

# GROWTH OF A NOMADIC COMMUNITY IN INDIA: A GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW OF THEIR OCCUPATION

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## ABSTRACT

In India, there are a community of Snake Charmers. And they are one of a number of semi-nomadic communities found especially in North India, who lives in camps at the outskirts of the selected towns. In the state of Haryana, the community is known as the Sapera Nath. They are further divided into ten sub-groups. Some of them are- the Brahmin Sapera, Jhinwar Sapera, Soggar Sapera, Bihal Sapera, Nakphule Sapera, and Sandenath Sapera. These divisions are said to reflect the diverse origin of this community where people of different caste backgrounds took to the occupation of snake charming and over time evolved into a distinct community. They now have Scheduled Caste status in the state of Haryana. Here, the occupation of Sapera community reflects the base of the socio-economic conditions after the Wild life Protection Act. So, many people are engaged in government and private sectors. Out of these traditional healers, 8 to 9 persons are famous for treating snakebites also in the state of Haryana. The number of such snakebites people is higher in the rainy season because people encounter snakes mainly in the rainy season.

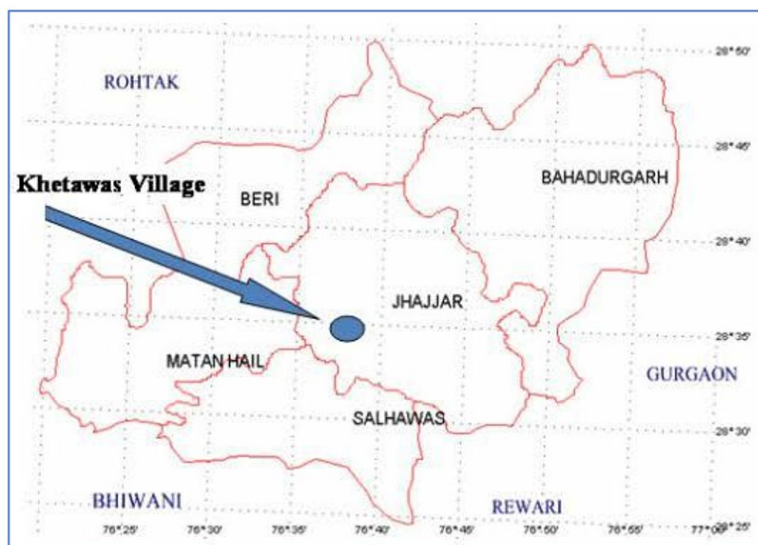
**Keywords:** Nomadic Community, Livelihood, Snake Charmer- Sapera, Rituals

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In north-west India, a community of Snake Charmers is noticed. It is one of a number of semi-nomadic communities found especially in camps at the outskirts of the selected towns. In the state of Haryana, this community is known as the Sapera Nath. They are Nomads and also called Sapera, who lives in a small village Khetawas. It is located in Matenhail Tehsil of Jhajjar district in the state of Haryana. As per the District Census Handbook Jhajjar 2011, Census of India, it has a total population of 1710 persons (911 males and 799 females) and 346 houses or families. Overall, here total workers are 772 consisting of 459 males and 313 females. Here are some facts and figures in the village, which found even lower than the average figures of the state of Haryana. For example the literacy rate is only 70.06 (Haryana- 75.55), the child sex ratio is very low i.e. 791 as compare to the state's average of 834. The village has an area of about 651 hectares that comes under the Jhajjar assembly and Rohtak parliamentary constituency. In this village, they are known very

famous snake catchers (Sapere) who can catch any kind of snakes in a few seconds and provide local medicines for snake bites. Near the village, the two lakes are also noticed namely, Bhindawas lake and Khaparwas lake. Bhindawas lake that spreads over 12 square Kilometers and is famous for migratory birds, come and stay here during the whole winter season whereas Khaparwas lake is also a significant one in this context. Figure-1 represents the layout map of the study area.

Here, some of the facts are given about the origin of Sapera community. They are known as the Sapera Nath. They are further divided into ten sub-groups, some of which are the Brahmin Sapera, Jhinwar Sapera, Soggar Sapera, Bihal Sapera, Nakphule Sapera, and Sandenath Sapera. These divisions are said to reflect the diverse origin of this community. Here, most of the people of different caste backgrounds took to the occupation of snake charming, and over time evolved into a distinct community. They now have Scheduled Caste status in Haryana.



**Figure 1** Study Area: Map Layout

## 1.1. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To study the occupational structure of the Sapera population of the village.
2. To study the livelihood of the population of the study area- village Khetawas.
3. To study the social, economic and cultural changes in the area under study.

## 2. DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

The paper is created from a field survey and report which is based upon primary data. Here, we had already come to know the research methods, techniques and other methodology before preparing this final research paper. It can also be stated that one opts design and his own methodology for his problem as the same may differ from one or the other. Hence, the field report writing was followed a systematic approach for analysing the data. A structural questionnaire has been designed to collect data. The data is processed for essential cartographic, representative and interpretative purposes. This involves the calculation of absolute figures into the percentage also.

## 3. LIVELIHOOD AND RITUALS

A person's livelihood refers to their "means of securing the necessities (food, water, shelter and clothing) of life". Livelihood is defined as activities essential to everyday life conducted over one's life span. Such activities could include securing water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, and clothing. The activities are usually carried out repeatedly and sustainably and provide dignity. For instance, a fisherman's livelihood depends on the availability and accessibility of fish. There are some of the main sources of livelihood in the area under study. Mostly people are involved in primary activities. They work as a musician in marriages and wedding ceremonies. Some families make drums and some are involved in making medicine for snake bite. A few of the prime rituals are as follows;

Nagbaba's temple is the adorable place of Sapera community.

In some families, there is a belief of Sardarshahar's.

They celebrate all the festivals of Hindu religion and some time go to a fair in a year.

In earlier time, they used to get married in the village itself due to one or the other causes.

Men pierce their ears. And last but not the final ritual, they build tomb after death.

#### 4. DRESSING AND FOOD HABITS

Elderly women wear Ghaghra. Most men wear Kurta Payjama. But a few of people who belong to snake catching occupation wear Saffron-coloured Dhoti- Kurta. Most of the female wear Salwar-suit. Some women wear Saries on selected days or on occasional festivals.

Here, approximately 65 percent population are pure vegetarian. And at some special occasion, they eat Chicken too. Some families eat meat once in 10 days. Some serve goat meat to his Lord and then they consume the meat. Most of the families consume wine.

#### 5. OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

Occupation refers to the distribution of the working-age population between 15-59 years in various occupations available in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. It is an essential indicator for the development levels of a country as a large proportion of primary sector workers indicate that the country is not developed. If a large proportion of the population is engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors, it indicates that the country is developed. Here are some of the determinants of occupational structures, e.g. economic status of the population, purchasing power, per capita income, etc., development of technology, socio-cultural educational status etc.

Human occupation is defined by Census of India (1971) as "occupation is the name of the function which a person performs by engaging himself in some gainful activity". It indicates the earner's nature of work. In common, we come across 3 divisions of occupation; i) service, ii) business and profession, and iii) cultivation. Thus, the term 'occupational structure indicates the unitary relationship pattern of these three occupational components of the working population. These components include primary, secondary and tertiary activities in urban or rural settlements. Towns and cities owe their existence to the presence of specific social and economic activities that require people's concentration.

The occupational characteristics of a place depend primarily on its socio- economic history, the sequence of its growth, essential functions and the resources of the region in which it is located. The nature and complexity of the economic base give rise to the distinctive type of occupational characteristics. The occupation and industry are two different lenses of view of the population's economic activity. The first is, what the individual does, and the second shows the worker's position in the country's economic structure. Occupation is the type of work performed by a single person while the industry is the branch of economic activity to which that person is connected.

In the present paper, the occupation of Sapera community reflects the base of the socio-economic conditions after enforcing the Wild Life Protection Act. Here, the main occupation types are Play with Beans (a music instrument) in marriages and other auspicious days. It is followed by farming worker (labour), Antimony workers, Services (Government and Private), Home-maker, Carpenter, Barber, Weaver etc. After the above act, many people are engaged in private sectors too. Out of these traditional healers, some persons are famous for treating snakebites in Haryana. A few people also come annually to the healers for the treatment of snakebite. The number of people is higher in the rainy season because people encounter snakes mainly in the rainy season, as discussed earlier. Table-1 gives a detailed picture of their occupational structure along with the number of workers.

Table-1 Village Khetawas, District Jhajjar, Haryana (India) Occupational Structure of Sapera, 2021-22

Occupational Structure	Number of Workers	%age
Bean (a music instrument) Party Worker	22	27.8
Agriculture Labourer	18	22.8
House Maker	12	15.2
Hawker	4	05.1
Driver	4	05.1

Antimony (metal, glass, mining) Workers	8	10.1
Government Services	4	05.1
Shopkeeper	2	02.5
Herbalist and others	5	06.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source** Field Survey and Original Report, November 2022.

We can see a significant change in their occupational pattern. Except for government and private services, there is a big difference in villagers' occupations especially among Saperas. Their traditional occupation is continuously decreased to less than half what it was before the enforcement of the Wild Life Act, 1972. The private and personal occupations have been expanded. Farming labour has become double as compared to some years before. The number of workers has become more than triple in this sector. Apart from these, no significant difference has been noticed in whatever occupation it is. Figure-2 represents the occupational structure of Saperas community in the area under study during 2021-22.

**OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE OF SAPERAS, 2021-22**

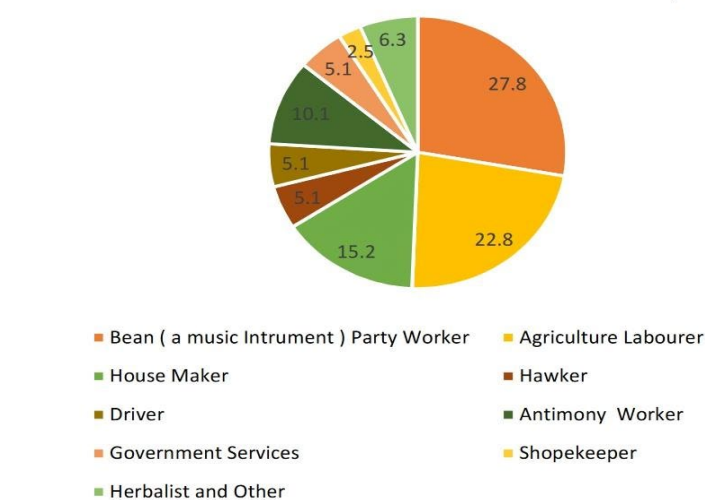


Figure-2

## 6. CAUSES FOR CHANGE OF OCCUPATION

With time, many things have been changed. Occupation is not the exception to this. But there are many reasons due to which the Saperas in the area under study have changed their occupations. Here are the reasons, e.g. the Government Policies. It is one of the biggest reasons for changing their traditional occupation to the others occupations. The Government of India banned snake catching through the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972. This act plays significant role to stop the traditional occupation. People had to stop snake play or snake games for their living and have to work as construction labour or another type of worker.

The other causes of the change in their occupation are given hereunder;

**The Problem of Illiteracy-** The education level of people of Khetawas, mainly in the Saperas community is deficient. As they are mostly illiterate and when the Government prohibited snake catching and snake game, they had no skill to do other work. That is why most of the people choose to work as labourer.

**Lack of Awareness-** Most of the Saperas community people are unaware about Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojna, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, Scheme for Promotion of Crop Diversification, Toolkit Reimbursement once during the training period to SC and all Girl students in Government Industrial Training Institutes, Up-gradation of the Typing and Data Entry Skill of the Scheduled Casts and Backward Classes Unemployed Youth through Computer Training etc. These are some significant schemes. But due to illiteracy and unawareness, the village people especially the Saperas are unable to take benefit of these schemes, run by the Government

for the welfare of rural poor people. Various govt-sponsored schemes do not reach to the needy due to a lack of awareness which becomes the reason behind the ill or poor conditions of people residing here in the remote village.

**Geographical Location-** The geographical location of village Khetawas has also affected the occupation of Sapera because it is not well connected with the industrial and other developed areas. The distance of the factories and other types of industries too has affected their occupation adversely.

**Lack of Transportation-** Most of the people of the village are poor and do not have enough money to stay in the towns or cities. At the same time, the means of transportation is not good. If there were good transportation facilities, they would also do jobs by migrating to the nearby cities. These poor transportation facilities in this small village Khetawas lead to unemployment and low quality of work.

**Money in Hands:** Most village people live below the poverty line. They do not have enough money to start their own business. Due to this, they come under compulsion and work as bush labour to feed themselves.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Here, we studied about the Snake Charmer (Sapera) community of a small and remote village Khetawas. We came to know about the occupational structure, livelihood, social, economic and cultural changes of the population of this village. We had a look over the government policies for the village. We also find about the dominating male society by studying the sex ratio of the village as per the District Census Handbook, Jhajjar, Haryana, Census of India report, 2011 along with the survey based on first hand information or primary data. According to data, it has almost one third of its population as a working population. The population of this community came across a drastic change in their traditional occupation, especially after the implementation of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, by adopting labour work for their livelihood. However, after struggling for years, the population of this village tried to overcome all the obstacles and raise themselves for a better living. And nowadays, their willpower is strengthening them to be a productive part of the society.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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