumb' by them." (Rizvi SHM : 1987) It includes aged patriarches who are brothers children. The Meenas follow the patrilocal pattern of residence so the married daughter resides with her in-laws. The widowed or divorced women only finds shelter in the household or the 'ghar'. The presence of child brides in each 'Kutumb' is of common occurrence as the Meenas practice child marriage and it is only after reacting puberty that the brides are shifted to their husbands place. Being a matrilineal society, the inheritance rights lie with the male issue. "The property amongst Meenas is viewed from two angles, 'jagjagati' and 'Khetibari'. 'Jagjagati' literally means moveable property while 'Khetibari' means immovable property including agricultural land and its produce." (Col.

Tod : 1914)

The Meenas have definite rights of ownership of land and have elaborate system of agriculture. "Ideally under customary laws the property rights are vested within the 'thok' and the land of each being marked by the construction of a shrine of the 'thok' diety. Within the 'thok' land plots are individually held." (Rizvi SHM : 1987) The occupant is free to lease it without the consent of "thok's patel". The Meenas did not sale the cultivable land previously but this idea has been introduced in the Meena Community totally by the outside agencies. But a Meena cannot sell or mortgage his land to any non-Meena. This is a customary law. Infact due to this rule the contemporary Meena villages are saved from the encroachment by other tribes or communities.

During the course of interviews, special focus was given to questions pertaining to the ownership of a piece of land and the kind of right the person holds on the land. The following points emerged from intensive probing. Till the mid 50s the ownership of land was vested in the individual 'thok'. The representative 'patel' used to distribute the produce equally among its cultivators. Many old informants still recall referring the land as belonging to their 'thok'. It is only after the abolition of 'zamindari' system and introduction of Land Reforms Act the land was distributed among the individual households of the village and this was perhaps the beginning of the individualistic ownership of land.

In Nangal Meena village the total land of the village was equally divided amongst the two 'thok' namely Bhagirathi Meena and Sundar Meena. They were the first settlers in the village. In due course of time the expansion of the two 'thok' necessiated the division of the land between five 'thok' namely Dabro, Rakhla, Ghasika, Khojika and Dakhmi. Similarly the land of Akhoda Meena village was originally divided amongst two 'thok' namely Ladya and Kankya but later immigration of some other 'got' people in the village necessiated the further division of land which was distributed among ten 'thok'. However, at present a Meena can and does claim his ownership right over a piece of land in the village and the idea of 'thok' ownership of cultivable land is totally lacking for the fact that as yet a Meena can not dispose off his land to a non-Meena without the concurrence of his 'thok's patel'. This is perhaps the reminiscence of the age of old traditional

ownership pattern of the property.

The customary inheritance is from father to sons. The daughters are not entitled for a share in father's property. If the father dies without paying the debt the eldest son pays it and for this he inherits a major share of the property. The share is decided by 'Patel' or 'Panchpatel'. Besides 'khetibari' the Meena consider personal effects, that is, clothes, ornaments, carts, etc. as 'jagjagati' (literally meaning worldly goods). Such things are owned by an individual. Live stock, wells, agricultural implements, etc. are rarely owned by individuals but is rather held by an extended family ('ghar') or living consanguines ('kutumb').

'Jagjagati' in Meena society is not the right over things but considered as obligations owed between persons in respect of things. Thus after the death of the head of the household these things are equally shared by surviving sons and are utilized collectively. The principal means of acquiring land under traditional system is inheritance and relates to the transfer authority from one generation to the next. Meena, being partilineal society the authority transfer to the eldest son.

"The land tenure in Meena villages has great similarities with the formal tenure patterns elsewhere in Rajasthan. It is true that during the period of British rule the process of breakdown from group to individual rights continued even though legally the right was no longer a right of full ownership but a right of occupancy. Under this rule the individual became increasingly important in every respect. This whole process of individualization coupled with similar ideas affected the land holding pattern. Residential land is owned by 'kutumb' and 'ghar'. Distribution is observed in agricultural land and other material goods." (Rizvi SHM : 1987)

The father remains the undisputed head of the family till his death. It is he who is the genitor and pater in literal sense, that is, he has to provide food, shelter and get his sons and daughters married as well. The distribution of the family 'jagjagati' may be done during his life time provided he accedes to it. All the decisions within the household are taken by him; from buying a new pair of bullocks to sending the daughter-in-law to her parental home. The land can be divided amongst the male members of the family only after the death of the head of household. Though such cases are rare yet, after the father's death the eldest son takes up the entire responsibility of the father

and this is symbolised during the funeral rites of 'nukta' when the head gear (pagri) of the late father is ceremoniously handed over to the eldest son by the 'thok patel'. This is witnessed by entire kith and kins.

Within the women's quarters the part of the house where women spend most of the time in cooking and other domestic chores, there exist a distinct code of conduct. Though not legally recognized, yet it is easy to tell that the wife of the head of the family rules the inner quarters. She organizes the working of the women members of the family and assigns them specific duties within the house and outside. After her husband's death the wife of the succeeding head of the family attains all the power of the female quarters.

It has been observed that the old widowed women have an oppressed and neglected existence within the family and are considered a burden by their sons. The only possession to which a woman can truly attach herself are her personal ornaments which she receives from her father and in-laws. Only on her death the daughters and daughter-in-laws can take possession of her ornaments.

#### **FAMILY AND KINSHIP**

As evident from the description of the family that authority, power and status lies with the eldest male member of the 'kutumb' who is responsible for the socio-economic well-being of his 'kutumb' member. His wife helps him in this regard by organizing the women power for smooth running of the domesticity. The kinship terms as prevalent in the family circle confirm the above stated facts. The father is addressed by the term 'kaka' which is generally used for the father's younger brother. This is also corroborative of the fact that on widowhood the woman is allowed to legally marry her younger brother-in-law. The social sanction to such levirate unions is accorded and this is reflected upon the common kinship term 'kaka' used for father and father's younger brother. Thus placing the father and his younger male sibs in the same category having specified role and status. While the term 'baba' is used for the father's elder brother who obviously has a higher status in the 'kutumb' and wields more authority. Thus implying that the basic obligations and distribution in the 'kutumb' are not confined to a man's family of procreation but to the entire generation of children who have been born out of the sibs of his own generation. Thus all the 'kaka' are equally effective in the socialization of the children. In the same

vain the younger sister and daughters are treated. Both are referred to as 'chhori' meaning young girl.

Hence, in the joint family and household the paternal grandparents hold the highest position of authority and status. In this patriarchal society the natal family is responsible for the rites and duties of an individual from birth until death.

**Table- (2)**  
**Types of Family/Household**

Type of Family	Nangal Meena Village	Akhoda Meena Village	Tiddi/ Teeri Village	Total
Simple (Nuclear)	19	15	40	74
Complete (extended)	50	58	65	173

**Table- (3)**  
**Kinship Terminology among Meenas**

S.No.	Kinship	Terms used
1.	Father	Kaka
2.	Mother	Jiji
3.	Father's elder brother	Baba
4.	Father's younger brother	Kaka
5.	Sister (elder)	Bahen
6.	Sister (younger)	Chhori
7.	Daughter	Chhori
8.	Son	Chhora
9.	Father's Father	dada
10.	Father's Mother	Dadi
11.	Mother's Father	Nana
12.	Mother's Mother	Nani
13.	Mother's Brother	Mama
14.	Mother's Sister	Mausi
15.	Father's Sister	Bua
16.	Father's Brother's Son	Bhaiya
17.	Father's Sister's Son	Bhayo
18.	Mother's Brother's Son	Bhaiya
19.	Mother's Sister's Son	Bhaiya
20.	Father's Father's Brother	Dada
21.	Father's younger Sister	Chhoti Bua
22.	Father's elder Sister	Badi Bua
23.	Mother's Mother's elder Brother	Bade Nana
24.	Mother's Mother's younger Brother	Chhote Nana
25.	Mother's Mother's younger sister	Chhote Nani
26.	Mother's Mother's elder sister	Badi Nani
27.	Ego's wife	Chore ki jiji
28.	Wife's Sister	Sali
29.	Wife's Brother	Salo
30.	Wife's Father	Susura
31.	Wife's Mother	Sasu

## Marriage

One of the most important events for a family is the marriage of one of the members, Among the Meenas marriage is essentially a ritual and formality. It is considered to be a very important stage through which one has to pass. Arranged marriage is the most common form of marriage among Meenas.

**Table- (4)**  
**Marriage Form of the Meenas**

Type of Marriage	Nangal Meena Village	Akhoda Meena Village	Tiddi/ Teeri Village	Total
Arrange Marriage (a) Monogamous (b) Padma	62 1	68 -	80 5	206 6
Love Marriage	3	4	9	16
Nata	1	-	8	9
Widow- remarriage	2	1	3	6

Social stigma is attached to a person who remains unmarried even till the age of 18 years. It is held among the members of the society that marriage should take place early in life. In case of girls the rule is specific and explicit. They must be married before they attain menarcheal age. Indeed the girls are married before reaching twelve years of age. Marriages are mostly celebrated during 'akhateej- a day in the month of May. When there is considerable leisure time available to the agriculturists.

## MARRIAGE RULES

The most important rule governing Meena marriage is endogamy or the rule of marriage within the tribe. It has been commented that the rule of endogamy expresses a desire to maintain 'racial purity'. Not a single case of inter-tribal or marriage with a non-tribal individual was reported in both the three locales of the present study.

The rules of exogamy are much more explicit. The rules prohibit a person marrying with certain members related to him by bonds of kinship- real or fictitious. The clan or 'got' and 'thok' are exogamous units. Marital relations within the 'got' and 'thok' are considered sinful. The rule of village exogamy is not imperative like the rule of tribe endogamy or 'got' exogamy. But a very large section of the tribe and village community prefers to have its affinal relations outside the village.

"Even the Muslim Fakir community which practices consanguineous marriages do not arrange or celebrate marriage inside the village. In one instance although the bride and groom were first cousins living in the same village but at the time of marriage the groom along with his party came from another village where he was temporarily shifted few days prior to the village. On enquiry it was found that Muslim Fakirs for the sake of honouring the sentiments of their Meena neighbours (regarding marrying within the village) make such an arrangement." (Col. Tod : 1914) By tradition all the people of the village, belonging to the same generation or age grade treat each other as brother and sister. Marriage unions are not allowed in the 'got' of mother, ego's own 'got', ego's wife's 'got' and paternal grandmother's 'got'.

### FORMS OF MARRIAGE

Besides arranged marriage there is one more form of marriage prevalent among the Meenas. In order of frequency marriage by 'nata' comes next to arranged marriage. There is no restriction on widow remarriage. It is preferred if she marries one of the husband's younger or elder brother or a paternal cousin. A man can have more than one wife if he chooses so. Woman in Meena society is an important asset and her economic value is measured by the amount of ornaments she receives from her father and in-laws.

Further, on widowhood her in-laws make best efforts to retain her within the household since it is prestigious for the 'kutumb' to have number of women. Further, the main lure lies in remarrying the widow with one of the sibs of the deceased or his cousins. The 'Kada' worn by the woman is considered to be the symbol of marriage and the second husband presents her with a 'kada' which finalises the union. Marriage with a non tribal is an offence which does not provide any other punishment, but excommunication from the tribe. However, if the marriage alliance is with a 'clean' caste like Brahmin, Rajput, Mahajan, Gujar, Jat and Khati the tribal council at village level imposes a heavy sum of money as punishment ('dand'); and only after taking a 'holy dip in the river' ('ganga snan kare') the accused may be accepted by the society. If the marriage alliance is with an 'unclean' caste, and the Muslims, the accused is never allowed by the 'panchpatel' for readmission in the tribal society.

The case studies given in the chapter of Political

Organization substantiate the fact that these social offenses are dealt in accordance with the existing customary laws of the tribe. Amongst the Meenas it is held that marriage should take place early in life. The girls are married before they attain their pubertal age. Ideally the Meena think that the right age for marriage lies between 6 to 10 years. Many a time the marriages were delayed because of children education in those families who attached a greater importance to education attainment. Such parents had to face a lot of difficulties in finding suitable mates for their educated sons. This difficulty was overcome by inception of another institution known as 'rokna'. This mainly involves engagement of the boy and the girl. The marriage takes place after the boy finishes his education. Many young Meena boys expressed that a married Meena boy of 8 years studying in class 1 or 2 becomes the target of bully for his class mates who are non-Meenas and cut jokes on the married status of Meena student.

Consumation of marriage or 'sawa' ('muklawā') forms an important part of marriage rites. This is mainly because the Meena bride attains her physical maturity only after a few years of her marriage. Hence, after deciding over the day she is given a ceremonial send off and finally proceeds to her in-laws house for permanent stay.

### BIYAH

The marriage amongst Meenas is settled by the respective parents of the boy and girl. This settlement mainly centres around the amount of cash and kind to be exchanged between the prospective in-law. These kind of settled marriages are mainly monogamous except in special cases when a marriageable girl having some physical disability, is married along with physically normal sister to the same groom within the accepted and agreed forms of payments. Such type of marriage is called '*padna*' meaning 'transfersal of burden'. Many Meena fathers agree to this form of marriage because through this the household acquires an extra hand for domestic chores.

### NATA

'Nata' type of marriage is another frequent and characteristic feature of Meena society. In this form, a married woman with living husband and offsprings can remarry another married man-her second husband paying a cash compensation ('jhagre-ka-paisa'), to her first husband. In case the woman in question is a widow, deserted or

divorced the compensation money is paid to the male guardian of the woman and on many instances the woman's father and her in-laws claim the money. It has been revealed by an informant during the field work that a widowed woman after ten days period of ritual mourning resumes her duties as a married woman within the household. Her deceased husband's brother (younger and elder) are entitled to accept her as wife by presenting her a wrist band.

The children born out of such unions are legally recognized by the entire household and get the share of their mother's deceased husband's property. Whether the widow would continue to stay with her in-laws or settle at her natal home depends entirely on her own discretion. Although it is considered pre-stigmatized for the in-laws family if the widowed daughter-in-law resumes the status of a married daughter-in-law within the household.

There is a good deal of difference in social and ceremonial aspects of 'biyah' and 'nata'. 'Biyah' is the approved ceremonial form of marriage while 'nata' is a simplified device for remarriage. However 'nata' has its ritual idiom. Like 'biyah' in 'nata' also a Brahmin priest officiates at the brief ceremony to give the marriage a religious approval. In 'nata' the bridegroom though wears a 'toran' on his forehead but the bride would only wear a small band of 'pipal' leaves around her forehead.

According to Meena belief a woman is married only once in her life time and wears a 'toran' during her first marriage. Thus she is not entitled to adorn the ceremonial 'toran' during her subsequent marriages. But the man can wear 'toran' as many times as he wishes to marry.

The tribe being partilineal, the residence after marriage is always the household of the groom's father. Establishing a nuclear household by the newly wed couple is totally absent. Till the father is alive the married sons can not think in terms of independent household. Though, to avoid conflicts among women on domestic chores, permission is granted to a married couple to establish their independent cooking hearth within the household.

#### **Divorce:**

Meena society permits its men and women members to seek divorce (chorna'). The men mainly seek divorce on the grounds of adultery, sterility, incurable diseases and negligence of duties towards husband and children. The woman can seek divorce on the grounds of impotency,

incapability to provide maintenance for the house, cruelty, criminality and insanity. Intensive study of the divorce cases revealed that the two major factors which lead to divorce are sterility and adultery. But even such divorce cases are few mainly because when a woman realizes that she is sterile she voluntarily permits her husband to remarry and continue to live with the new wife. In such instances there is no question of seeking divorce unless the woman has another man ready to marry her.

"Women seek divorce especially on grounds of impotency. The 'panchpatel' takes long to come to a decision mainly because social stigma is attached to a divorced man on such grounds and he loses his prestige in and around. Hence in such cases the village tribal council allows the man to undergo the treatment for cure of his impotency before finally allowing the divorce." (Rizvi SHM : 1987) In case of other reasons for divorce, like cruelty, criminality or lack of maintenance of family, the man is usually reprimanded in front of the 'panchpatel' and asked to mend his ways. This is referred to as 'pabandi' literally meaning 'to restrict'. In case the man refrains to comply the orders of the 'panchpatel' he is threatened and fined.

A divorced woman is permitted to remarry only if she has paid this compensation and is in receipt of the 'kagli'. This is mainly to safeguard the monetary interest of the divorced husband, since during 'nata' of the divorced woman the first husband is not paid anything by the second husband. Hence it is evident that the woman's party are losers socially, morally and monetarily. Thus a woman usually agrees to live with her problems at her in-laws instead of seeking her personal freedom. If a married girl conceives and delivers the child before 'sawa' she is neither accepted by her in-laws as rightful daughter-in-law nor by her own parents. But there is a provision to grant her permission for 'nata' in Meena customary laws.

The child can remain with her if her second husband agrees to it or the child is retained by the girl's parents. But in practice it was found that the child was accepted by her proposed husband and was given the same status as his own son/daughter. The local term for such a child is 'bakhdaila' literally meaning 'trouble creator'.

The Meena customary laws do not allow their members to remarry without paying the 'jhagre-ka-paisa' and only after obtaining of 'kagli' the marriage is

regularized by the society.

"In recent times many cases were brought before the tribal council wherein a Meena married a woman without obtaining a 'kagli' from her former husband and brought the bride in the village after obtaining 'azad form' (an affidavit countersigned by the judicial magistrate of nearby court) thus claiming his marriage as legitimate." (Rizvi SHM : 1987)

"Such cases, though few in number, did bring a state of confusion and confrontation between the customary laws and existing marriage laws of the state. In such circumstances a clarification was sought by the tribal council from the 'pargana panchayat' or 'gadhatpeshi' and it was decided that such affidavits would not be considered lawful in tribal councils. Further, if a person does so he would be punished and the woman would be returned to her former husband. Furthermore, if the decision of the 'panchpatel' is not honoured then other tribal councils at various levels can also move a resolution for the excommunication of the accused even if he fails to deposit the fine." (Rizvi SHM : 1987)

In the sphere of a marriage institution one can note deviation towards acquiring mate by deciding the amount of gifts, etc. according to the existing customary sanctions of other communities around. For example, it is being claimed by the people of older generation that during sixteenth and seventeenth century Meenas used to send gifts in the form of ornaments for acquiring the bride and in exchange never demanded any dowry but accepted whatever gifts were given to them at the time of marriage.

Due to living with other castes, observing the prevailing customs of dowry and the impact of formal education, at present, when a husband goes to bring his wife during 'sawa', he demands a particular sum of money or gifts.

Thus a situation of confrontation emerges which sometimes results into anomalous situations because there are cases where the married daughter could not be given a formal send off in case of not acceding to demands put forth by son-in-laws. This has resulted into more obligatory duties of kinsmen towards such women. This situation can be seen interlinked with 'jhagre ka paisa' when such deserted women attempt to remarry.

"According to normative rules one can not remarry

('nata') without obtaining 'kagli' after divorce and divorce on the other hand is being discouraged by laying strict conditions on which one can seek divorce. In such cases the customary laws are being relaxed so that the compatibility between normative rules and changing cultural scene in contemporary Meena society may be achieved." (Mann, R.S. : 1993)

This Meena society observes fundamental distinction between legitimate and illegitimate child. The illegitimate children born of those women who gave birth to such children before 'sawa', are looked down upon by the tribal society. But the customary laws provide sanction for legitimization, affiliation and guardianship of such children.

If an illegitimate child's biological father marries the mother, he is entitled to claim the child as his own either by obtaining this right from the 'panchpatel' or recognizing the child as his own. Further, by adopting either procedure the child receives the status of a legitimate child and the 'jaga' enters his name in the genealogy of the family after attending the ceremony in which the kinsmen bless the child.

## MARRIAGE RITUALS

"The marriage rituals can be divided into three categories, premarital, marital and post-marital. Since child marriage is the only common form of marriage it has been affirmed by majority of parents that if an offer is made by the girl's father it is generally accepted by the boy's parents." (Manohara Prabhakar : 1972)

For the final settlement of the marriage the bride's father along with his 'thok-patel' visits the groom's house with cash and some gifts. He formally marks out a 'tilak' on the forehead of the groom which signifies that the boy is now ritually marked out for his daughter. This is referred to as 'rokna' literally meaning customary engagement.

The marriage are usually performed on an appointed day 'akhateej' which falls during the slack agricultural period when the harvesting and sale of crop have been done. This time period is selected mainly to give the participants ample time to enjoy themselves and the parents to indulge in shopping spree from the amount they received after the sale of the crop.

Further, the selection of the day 'akhateej' is



purposive since for this day no formal sanction is required from the priest. Other than this particular day a formal auspicious day is to be decided by a priest after consultation.

So to avoid this 'akhateej' is the day on which a common observer may witness hordes of bridegrooms proceeding towards their respective destination on any transport available, e.g. from walking on foot, sitting on the parallel bar of the bicycle of a cart. He is generally accompanied by a handful of associates.

It may be mentioned here that the ones who are to be married fall within the age group 5 to 10 years with the result that both bride and groom fall asleep by the time they are to be married. It was interesting to find that none of the married adults could recollect events of their marriage day. The half asleep bride and groom are usually carried on the laps of their respective parents for the final marriage rites.

Two to three days prior to marriage the respective women members of the 'kutumb' apply oil and turmeric paste on the bride and groom at their respective houses. "It was witnessed that both wear 'hasli' (or 'khungali') weighing up to 5 kg around their neck during the ritual. This 'hasli' is made of silver and due to its weight it is held up with the hands because the tender neck region of the children receive bruises if it hangs on for a longer period of time." (Rizvi SHM : 1987) The application of turmeric powder with oil is believed to improve the texture and complexion of the skin. This particular rite is locally referred to as 'tel' (literally meaning oil). The women members recite the folk songs and intermittently cut jokes with the male folks.

The boy and the girl are not allowed to go outside the village till the completion of this rite which sometimes lengthens to a couple of days. The women who attend this rite are treated with good food depending upon the economic status of the family.

It was observed that considerable amount of sugar is consumed by Meenas in the form of 'bundi' since they are very fond of sweets and the social status of the family is measured by its capability of spending money to purchase bulk of sugar for arranging various feasts organized during marriage.

The 'patel' erects the first wooden post and other senior members of the 'thok' contribute their share through erecting the rest three wooden posts. The women members

take special efforts to clean the ground and make floral designs on the floor around the 'manda'. The designs are made through sprinkling lime water. The beautifully decorated earthen pitchers kept one above the other mark the completion of the 'manda' ritual.

During this ritual the boy or girl are kept within the living quarters. They are not allowed to roam around after performing this ritual. Because it is believed that if they come out of the living quarters they may become the target of evil spirits.

The impact of culture contact between Meena and non-Meena is more pronounced in the marriage rituals. It is evident from the fact that certain innovations such as erection of canopy, decoration with paper and tinsel, illumination with coloured bulbs in case of availability of electricity and use of loudspeaker blaring away Hindi film songs around 'manda' are some of the latest entrants in a Meena marriage.

Some elderly male members accompany the groom and the party proceeds towards the bride's house. The groom is attired in fine clothes and wears ornaments around his neck, in ears, around waist and ankles. He also carries a sword and adorns a 'toran' around his forehead.

According to Meena informants on this day a Meena boy for the first time wears a 'kurta' and 'dhoti' as worn by adults, since till the age of 6 and 7 he roams around naked and such children who are not married can be seen loitering around the village throughout the year. Only during winter they cover their body from neck to waist by putting on 'jhabla' which is similar to a shirt reaching up to thighs.

The groom is given a warm send off amidst playing of musical instruments (generally played by Muslim fakirs), recitation of folk songs by women and firing of guns in the air. During these festivities the menfolk consume home made spirited liquor made from jaggery.

Since most of the marriages are arranged within a defined territorial zone (pal) the distance to be covered by the groom varies from one kilometer to sometimes 30 kilometers. This distance is covered by any means of transportation available to the families. Sometimes when there are two or more sons getting married at different places on the appointed day the author has witnessed the procession of groom covering the distance through brisk

walking through forest and hills. To reach to his destination within time the groom starts from his house one or two day earlier.

After the arrival, bridegroom and his associates are received formally at the gate of the village. The greetings are exchanged between them. It may be noted here that the female members never accompany the groom. The party is led by their respective 'thok' Patel.

After putting vermilion mark on the foreheads of groom and his associates they are brought to the house of the bride where they are provided with cots, mattresses and water. The associates clean themselves and put on their fresh clothes before proceeding to witness the 'phera' ritual.

The two respective 'thok Patel' in consultation with the respective parents decide about the payment to be made to some specific relatives at the time of this ritual. This payment is locally referred to as 'neg' or 'leva'.

A priest ('jogi') is called to perform the ritual with chanting of 'mantra'. At the decided hour a fire is lit in the centre of the 'manda' with the help of dried sticks and clarified butter. The priest during the circumbulation chants the so called 'mantra' which are not the Sanskrit 'mantra' meant for marriage but mostly are recitation of 'Hanuman Chalisa'.

Thus the presence of 'jogi', lighting the 'sacred' fire and chanting of 'Hanuman Chalisa' read aloud are desperate attempts of Meenas to emulate Hindu rites. At the end of it the 'jogi' blesses the couple to lead their married life as happily as led by Shiva and Parvati the eternal man and woman of Hindu religion. This ritual is generally performed after taking dinner in case the groom and his party arrives after sunset.

Following this ritual the bride can be taken to her in-laws. However, this generally never happens due to child marriage. The status of 'kutumb' is determined by the number of days it can entertain the groom's party in the village. Since the party members are to be provided with all material comforts along with two time meals it is an expensive affair. It was witnessed that such kind of hospitality is offered minimum for a day and maximum for two days.

Besides the above payments 'thor-net' is a part payment which ranges from hundred rupees to five

hundred rupees paid by respective parents to the 'jogi' priest before the couple is taken around the village for worshipping the deities.

An important aspect of the Meena marriage is exchange of ornaments between the two families. The ornaments such as 'gutti', 'murki', 'khungali', 'baddi', 'dora' and 'kadi' are given to bride and groom by their respective in-laws. The bride is presented with 'chuda', 'churi', 'kankati', 'guluband', 'airan' and 'kanta' by her father. Similarly 'jhala', 'jantar' and 'kankati' are generally presented to the bridegroom by his parents.

The list of the invites begins with 'thok Patel' followed by members of thok' residing in the same village and nearby villages, and members of village community. In the girl's marriage the presence of her mother's brother is essential since he presents the bride with a veil called 'lugra' which is supposed to cover and protect her from the eyes of the other sex. The women are supposed to accompany the bride and groom during their visits to village deities and other shrines of the Hindu pantheon.

After the formal send off of the bride the women relatives make preparation to formally visit the groom's house. This is exclusively woman's affair. This rite is locally referred to as 'milni'. The respective women members of the two affinal households meet and exchange greeting for the first time. The visitors are offered food in lieu of which the bride's women relatives pay some money in cash. It is considered sacrilege to eat in the house of the daughter's in-laws. After enjoying the feast and offering greetings the women bring back the child bride from her in-laws. She stays at her natal home till the performance of 'sawa' or 'muklawa'.

'Sawa' is the final rite of Meena marriage wherein the child bride after attaining puberty visits her in-laws to consummate her marriage. This rite entails exchange of gifts the major burden falling on the bride's parents. Since the groom demands something expensive from his in-laws to finally bring their daughter home. The groom visits the bride's house along with some new clothes, ribbon, hair clips and other toilet articles for the bride. The father-in-law presents him with the gift decided upon earlier. The girl dressed in all her finery along with some household articles leaves her natal home finally to establish herself in her husband's 'kutumb'.

This became conspicuous during the 'sawa' of a village boy aged 18 years. The night he was supposed to consummate his marriage he was found absconding from the house. His 25 years old bride had to wait in the room for the major part of the night. The search for the young broom was a joyful even for the village youth who chased him through the forest and fields, ultimately physically coercing him to enter the room. The girl on the other hand having attained her physical and sexual maturity in her own village fully understands the plight of her husband, and being senior to him in age fully sympathizes with him. She confirms and communicates with him with utmost patience and servitude.

"Extramarital relations are considered to be sacrilegious. Traditionally a woman found indulging in such liaison was chained and shackled within the courtyard of the house during the night and a strong-and strict vigil was kept on her during the day while at work till she amended her way. This punishment is locally referred to as 'naud dalna'. Thus woman as an asset was considered to be the property of the 'kutumb' body whole sole." (Rizvi SHM : 1987) Deviation from this pattern amounts to criminal offense. To substantiate the above statement a couple of case studies have been given below which were dealt by the tribal council in the past.

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRADITIONS : MEENA VIS-À-VIS NON MEENA

The social intercourse of Meenas with other non tribal groups. living in the villages, hint at the existence of three broad divisions on the basis of their 'ritual purity'. These divisions are 'clean' 'unclean' and 'untouchable'. The social distinction amongst three divisions is reflected in the physical distance maintained from one another especially during feasts.

In their everyday life the Meenas confine their dining relations to their own group and it is largely on occasions of feasts that Meena vis-a-vis non-Meena dining relations come into focus. As a rule the Meenas are considered by the non-tribal, at par with the 'clean' caste of the Hindu 'varna' system. The Meenas accept food from 'clean' caste including the Brahmin, who retain the highest position in the social hierarchy of the village. Rules regarding smoking and sharing the same smoking pipe ('hukka') are strict. Meena does not share his smoking pipe with any other caste member of the village.

The native smoking pipe 'hukka' or sometimes 'bidi' is shared among Meenas only. But there is no distinction of 'clean' and 'unclean' castes when drawing water from the village wells. The table (6:5) presents the caste-tribe composition of the village Nangal Meena and Tiddi. (Census of India : 2011)

**Table (5)**  
**Caste- Tribe Composition of the Villages of Dausa and Udaipur districts.**

S.N.	Name of Communities	Traditional occupation	Nangal Meena Village (no. of house.)	Tiddi Village (no. of houses)	Ritual position
1.	Brahmin	Priest	2 (11)	5 (7)	Cl.
2.	Balai (S.C.)	Ag. Labour	2 (9)	-	UCL.
3.	Bhangi (S.C.)	Scavenger	1 (7)	1 (2)	UNT.
4.	Chhipa	Dyer	1 (11)	-	CL.
5.	Fakir (OBC)	Mendicant and musicians	-	9 (47)	UCL.
6.	Khangar (OBC)	Skinner /tanner	-	2 (7)	UCL.
7.	Khati (OBC)	Carpenter	1 (11)	5 (9)	CL.
8.	Kir (OBC)	Leather work	-	4 (14)	UNT.
9.	Kumhar (OBC)	Potter	2 (17)	4 (13)	CL.
10.	Mahajan	Trader	1(16)	2 (6)	CL.
11.	Meena (S.T.)	Agriculture	69 (421)	105 (800)	CL.
12.	Nai (Muslim)	Barber/ surgeon	-	2(9)	CL.
13.	Nai (Hindu)	Barber/ messenger	1 (3)	1 (8)	CL.
14.	Rana (Muslim)	Musician	1 (2)	-	UCL
15.	Thakur	Trade /distiller	-	1 (5)	CL.
			180 (1169)	138 (1136)	

Notes:1. Numbers within parentheses stand for the number of approximate persons living as members of a household.

2.CL. Ritually 'clean' caste ,UCL: Ritually 'unclean'

caste, UNT: Ritually 'untouchable' caste

3. Number of persons are calculated from the records of the survey conducted by the village 'patwari' during March-May 2008.

From table 5 and on the basis of the everyday interaction of Meenas with other communities living in the villages the following classification can be made

1. The 'high' castes : including Brahmin, Mahajan, Thakur and Meena.
2. The 'clean' castes ; including Khati, Chhipa, Kumhar and Nai.
3. The 'unclean' castes : including Khangar, Rana and Fakir.
4. The 'untouchable' castes : including Kir, Bhangi and Balai.

It was further observed that in Nangal Meena Village on communal gatherings special care is taken by Meenas to accord due prestige to other caste groups. Brahmin and Mahajan are almost always given the place of honour, During marriage and death feasts the social distance maintained by Meenas with other non tribal communities is clearly visible. The prominent position in ritual heirarchy held by the Brahmins, continue to exist in Meena villages as well. The Meenas, try to identify themselves with Hindus and seek regular services of a Brahmin priest during various rites. Hence, by adopting these sanskritized rituals the Meenas have established a position for themselves in the ritual hierarchy of their village. Their ritual position is recognized and accepted by the other caste groups living in the same village :

Brahmin-highest

Mahajan, Meena and Thakur-High

Khati, Chhipa-Middle,

Kumhar, Nai, Fakir, Khangar and Rana- Low

Balai, Bhangi, Kir-Lowest.

Meenas are aware of their ritual position and this knowledge becomes essential to guide the members of this community in their everyday social interaction, in commensal and mutual visits and relations.

## NUKTA (FUNERAL FEAST)

The eldest son takes up the entire responsibility of the father after the father's death and this is symbolised during the funeral rites. The 'Pagri' of the father is ceremoniously handed over to the eldest son by the 'thok-patel', during this funeral-feast. This is witnessed by the entire birth & kins. By tradition all the living consanguines would cooperate with him.

Because of some restraints, in certain cases this cooperation is not sought thus he not only mortgages his land but also the shares of his younger brother to manage for 'nukta' (Rizvi, SHM : 1987) The celebration of 'nukta' on a grand scale among the Meenas generally gets them into debt. Nukta, under the customary law, is obligatory and the scale of the feast goes up with the economic standing of the family. This situation brings some unhappy developments in the kinship relations.

For these kind of cases the tribal council seeks adjustment and allows the eldest son to inherit a larger part of the father's property, if he solely takes responsibility for organizing the 'nukta'. Still a great value has been attached to such feasts by the Meena tribal society. Earlier this rite was a shared responsibility of the 'ghar' and the 'Kutumb'.

This is surviving as an institution because of its multi-dimensional (social, economic and religious) implications.

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