

# Social Aspect of Thar Coal Field Area of Tharparkar District in Sindh Province of Pakistan

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## Abstract

*The research paper significantly highlights the social perspective of Thar Desert of Pakistan. The study conducted in Tharparkar district of Sindh province of Pakistan which accounted more than 99% of area in Thar Desert of Pakistan. However, the richest social aspect of this area is exemplary peace religious harmony and patriotism. On the contrary, the uncertain conditions in the area of Thar Desert caused a substantial number (11%) of local people seasonally get migration to barrage areas every year. Study reveals, the life of Thar Desert depends on monsoon rain. Hence, more than 73 percent of the people's livelihood dependent upon the rain fed agriculture and livestock rearing.*

**Keywords:** Droughts, Patriotism, Resources, Rich culture, Seasonal Migration, Thar Desert.

## 1. Introduction

The term 'Social' is much in discussion about what accurately meant by this and it has different aspects. Taking social in the context of social resources that means social networks and connectedness which increase people's trust and ability to co-operate in more formalized groups and their systems of rules, norms and sanctions. The word "Thar" is commonly used for Thar Desert of Pakistan and this area is existed on the border of India and Pakistan. The area of Thar Desert is bifurcated into two countries that is 85 percent of the area counted in India and only 15 percent area of Thar Desert in Pakistan (Sinha R. K. et al, 1997). The majority of Thar Desert area in Pakistan is covered in District Tharparkar and Umerkot. Therefore, people from the District Tharparkar and Umerkot are known as "Thari"<sup>1</sup> in Pakistan. Thari people are very hardworking, honest, and extremely hospitable people in Sindh. On the other hand, the people of the Thar Desert has been spending a problematic life for centuries in context of shortage of water, sanitation, malnutrition, uncertain weather conditions (frequent occurrence of drought disasters), lack of income earning opportunities and basic amenities. The Thar Desert has preserved a numerous folk stories. Thari culture has a similarity with Rajistani (India) and Sindhi culture in some extent. But Thari culture has a

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<sup>1</sup> A person who lived Thar Desert is known in local term as Thari.



lots of similarities with Sindhi culture and it is said that Thari culture is derived from the Sindhi Culture.

The life in Thar is full of joys for visitors who find the indigenous traditions and lifestyles of children, women and elderly people. The strange scenes of the Thar Desert include the sand dunes, rising and setting scenes of sun in sand dunes, caravans of camel, the grazing herds like goat, cow, sheep, camel, common dresses of children and women and women's jewelries, local songs sung by local faqeers<sup>2</sup> on the patriotism of Maruee<sup>3</sup> in their lyrics. The indigenous myth and measures to cope with calamities like drought and dearth were losing their potential in the wake of strong influence of cash economy. The fascinating color of grazing lands and the romantic instinct of tending the flocks of cattle are diffusing in the growing needs of daily life. The tribes and castes in Thar Desert adopted a multi-colored settlement pattern rather than territorial segregation. Successive waves of invasion have therefore created a mosaic of cultures and ethnic groups in Thar. But all have, in time, bowed to similar means of production and a common measureable culture.

Tharparkar District keeps the least densely human populated district (47 person per squar kilometers) among all districts of Sindh province. On the contrary, the population of livestock in Tharparkar District is the greatest among all districts of Sindh. The study area is the largest populated in minorities especially in Hindu (41%) but there is no religious and social discrimination was found particularly between Muslims and Hindus. The livelihood source of the people in the study area is divided into six categories that is Agriculture, Livestock farming, Carpet Industry/ Handicrafts, laboring and Seasonal Migration (food for work). The people of study area owned their houses but few people has their own agriculture land. However, land is categorized in three types like survey land, enemy land and government land. The rangeland forests are the major provision of fodder for livestock in the study area. The great number of people nurtured animals' goat, cattle, sheep, camel and horses respectively.

## **2. Review of literature**

Those social communities which have different identity and distinct from dominant communities at national level societies. They were the lowliest, the most deprived and vulnerable segment of the society. The socioeconomic and sociopolitical status of these communities often remained low to protect their rights to lands, natural resources and cultural resources which altogether existed to limit their abilities to participate in and get benefits from various mega projects. The indigenous community is significantly poor and vulnerable if their lands and resources are degraded, transformed and encroached by outsiders or encroached in the name of the mega projects. They may be under threat of their religions, cultures, languages and their institutions. These features exposed different

<sup>2</sup> Local Singers are known as Fakeers and these fakers have family legacy of singing.

<sup>3</sup> Maruee was a local poor girl from Thar Desert of District Tharparkar who rejected king Umar's proposal of marriage and prefer to live with their kith and kin

kinds of risks and negative impacts to the indigenous communities, including loss of culture, identity, loss of their natural resources, impoverishment and diseases. In the context of these mentioned circumstances, people of Tharparkar fulfill the characteristics of indigenous people.

The majority of the folks (96%) were living in the rural areas of Tharparkar (Census, 1998). The district keeps a unique identity in Sindh province even in Pakistan due to the largest number of Non- Muslims (Hindus) communities. They are living with centuries without any religious or social conflicts. Both Muslims and Hindus are living in same village or in neighbors. These communities have different castes but caring each other. Successive migration has shaped a mosaic of cultures and social groups but they have occupied the similar livelihood pattern. The People of Tharparkar is believed to be honest, hospitable and hard-working (Gobind, 2006). They have constructed "Autak" as guest house at community level as well as individual level. Each settlement have at least one 'Autak' or as a Guest House located at a separate distance of the common living area. Women mostly interact within their own communities and their own village women's. The inter-marriages are common in Hindu communities significantly in same caste whereas Muslims are highly preferred to arrange intra-marriages within immediate relatives. The opportunities for women to interact the other communities or caste is more restricted. Rajput women observed a strict purdah (Seclusion) while poorer castes such as, Bajeer, Kolhi, Bheel and Menghwar are free from seclusion. These women were freely tending their tasks such as fetching water from well, collecting firewood, nurturing to livestock with their own male family members and helping their males in agriculture work. The majority of the family structure is based in the study area is joined family system (Rajab, 2003).

## **2.1 Tribes**

The people of Tharparkar has a multicultural tribes but their traditional characteristics are seeming common similarities. The Hindu communities arranged their intra-marriages among their communities. However the Muslim communities believe in intra-marriage with their families significantly with immediate relatives. The most common social tribes (Groups) of Tharparkar among Muslim community is Rahiman, Nohri, Sameja, Soomra, Sama Halepota, Memon, Juneja, Syed, Lanja, Khaskeli, Bajeer, Rind, Chandia, Channa, Kumbhar, Dall, Rajar, Mehar, Theba, Bajeer, Khosa, Noon and Maghanhar (Faqeer). However, the major castes among Non-muslims (Hindus) are Brahman, Rajpoot (Thakar/ Sodha), Maheshwari, Lohana, Maharaj, Suthar, Guriro, Bawa, Menghwar, Kolhi and Bheel (Raichand, 1956). However, Bajeer caste is the only caste noted between Muslims and Hindus. On the basis of religious division in Hindism; Bheel, Kolhi and Menghwar are included in scheduled castes or lower castes in Hindism which has commonly less privilege.

## 2.2 Fairs and festivals

There are a great number of fairs and festivals are celebrated in District Tharparkar and these festivals provide opportunities to the local people from the remote areas to share their views and meet each other. However, through these festivals and fairs deals a sell and purchase of livestock. They also enjoy their traditional music and dance. The festivals are celebrated on various religious events. Hindu community is celebrating more festival than Muslims. The Hindu community organizes their festivals such as Holi, Diwali, Thadhri and Nave Ratri etc. Christian are also celebrating Christmas significantly in urban areas of District Tharparkar in Mithi, Islam Kot, and Nagarparkar Talukas. Muslim has two major events two Eids i.e. Eid-u-Uzha and Eid-ul-Fitar in a year which celebrated throughout the whole district. Like other parts of Pakistan, the people of Tharparkar also has its own local dances such as Dandan Ji Rand, Mitco, Chakar Rand and Rasooro. The Dandan Ji Rand is performed by 8 to 10 men. All the performers have one small stick in his one hand and his another has a handkerchief are dancing on beat of the Dhol of a circle. The Dhol presenter also sing a song on the beat of his Dhol.

## 2.3 Maruee (An Eternal Charisma of Patriotism)

Maruee the most valued and respected daughter of land of Sindh particularly Tharparkar. She is known as a sign of patriotism. She did not surrender to any pressure or lure. Maruee was a gorgeous girl and a daughter of shepherd. Umar Soomro was a King and ruled over the Thar in the past. King Umar Soomro proposed to marry her (Maruee) and wanted to set her as a queen of his palace. On the contrary, Maruee preferred to spend a very simple Thari life which was full of problems, instead of becoming a queen. Historically, this area is also known as "Malir", however present name of her village is "Bhalwa" becomes popular, after settlement of Bheel community at this village and named Bhalwa village.

The everlasting character of Maruee in Shah Latif's poetry revealed as a representation and model of Patriotism for the nation significantly for the people of Tharparkar District. The greatest sufi poet of Sindhi of language Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai has comprehensively presented the virtue of Patriotism ingrained among the people of Sindh. They hold their honor dearer than even their lives. Maruee says to Umar in her response to his offer, "Umar, I will continue to turn down your offers of rich jewelry and sophisticated clothes as long as I conscious. I am not ready to cost away my poor garments by sacrificing my national honor. No one will control me as long as I live." Maruee loves her Maroo despite all their faults and shortcomings.

Being deeply touched by her dedication, love and a great sense of patriotism with her land, people. Umar set her free. This is an inspirational message forever and for humanity. In the words of Shah Latif Bhatai: says:

*"I would not use your oil; my heart is attached to my kin,  
Why should I listen to any one, ultimately I belong there.  
This is not the way of my kin folks,  
To exchange daughter for the sake of gold."* (Bhitai)

### 3. Research methodology

The following research techniques has been specifically used to achieve the objective manner:

- Review of secondary sources: Documents, reports, books files, maps, aerial photos and statistical bulletins.
- Direct observation of the people of coalfield areas.
- Case studies, life histories and oral as well as written stories.
- Semi-structured interviews of key individuals focus groups and mixed groups asking probing questions.
- A multistage sampling plan has been used to select households. The respondents were included village elders, traders, agriculture-related people, livestock breeders, government officials, teachers, students and etc. The total sample size is from the Thar coal field area of District Tharparkar is 290.
- The total population of Thar Coal Block-II is 7590 with 1249 households. The total sample size is 290. The sample size is appropriate at  $\pm 5\%$  error rate, 95% level of confidence, with 50% of response distribution from the population.

### 4. Results and discussions

The population of district Tharparkar separated into two main religious classes i.e. Muslim (59%) and Hindu (41%) lived with centuries in the same environment (Census, 1998). Succeeding immigration has created a mosaic of cultures and ethnic groups but all have taken up similar means of livelihoods. In the Study Area, the population of Hindus (44%) and Muslims (56%) in the nine villages located in Thar Coal project Block II. The Muslims population is slightly lower in the study area but they are economically prosperous in the ownership of larger cultivated lands and livestock (ESIA, 2012). Despite these socio-cultural differences, the social relationships between the Hindus and Muslims among the various castes and their sub-groups of both religions were harmonious. There are practically no reported cases of conflicts, serious crimes, animal thefts, disagreements, land disputes and others.

#### 4.1 Gender Roles

The Thari women have freedom of mobility, confidently move to agricultural fields, fetching water, arranging energy for cooking foods lonely from the surrounding areas of their villages and supporting to their families to earn money through small businesses. Thari Women cover her faces while outside of their homes. The getup of women is vary from the unmarried, married and widows

through their clothes and bangles. Therefore, these women can easily be segregated from their status through their getups. Women largely communicate within their own caste or their village women. The women related to upper caste follows strict veil while women from poor families or lower caste are free to follow seclusion. Gender analysis defines, the socioeconomic status of men and women are related to complement each other within a specific socio-cultural and economic context. The work of male and female is clearly well-defined in the rural areas of Tharparkar District, that the division of labor is gender based. Women commonly overworked; she begins work at dawn and finishing at sunset. The women play a most important role in the rural areas significantly addressing food security and healthy nurturing their children at the household level. Also participate in agriculture related activities such as livestock nurturing and farming. While, women from the poorer communities of the study area significantly Bheel and Kohli families migrate with their male family members to laboring in the Barrage areas of Sindh in the harvest seasons of wheat, sugarcane, cotton picking etc. The Majority of the women of the study area were found illiterate. There are also lack of awareness and understanding regarding socioeconomics and political issues.

The women respondents in the study survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) from the surveyed villages revealed a profound connection with their land, frequently much stronger than their men respondents. This deep attachment with the land shows their freedom of mobility in their villages because most of them were conscious about their dislocation will insecure them and limited their mobility within home. Also, they were never compromised in the loss of freedom and breakup of relationships with their villages.

The male members of households had primarily responsibility for both external and internal family matters. They are not only responsible for representing their households in the village and wider community, but at the household level women effectively played their role in decisions making. Indeed, the men household head had the right of final decisions and lone authority in managing economic resources. Consequently, the members of the family considered to him as the primary supporter and ultimately responsible for their welfare.

## **4.2 Language**

The frequently spoken language in the study area is known as Dhatki (51%) which is also called as a 'Thari' Language. Basically 'Thari Language' is a dialect of Rajistani language that is mostly spoken language in Thar region. However, 46 percent of respondents from the study area speaks Sindhi language. Furthermore, the majority of the people of the study area believe that basically Thari Language is dialect of Sindh Language. Tharparkar district is counted as Thar Desert due to its vast area around 99 percent area of the district is extended in Thar Desert. Tharparkar district is the home of two prominent communities i.e.

Muslims and Hindus. According to a census report (1998) Muslims are almost 59 percent of the whole population whereas the remaining population constitutes Hindus 41 percent of the total population. Due to variation of the population between Muslim and Hindus in the study area, the population of the Hindu believed community (43%) is slightly greater than the Muslims (57%). The extremely largest number of Hindus of Pakistan are lived in Tharparkar district. The respondents were considered for their ethnicity. It is generally represented by the language they speak in Thar Coal field area of district Tharparkar and the data (Table-02) exhibits that the majority of the respondents (51%) were speaking Dhateki which is local dialect of Sindhi Language, while pure Sindhi speaking were 46% of the total sample size. However, only 3% of the respondents were from the Kolhi communities which is most deprived community in the study area.

**Table: 02.** Distribution of Respondents by Language

S.No.	Language	Frequency	Percent
1	Dhateki	149	51
2	Sindhi	134	46
3	Parkari	9	3
Total		290	100

Source: Study Survey, 2012

#### 4.3 Major problems in Thar desert

Pakistan lies at the lowest level under developing countries at global level, and ranked at sixth lowest level among under developing countries of all Asian countries(HDR-UNDP, 2016). Tharparkar is the most disadvantaged districts in Pakistan, with 72.4% of people living in acute poverty. It is the second most poverty stricken district in Pakistan. In addition, this study reveals that the major issue of the respondents in the study area are water scarcity 40 percent, food shortage 29 percent, health 12 percent, employment 10 percent and education 9 percent respectively.

Tharparkar's rural communities have risky livelihoods based on seasonal monsoon rainfall. In case no sufficient rainfall occurs in the study area which negatively impact on the livelihood pattern of the people of Tharparkar. In the consequent of this, drought is declared by the authorities and drought compels around 40% of families to migrate in search of livelihoods. Drought is a combination of financial, social and livelihood deficiencies exacerbated by dearth of safe water, malnutrition, shortage of fodder and sometimes caused an outbreak of human diseases. As an arid desert zone, safe drinking water is critical to survival. However, 81% of the population are currently drinking unsafe/saline groundwater. Much of this contains dangerously high levels of fluoride and other

chemicals. This type of undrinkable groundwater is found in 89% of the district (as per WHO standards).

**Table: 03.** Major Problems of the Study Area

S. No.	Major Problems	Frequency	Percent
1	Water Shortage	117	40
2	Food Insecurity	84	29
3	Health	36	12
4	Unemployment	28	10
5	Education	25	9
Total		290	100

Source: Study Survey, 2012

#### 4.4 Trends of Migration in the Study Area

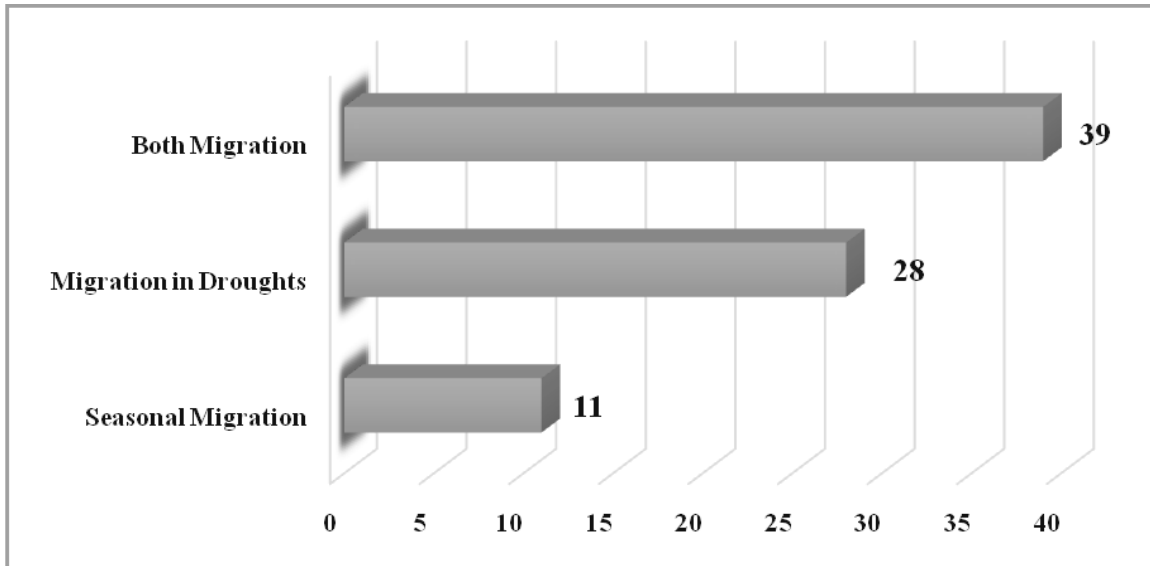
The seasonal migration, permanent migration and migration in droughts were observed in the study area. Seasonal migration was almost common in the all of the villages of the study area and it is a regularly undertaken by with family or only male adults of those households who have insufficient livelihood resources at their villages. The study indicates that the human population of the study area is relatively permanent, only moving seasonally or in the occurrence of droughts for their livelihood supplement. The permanent residency showing their attachment with their land and among communities. The Bheel and Kolhi communities of the Hindu faith and belong to the lower (schedule) caste communities were seasonally migrated with their families. However, only male adults form the poorest communities are also seasonally migrated to the barrage areas of both Hindus and Muslim. Due to the largest number of the livestock in the study area, a notable number of livestock owners' especially male adults move with their livestock to the barrage areas of the province till the monsoon precipitation. The main purpose of seasonally migrated people to obtain grains and addition their minor incomes at household, as well as collect feed for their livestock. These migratory families return back at the time of the first monsoon rainfall occurs with their earnings. Study reveals that 11 percent people are seasonally migrated and further 28 percent people leave at the time of a drought. These 28 percent drought displacees people are farmers, livestock herders and owners, skilled and unskilled labor. In case of droughts in the study area both seasonally migrated people and drought displacees<sup>4</sup> caused involuntary migration or these people were out of their permanent residency. Therefore 39 percent human population frequently got migration with their livestock. The frequent occurrence of droughts are in the

<sup>4</sup> In the occurrence of drought caused forcibly migration .



study area where almost happened every three years. Thus people of the study area faces a famine and nearly 40 percent of the local communities leave their permanent residency temporarily.

**Figure 1:** Shows Trends of Migration in the Study Area n=290



Source: Study Survey, 2012

## 5. Conclusions

The social aspect of the study area is enormously rich in the context of its culture, hospitality, religious harmony, peace, patriotism of Maruee etc. On the contrary, people of the study area faces major problems at their village in the shape of shortage of water, poor health facilities, poverty, illiteracy and unsustainable livelihood pattern and lack of job opportunities. Apart from the problems they love with their topography due to exemplary peace and social network where everyone lives peacefully. Moreover, the 11 percent of poorest communities significantly belong to the schedule cast seasonally migrated every year to the adjacent barrage areas of Sindh provinces in search of food for their families and fodder for their livestock at the time of harvest of wheat and sugarcane. Hence, drought comes frequently in Thar region and in the occurrence of drought further 28 percent people leave their areas which counted 39 percent people are out of their ancestral land.

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