

Globalization and Role Transition among Mirasi Community in Rawalpindi

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Abstract:

This article deals with the information regarding the modes of income and the impact of globalization on the Mirasi community. The study was conducted in a village called Thoha Khalsa in the Potohar region Punjab. The Mirasi community has settled in Thoha Khalsa for 10 generations. In this study an attempt has been made to understand the mode of income of Mirasi community and transition of roles from their ancestors. During the last decade advancement in technology has brought some significant changes in their traditional roles. This paper focuses on the multiple roles of this particular community played in the society. They are occupational musicians, dancers and beggars as well. The Mirasi community is on the verge of diminishing, losing its culture, traditions and values. This research highlights changes which have occurred in Marasi community over the years. Due to rapid urbanization, modernization and economic instability, traditional communities like Mirasi are losing their traditional ways, patterns of life and cultural heritage. This study will help to preserve the knowledge of this community. The data presented in this paper has been collected by using qualitative anthropological research techniques.

Key words: Globalization, transition, technology, modes of income, role, music, dance

Introduction

Anthropology is the comparative study of human societies, cultures and their development. Anthropologists have always been interested in investigating different society's especially ethnic groups. While highlighting these cultures the researchers have also preserved them for generations to come. Like every community or ethnic group the Mirasi have their own unique characteristics and social roles in a society.

Mirasi community has played a major role in the rural community of Pakistan. In the rural community there existed a system of barter, different groups, specialized in specific occupations and had an elaborate mechanism for exchange and the interrelationship of services within the community. In this system, communities such as the Mirasi were paid annually in grain at harvest time, provided with clothing and residential facilities in exchange for their service during all ceremonies. With the fall of such traditional systems due to urbanization the Mirasi community is left struggling for survival today.

In oral traditions like that of the Mirasi learning by the next generation takes place through direct oral communication where the young have a strong sense of affiliation to their community. Unfortunately, this is no longer accepted as a way of life and along with the denial of convention and practical learning in the modern society, we are facing the denial of such communities. As these communities are slowly diminishing, we in the Punjab are losing our heritage and many of its rich and colorful cultures which once thrived in this region. As the world gets increasingly interconnected through globalization, a sundry of changes are taking place. Life as we know it is changing. Changes enter our lives through technology, new thoughts, and lifestyles and visions of others. Globalization promotes the homogeneous set of values and beliefs due to these factor ethnic communities are losing their identity and individualism.

Academic Dictionary of Anthropology defines the community as a group of persons who share a common sense of identity and interact with each another can sustained basis. In a community all persons have social standing. Standing entails the right and responsibility to produce a culture in its manifold forms. A person shares the community with another when they cannot disengage from his/her social relationship with others. A good test for this is if a person can ignore another person's trouble. If so, these people who do not share a community.

Locale

Pakistan is a country where the bulk of its population lives in rural areas. The lifestyle of the village people is different from the urban people in many perspectives. The area under consideration has some distinctive features and details, which are necessary for a case study to be given so that the layman or the reader can understand or comprehend the whole scenario. This profile contains the details of the area, including the culture, social practices, customs and traditions, language, cuisine etc.

Thoha Khalsa is a village, in the heart of Kahuta tehsil a subdivision of Rawalpindi District. The village is a beautiful valley surrounded by lush small green hills and rivers. It is divided into different parts which are then sub- divided into different smaller villages. It has a big rain water pond called by the locals as "Baan". The village is located at 33°32'N 73°29'E / 33.533°N 73.483°E / 33.533; 73.483 and has an altitude of 778 meters (2555 feet). It is 40 kilometers away from district Rawalpindi. There are several different legends related to how the name of "Thoha Khlasa" came into being. The first legend goes back to 926-1030 when a man called *Dada pir khala khan*, son in law of Raja Maal was the first Raja of the Janjuah caste to embrace Islam by Mahmood Ghaznavi. Kingdom of Kahuta ruled by the famous Sultan Ahmed Janjuah, also known by his

pre-Islamic name of Raja Kala. He conquered the region with the aid of his brothers Raja Jodh, Raja Bhir, Raja Khakha in what was the campaign of conquest by the rising Janjuah overlord, Raja Mal of the Janjua Rajput clan, in the early 13th century.

The Janjuah caste has been mentioned in *Tuzk-e-Babri*. The Janjuah caste was royal warriors of South Asia. They used to trade salt from salt ranges of *Khewra*. These salt ranges were discovered by Alexander the great. According to the legend during the kingdom of Dada Pir Kala khan ruling over 84 villages, one of which was governed by a Sardar called “Thota” so the name of the village was named after him “Thoha Khalsa”. The second legend refers to a person during the time of *Ahmed Shah Abdali*, it is said “Thoha Khalis” was founded during this era. The third legend is in reference to the rise of Sikhism “Thoha Khalis” was renamed Thoha Khalsa by a Maharaja called Ranjeet Singh. In a native language “Thoha” means a place and “Khalsa” in Sikhism means “pure or sovereign”.

Research Methodology

Qualitative anthropological research methods were used to collect empirical data, which include in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Purposive sampling was used to select 5 respondents for in-depth interviews. These respondents belonged to the Mirasi community of Thoha Khalsa (Mohra), situated Potohar Region in Rawalpindi. Out of the five respondents, 3 of them were males and 2 females with the age range of 30-81 years. These respondents were still in the profession of entertaining and active in their profession. Unstructured interviews were conducted and the interviews were carried out in *Potohari* language (regional language). One focus group discussion was conducted and for that purpose 8

members of the same community were selected by the judges sampling method.

Results and Discussion

Pakistan has a lot of wealthy cultural and ethnic background going back to Indus Valley Civilization, 2800 BC – 1800 BC. The region of Pakistan has been invaded in the past, occupied and settled by many different people, including Aryans, Greeks, White Huns, Arabs, Turks, Mongols and various Eurasian groups. The different ethnic groups have differences in dress, food, and religion. The cultural origins come from the civilizations of India and eastern Afghanistan, with significant influences from Persia, Turkestan and Hellenistic Greece. It was the first part of the subcontinent to receive the full impact of Islam. Hence it has developed an identity of its own.

There are several kinds of musical families such as *Kalawants*, *Gharana*, and *kawal* in the subcontinent. The most influential, important and numerous are collectively called Mirasi. Mirasi are rural musicians providing the musical entertainment on different events (Neuman & Daniel, 2007).

The Mirasi living in Thoha Khalsa have many different roles. One of the major roles is entertaining at weddings. They have other roles such as performing circumcision, hair cutting and helping out at funerals. In Potohar the tradition of mimicry is still in existence in wedding ceremonies. The mimicry is in the form of play. Folk love stories are acted out or sometimes these love stories are made into comedies by the Mirasi. The Mirasi use different forms of entertainment such as singing songs and telling jokes on weddings and other ceremonies (Malik, 1978).

The occupational musicians of pre-modern Northern India were often grouped under the collective umbrella term *Mirasi*. In Persian, the word *Miras* means “inheritance”, the traditional role of a Mirasi was to sing in praise of their patrons

and to keep their genealogies. They were also known to accompany their patrons into battle, sing war ballads and epics of past heroes and events. Within their own communities these musicians were more commonly known as *dhadhi*, *dholi*, *charan*, *langha*, *kalawant*, *qawwal*, *naqqarchi* and so on. During the Mughal reign the Mirasi were employed as soldiers and musicians in their armies. Musicians who play musical instrument Sarangi were known as *Sarangi* communities, this community was employed by the Mughal army, were living in close proximity to Delhi and surrounding towns such as Kirana, Moradabad and Bareilly (Daniel & Neuman, 1980).

Aziz Malik in his book wrote that folklore is a very important aspect of history. Sometimes folklore corrected historical facts. In the sub-continent, the start of history was in the form of folklore rather than in written form. In sub-continent the history was told orally rather than in written form. When Al-Biruni visited this region, he was extremely surprised to find that history was sung rather than recorded in written form. He wrote that there were *Mirasi* and *bhaat* who lived with kings and the Rajput, the Mirasi sung ancestral history of Rajput in the *darbar* of Rajput (Aziz Malik, 1978).

Mirasi were in charge of maintaining genealogy. Mirasi accompanists are divided into sub-groups depending on their ancestral background and lineage. The largest functioning and a pure soloist group among the Mirasi are called the *Barradri* (Neuman & Daniel, 2007).

In Potohar the head of Mirasi community is called *Vichola* (Respectable head of the community). He is the elder member of the community. The *Vichola* was an authoritative figure in his own community. The *Vichola* solved all the problems of the community. He also played a role of matchmaking in rural communities by acting as mediator between the two families. The organization of the wedding and proceedings were *Vichol's* responsibility.

Most Mirasi of Potohar region are bilingual, speaking both native language and regional language (Potohari). The *Gojri* is native language of Mirasi in Potohar. Punjab has provided many famous singers from the Mirasi communities. Most Mirasi are bilingual, speaking both Punjabi and Urdu. Many of them have settled in the villages of Punjab (Saeed, 2011).

The Mirasi of Potohar no longer practice genealogy like their ancestors did, but are still entertainers by profession. Most of the Mirasi have adopted other profession for their livelihood. The Mirasi no longer practice genealogy of the two major castes *Rajput* and *Jat*, the majority of them are involved in agricultural labor as well as being artisans. Some still remain as entertainers, entertaining other communities living in villages. Many Mirasi have completely abandoned their traditional occupation and even have changed their caste, as well as converting the *Shia* sect of Islam. Anthropologist calls this *ashrafization* (Daniel & Neuman, 1990).

The Mirasis of Thoha Khalsa have changed their sect from Sunni to Shia, trying to change their caste. The Mirasi community in Thoha Khalsa mainly entertains the Rajput caste, which is most influential caste in Potohar region. The females of Mirasi community entertain by singing folk songs on weddings and childbirth, which have been passed down from their ancestors. The male Mirasi play the role of a musician in weddings. Most of the Mirasi rely on weddings for income.

Mirasi divide their tasks between males and females. The female dance and sing love songs while the males play musical instruments such as the drum known as Dhol and bagpipes. The traditional songs are handed down from generations to generation and sung from memory. Mirasi entertainers used to be and are in the service of rich Hindu and Muslim families (McIntock & Wayne, 1991).

History of Mirasi Community

In 1891 during the British Raj a population survey was conducted and the Mirasi community and other such lower castes were given a derogatory label of “Kami”¹. The roles of Mirasi were to cut hair, shave and to perform circumcision. In Potohar the status of Mirasi is not always a “Kami”. The original profession of a Mirasi was not of barber, match-maker and entertainer they originally belonged to the upper class (Sardar). When no higher positions were available to them in their village, they adopted new skills such as pot making, cooking, barber etc.. (Aziz Malik, 1978)

The most popular and distinct characteristic of Pakistani Punjabi music is that it is exclusively inherited unlike other Western countries where music is a chosen occupation. Pakistani musicians are born into musical families collectively known as Mirasi. These people are born into families of occupational specialists whose ancestors have been musicians for centuries. The extensive use of such a negatively perceived title “Mirasi” abundantly exhibits the low social status of professional musicians in Pakistani Punjab (Ballard & Roger, 1990).

Mirasi community is heterogeneous in nature, varying in status, occupation and in origin. There is no clear definition of the term “caste”. Like all the lower classes the position of Mirasi community varied according to their association with certain patrons. If a Mirasi was permanently attached to a Rajput clan, there were many benefits to the Mirasi because of this attachment, such as giving them a higher ranking than those who were working for the lower classes as servants. Rose (1999) further discussed reveals that there were many sub-groups of the Mirasi communities which mean that the term “Mirasi” was used broadly (Rose, 1999).

In 1947 after the partition of the sub-continent, the historical red light areas in Lahore, Multan and the famous *Hira Mandi* (red light area) were inherited by Pakistan. These were well-developed and attracted both wealthy clients and those looking for singers and actresses. The prostitutes who were associated with dance while their musician companions were known as the Mirasi. The prostitutes to this day dance to the music of harmonium and *tabla* played by the Mirasi (Saeed, 2001).

Mirasi community has played a major role in the rural community of Pakistan. The word Mirasi is derived from the Arabic word *Miras*, which means inheritance or sometimes heritage. In India, the Sikh Mirasi are known as Mirasi Jatt. In Pakistan, the Mirasi claim to be decedents of Arabs. According to Mirasi history, once a Muslim of Medina whipped a man called *Akasa*. At Akasa's death bed, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) asked Akasa if anyone who might have injured him, would he like to take revenge. The *Akasa*, instead of taking revenge, praised him. The community has since that time claimed to have entertained kings and nobles for a living (Rose, 1991).

In the rural community there existed a system of barter, different groups, specialized in specific occupations and had an elaborate mechanism for exchange and the interrelationship of services within the community. In this system, communities such as the Mirasi were paid annually in grain at harvest time, provided with clothing and residential facilities in exchange for their service during all ceremonies. With the fall of such traditional systems due to urbanization the Mirasi community is left struggling for survival today.

In oral traditions like that of the Mirasi, learning by the next generation takes place through direct oral communication where the young have a strong sense of affiliation to their community. Unfortunately, this is no longer accepted as a way of life and along with the denial of convention and practical

learning in the modern society, we are facing the denial of such communities. As these communities are slowly diminishing, we in the Punjab are losing our heritage and many of its rich and colorful cultures which once thrived in this region.

According to Malik (1978) folk music is usually transmitted by word of mouth. A folk song can change as a result of the creativity of those who perform it or of their particular musical style or of their faulty memory, As it is handed down from generation to generation. The Mirasi women of Thoha Khalsa participate in weddings by playing *dolki* and singing folk songs called *galyan*. The folk songs (*galyan*) have been orally handed down from generation to generation. Folk music does not employ any musical device as the result of conscious knowledge or the study of the science of music. It does not seek its theme or any emotional content from music, but starts with one of its own choice, in the form of poetic peace or song and music serves as but a guide or groove for the overflow of poetic emotions (Neuman & Daniel, 1977).

During the course of reviewing the literature, researcher consulted two other ethnographic studies on Mirasi community. Faryal Aslam (1999) work on Rubbabis (Musical Community) and the other one is on the Manganhar (musician community) by Mohammad Aslam. Rubbabis are a professional musical community residing in Lahore. They differentiate themselves from occupational musicians such as Mirasi. As the name suggests they have a special affiliation with musical instruments particularly with Rubbab it is consider as their ancestral instrument. This research by Faryal Aslam in (1999) aimed at understanding the native perception about Rubbabis culture and musical relationships, particularly with reference to their historical context.

Another research conducted by Syed Abbas (2000) that of Manganhar's musician community residing in Umerkot Sindh. They play different musical instruments and attend different ceremonies. The word Manganhar is consisted of two

words that are “Mangan” which means “begging” and “Har” which means “the person who is associated with the profession of begging”. As a hereditary occupational group they have preserved and continued the folk/ceremonial music and local folk stories of Sindh from generation to generation. Mirasi are considered to be an integral part of Potohar culture. Like every community and ethnic group Mirasi have their own distinct characteristics and social roles. These traditional characteristics and social roles which are associated with this group are subject to change.

There are no specific documented historical facts regarding the origin of Mirasi. The Mirasi’s of Thoha Khalsa do not know about their lineage. The Mirasi communities of Thoha Khalsa were emigrants from Kashmir who had settled in Potohar region (Thoha Khalsa) in the 18th century. The village Thoha Khalsa was the hub of trade in the 18th century because of its geographical location and its borders met with Kashmir. The Sikh’s were dominant at that time; they were very rich and owned plenty of land. Barter system was very common amongst the community of Thoha Khalsa. In return for free labor the Sikhs donated some of their land to the Mirasi community to settle in. As the Mirasi settled down in these parts they began to work for the landlords and even began to participate in the local weddings by helping out as hired help, singing, dancing and playing musical instruments. The Mirasi married into *changhar* tribe and the community has been settlers in Thoa Khalsa for over 10 generations.

Transition of Ancestral Roles

Economically Mirasi are poor because their work and entertainment are no longer required or appreciated by the villagers. To overcome poverty, they have adopted other means of income alongside their ancestral profession. In the book Potohar the author mentioned that Mirasi of Potohar

entertained in many different ways. Mimicry and folk love stories were acted out and made into comedies (Malik, 1978). The role of Mirasi and their profession has changed enormously to that of their ancestors. The ancestors of the Mirasi used to entertain people by performing plays, mimicry, telling jokes and performing comedy acts at weddings and funfairs. Many of their ancestors were genealogists. The role of Mirasi today is limited to singing and dancing.

Singing at weddings called *galian* (traditional folk songs). *Galian* is a light hearted competition. It is a folk tradition teasing of each other in a well lighted hearted humor. Mirasi are invited by both families on *mayooun* up until the arrival of the barrat which is called *dharay* in native language. The *dharay* (days) usually last a week, the *galian* are sung during the night when all female relatives and neighbors get together and have a singing competition amongst each other. The close relatives of the bride and groom such as sisters, sister in laws and aunts bring large amount of *mehtai* accompanied by the Mirasan singing traditional songs. The gathering last for 3 to 4 hours where the host serves tea and *mehtai* to the guests, when the guest leave, they are given a small bag of sugar from the *sagan*. They also dance during the weddings. The females do a traditional dance on a bride's wedding called the *luddi* and on request they perform to the latest Indian songs. The men perform *bhangra* at the groom's house. When they both dance at the weddings they are showered with *vhell* by the close relatives and friends of the groom and the bride.

When a new baby boy is born in the village, once the Mirasi finds out about the birth, they go to the baby's house to congratulate the family by singing traditional songs. They are welcomed by the baby's family and given money and sugar in return.

Mela (festival) is one of the major means of entertainment which starts straight after the cultivation of the wheat crop. There are four different *melas* in the village *Thoa*

Khalsa. In *melas* the Mirasi play the *dhol*, dance and sing and entertain all the villagers and guest from all over the country. The ancestors of the Mirasi used to act out dramas, mimicry and perform in a circus, but this is not the case of the Mirasi today. They have lost many of the talents performed by their ancestors.

The Mirasi earn most of the income during the summer season. Weddings do not take place during the month of Ramadan and Muharram therefore mode of income during this season is scarce. To survive these months they beg for a living.

Mirasi's are hired to invite relatives of villagers on different occasions like marriages and deaths. Technologies such as mobile phones, internet and postal services have taken place instead. The concept of invitation via Mirasi is diminishing in the village due to these technologies. Mirasi community is finding it hard to find means of earning income. The Mirasi earn most of their income in wedding ceremonies. They attend different weddings in a group form where they perform music and sing folk songs. On the birth of a new born in the village Mirasi congratulate the family by singing traditional songs. They are welcomed by the baby's family and given money. Funfair is one of the major means of entertainment which starts straight after the cultivation of the wheat crop. The Mirasi entertain villagers by playing the drum, dancing and singing. The ancestors of the Mirasi used to act out dramas, mimicry and perform in a circus, but this is not the case of the Mirasi today. The people of the village no longer find this form of amusement entertaining anymore because they have asses to other means of entertainment such as television, movies and internet.

Change of Role

At the present time most of the Mirasi community is working in shops. They own their own barber shops and male beauty

salons. Some Mirasis work in jewelry and clothes shops. The younger generation is in the Pakistan Army and Navy Bands. A low percentage is working abroad in countries like Saudi Arabia and Dubai. The Mirasi no longer practice genealogy of the two major castes *Rajput* and *Jat*, the majority of them are involved in agricultural labor as well as being artisans. Some still remain as entertainers, entertaining other communities living in villages. Many Mirasi have completely abandoned their traditional occupation (Daniel & Neuman, 1990). The Mirasi community is branching out to other professions because they are struggling to make ends meet in their ancestral profession. The ancestral profession of Mirasi is a temporary source of income. They say that their ancestral profession is an impermanent source of income.

Traditionally, a person's lifestyle was more locally determined and evolved slowly. However, in the 21st century, globalization makes the globe flat, and lifestyle and taste are globally influenced and can change rapidly (Berghahn, 2007). Globalization is an integrating process of economic, political and cultural systems across the globe, it has escalated by growing trade, fast transportation and communication. Globalization has had an enormous impact on the economy, social life, culture, political system and the environment. Globalization and the transformation of culture have also affected our society, due to modernization and globalization modes of entertainment have drastically changed. Indian culture has had a great impact on the means of entertainment in our society.

The influence of various cultures has changed the aesthetic sense of rural community. The Mirasi are no longer in demand because their form of entertainment is no longer popular. The local community no longer prefers folk music and gives priority to Indian music and dance. Due to this rapid transformation of trends and modes of entertainment, the Mirasi are no longer fulfilling the entertainment criteria of the

rural community. The Mirasi are therefore adopting different professions for their survival. The Mirasi are struggling to survive and preserve their ancestral profession, tradition and culture. They have adopted other professions but still are attached to their ancestral profession. They have found jobs in military bands, hair dressing, and beauty salon.

Conclusion

The Mirasi is a small community living together with common ecology and locality. They have their own norms and values. There is an incredible homogeneity between the Mirasi community. The Mirasi community has settled in Thoha Khalsa for over ten generations, sharing a common piece of land. The Mirasi community is uniform in the sense they share common values and norms in comparison to the surrounding community. They have strong bonding because they are interrelated through marriages.

Traditional communities like Mirasi do not only share space they share their faith, common culture and participation. These communities generate people spiritually, morally and physically. Culture is sustained through these traditional communities.

The research highlights the modes of income and change in role. The research indicates that the Mirasi community is struggling to maintain their role, traditions and to preserve their culture. Many traditions have been lost through generations and are on the verge of diminishing completely due to modernization and globalization.

Globalization has changed the life style of rural community, along with it the mode of entertainment and aesthetic sense. With the advancement in communication and technology, the need of traditional entertainment provided by the Mirasi is no longer required. The Mirasi community is finding it difficult to sustain their ancestral profession in the

era of globalization and modernization. The Mirasi communities have in many ways lost their traditional profession, but are still struggling to hold on to their traditions with great difficulty. The Mirasi communities are finding it economically difficult to maintain their day to day living, therefore they are moving towards different professions.

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