

1. Introduction

The Rajbhar community's history has three main explanations: 1) Rigvedic origins linked to the Bhar community, associated with the name Bharat; 2) descent from the NagBharshivaa, indigenous inhabitants tied to the Shaivite Bharshivaa cult and Nagvanshi claims in western India; 3) connections to the Bhar caste ruling in eastern Uttar Pradesh during Buddha's era, notably at Sumasnagiri in Mirzapur (Jayaswal, 1943). The Bhars, also known as Rajbhar, Bharat, Bharpatwa, or Bhar, were a dominant tribe from Gorakhpur to Saugor, outnumbering associated tribes like Cherus, Majhwars, and Kols (Crooke, 1896). Scholars suggest the Bhars originated from the ancient Naga clan, with some migrating from Kashmir to the Ganges plains, establishing kingdoms in Mathura and Padmavati post-Mauryan era (Rajbhar, 1985; Rajbhar, 2015).

The Bhar tribe is also known as Rajbhar, Bharat and Bharpatwa. According to some ethnologists, the name Rajbhar signifies a landowning Bhar (Crooke, 1896). Bhar's got their title "Bhar" from Bharshiva kings during Gupta kings' rule when Bharshivas were defeated by Guptas and Bharshiva started work under Guptas as their feudal.

They are also called Bharashiva. This gotra started from their ancestral people of *Nagavansha* who started the new style of worship of Shiva with *Shivalinga* carrying on shoulders (Subramanian, 1928). An inscription found in Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, and Pauni Copper Palte (Pravaersen 1st), Pauni Village, Bhandara, Block, Maharashtra, elucidates the origin of the Bharashiva nomenclature (Archaeological Survey of India, 1937–1938):

“अंसभार सन्निवेशित शिवलिंगोद्वाहन-शिवसुपरितुष्ट समुत्पादित राजवंशानाम्-पराक्रमआधिगतः
भागीरथीः अमलजलः मूर्द्धाभिश्चितानाम् दशाश्वमेधः अवभृथ स्नानाम् भारशिवानाम्-

(Mirashi, 1963)

Translation: “Having pleased Lord Shiva by bearing the Shivalinga, they consecrated their kingdom with the sacred waters of the Bhagirathi (Ganges) through their valor and performed the concluding bath (avabhṛitha) after conducting ten Ashvamedha sacrifices, thus establishing the royal lineage of the Bharashiva”.

The Bhar, Bhargote, and Bharashiva Gotras trace their origins to the Bhar Nagavanshi Kings from the Mahabharata era, with the term "Bhara" notably referenced in Panini's ancient grammatical treatise, the *Ashtadhyayi* (Rajbhar, 1985).

The name Bharhut is derived from its early rulers belonging to the Bhar or Rajbhar clan, and over time the settlement came to be known simply as Bharhut (Marshall, 1918). Several scholars assert that prior to the Gupta period, Bhar rulers decisively vanquished the Kushans in North India. To commemorate this victory, Bhar rulers conducted ten Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice) rituals on the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi, establishing a novel tradition of Shiva worship by carrying the Shivalinga on their shoulders. This distinctive practice led to their designation as “Bharashiva”. The renowned

Dashashvamedha Ghat in Varanasi derives its name from these ten sacrificial rituals (Subramanian, 1928).

In the Neo-Hindu era, integration into Hindu society often involved elevating non-Hindus to Kshatriya status, particularly as Rajputs. Mr. Kennedy observes that Aryan Kshatriyas, once warriors, became metaphysicians (Philosophers), and by the seventh century CE, many Kshatriya kings were non-Hindu. Medieval Rajput clans replaced them, incorporating tribes that held sovereign or local power (Crooke, 1896, p. 308).

Mr. Vincent Smith concurs, noting that southern indigenous tribes like Gonds, Bhars, and Kharwars underwent Hinduization, emerging as Rajput clans (e.g., Chandels, Rathors, Gaharwars) with genealogies linked to the sun and moon. He suggests Chandels and Gaharwars, originally Bhars, gained Kshatriya status through governance, with Bundelas and northern Rathors descending from Gaharwars (Oppert, 1893, pp. 303, 379).

By the medieval period, the term “Bharashiva” evolved into “Bhar,” as evidenced by various historical records. James Tod places Bhar in the list of Aboriginal Races, many names in which are not capable of identification, and their correct form is uncertain and those of the mercantile tribes are largely groups confined to Rajasthan (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1897).

The Bisen Rajput, Raikwars, Janwars, Kalhans, Haldiya Rajput, Trinetra Rajput, and Bais Rajput were, to varying extents, associated with the Bhar community, as documented in contemporary Persian texts and gazetteers (Rahman, 2008; Pandey, 1998).

2. Research Objectives

- a. This study aims to trace the historical origins, sociopolitical dominance, and cultural contributions of the Bhar tribe in North India, while examining their displacement and resistance against external forces. Key objectives include:
- b. Documenting their migration patterns, kingdom-building processes, and etymological evolution.
- c. Analyzing conflicts with Rajput migrants and Turkic rulers, including forms of resistance and territorial losses.
- d. Evaluating their contributions to architecture, urbanization, religious practices (particularly Shaivism), and regional development.
- e. Assessing the impact of colonial policies on their social status and exploring post-independence identity struggles.

3. Research Questions

The primary research questions are:

- a. What are the origins and etymological evolution of the Bhar tribe, and how did they establish regional dominance?

- b. How did interactions with Rajput migrants and Turkic rulers lead to their displacement, and what forms of resistance did they exhibit?
- c. What were the Bhar tribe's contributions to architecture, urbanization, and religious practices, and how have colonial narratives shaped their modern identity?
- d. In what ways have post-independence socio-economic conditions affected the Bhar community's quest for recognition and equity?

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods, multidisciplinary approach, integrating descriptive, historical, and empirical frameworks to elucidate the historical trajectory of the Bhar community in the early medieval contexts of Awadh and Purvanchal. It synthesizes primary and secondary data sources through rigorous triangulation to ensure reliability, address historiographical biases, and fill gaps in colonial narratives.

Key methodological components include:

- a. **Archival Analysis:** Examination of primary sources such as the Balaghat Inscription, Pauni Copper Plate, Ain-i-Akbari, Provincial and District Gazetteers, and archival records from the Uttar Pradesh State Archives and state libraries; supplemented by secondary sources including Crooke (1896) and Elliot (1862).
- b. **Epigraphic Evidence:** Detailed analysis of inscriptions (e.g., Epigraphia Indica Vol. XXIV) and reports from the Archaeological Survey of India (1937–1938) to validate Bharashiva origins, rituals, and historical claims.
- c. **Field Surveys:** Systematic fieldwork at archaeological sites, including forts (e.g., Bhar-dih), mounds, ruins, Dashashvamedha Ghat, and urban relics across districts such as Raebareli, Lucknow, Sultanpur, Amethi, Pratapgarh, Bhadohi, Varanasi, Faizabad, Jaunpur, and Fatehpur, to document architectural and cultural contributions.
- d. **Ethnographic Interviews:** Semi-structured engagements with indigenous historians, subject matter specialists (e.g., Rajesh Rajbhar, M.B. Rajbhar, Umesh Srivastava), prominent community representatives, and Bhar community members to capture oral histories, contemporary identity struggles, and valuable perspectives.
- e. **Collaborative Engagements:** Partnerships with heritage-focused organizations, including the Shri Bharshiva Kshatriya Foundation, Suheldev Maharaj Sabha, and Bhar/Rajbhar Samaj, to augment data collection and contextual insights.
- f. **Comparative Historical Analysis:** Contrasting Bhar narratives with Rajput and Turkic records to highlight biases and enhance interpretive depth.
- g. **Data Triangulation:** Cross-verification of archival, epigraphic, ethnographic, and field data to mitigate inconsistencies and strengthen overall validity.

5. The Historical Dynamics

The history of the Bhar tribe in the regions of Awadh and Purvanchal encapsulates their struggles, perseverance, and resistance against Rajput and Turkic forces. During the medieval period, Bhar rulers consistently resisted full submission to centralized authorities, frequently refusing to pay taxes imposed by central powers. As a result, sultans were

compelled to dispatch governors to forcibly collect revenues. Upon the governors' withdrawal, these rulers resumed autonomous governance, acting as independent sovereigns. Their territories were designated as mawas, and their fiefs were termed zortalab jagirs due to their formidable and rebellious nature (Minhaj-i-Siraj Juzjani, 1881).

During the medieval era, Bhar rulers governed an extensive region of North India, posing significant resistance to the expansion of Turks and Rajputs while striving to maintain regional dominance. However, the unified opposition of Turks and Rajputs led to the defeat and displacement of the Bhars from their territories. Despite this, Bhar rulers made substantial contributions to the political, cultural, and social development of the region. As adherents of Hinduism, their cultural practices aligned with those of other Hindu communities in Awadh, and they spoke Awadhi and Bhojpuri. Historical records provide limited details about their governance (Nevill, 1905; Pandey, 1988).

Inspired by the Arya Samaj movement, Baijnath Prasad Adhyapak published History of the Rajbhar Caste in 1940, aiming to demonstrate that the Rajbhar caste was historically linked to the ruling elite. Influenced by this movement, individuals from the Bhar tribe began adopting the surname "Rajbhar" (Prasad, 1940).

6. Regional Dominance of Bhars

By the eleventh century, the Bhar tribe had established a significant and influential presence in the regions of Awadh and Purvanchal. Their territorial control extended across the entirety of Awadh, encompassing present-day districts such as Hardoi, Lucknow, Unnao, Fatehpur, Ayodhya, Sultanpur, Raebareli, Pratapgarh, Jaunpur, Allahabad, as well as substantial portions of Purvanchal, including Shravasti, Bahraich, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Basti, Banaras and Bhadohi (Bhar-doi). During this era, Bhar rulers founded regional kingdoms throughout these areas, consolidating their authority. Historical accounts suggest that the Bhar people held a prominent social status within these societies (Carnegie, 1887; Bennett, 1872). Notable architectural contributions of the Bhar tribe include the construction of forts along the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, commonly referred to as Bhar-dih, some of which are notably expansive. Additionally, the Bhar tribe is credited with the excavation of numerous deep tanks, reflecting their significant contributions to regional infrastructure (Sherring, 1869).

7. Cultural Contributions of The Bhars

The Bhar community significantly contributed to the dissemination of Shaivism in North India. They venerated the Naga and Shivalinga and assumed responsibility for preserving and safeguarding ancient Shiva temples, many of which were constructed or patronized by them (Subramanian, 1928).

Bhars pioneered a novel Shivalinga worship practice, carrying the lingam on their shoulders and bathing it with Ganges water, resembling the modern "*Kanwad/Kanwar Yatra*". A key contribution to Shaivism was the establishment of Dashashvamedha Ghat in Varanasi, named after ten Ashvamedha sacrifices conducted following their victory over the Kushan

empire. This ghat remains a prominent pilgrimage site for the Shaiva sect. According to local beliefs and information documented in gazetteers and ASI reports (Archaeological Survey of India, 1937–1938).

The Bhar community in North India is closely associated with the establishment of Naga temples, the worship of Nagamata Mansa, and related rituals. Additionally, the community is linked to the *Naag Panchami*, *Teej festival* and *Kajri folk* song, which are integral to the cultural practices of Awadh and Purvanchal (Chauhan & Mishra, 2024).

8. Role in Urbanization

In *Chronicles of Unnao*, C.A. Elliot (1862) remarked on the Bhars' architectural skill:

“Every Significant Natural Work or Ancient Relic Is Credited Either To The Devil Or The Bhar Tribe.” (Elliott, 1862, p. 25)

Analysis shows medieval Muslim and Rajput settlements near Bhar forts confirm conflicts with Turks and Rajputs, leading to the Bhars' defeat. Turks and Rajputs built new settlements around these sites, forming the medieval second urbanization of Awadh (Tripathi, 2014). Gazetteers underscore the Bhars' major urban contributions, though underresearched and underrecognized. Scholars often trace North Indian Rajputs to Bhar ancestry (Blunt, 1931; Russell, 1916).

As a militaristic tribe, the Bhars established a notable empire through effort and struggle, evident in surviving forts, baolis (stepwells), shrines, ditches, and other features. Examples include the Raebareli Sadar fortress and baoli, Dalmau fort, Bhar Tila in Sultanpur, terracotta mounds in Gorakhpur and Basti, strongholds in Daundiyakhera and Buxar (Unnao), and various earthen bastions (Carlleyle, 1879; Sharma, 1970). Key sites—such as Dalmau fort, Lucknow's Tila Wali Masjid and Chowk area, Bharwara, Nagaram in Mohanlalganj, plus locations in Barabanki, Bijnor, Hardoi, Faizabad, Sultanpur, Amethi, Raebareli, Dalmau, Varanasi, Bhadohi, Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Fatehpur, Prayagraj, Unnao, Gorakhpur, Basti, Azamgarh, Ballia, Gonda, and others—reveal medieval Muslim populations tied to Bhar roots. This evidence disputes attributing Awadh's fourth urbanization phase mainly to Turks, as it ignores prior Bhar settlements (Staff, 2022; Praveen, 2018; Fisher & Hewett, 1883).

9. Resistance Against Rajputs and Turks

In the 12th century, five Rajput clans from the Maunas dynasty migrated from Amber (Jaipur) to Varanasi, drawn by Bhar prosperity. They settled, invited other Rajput groups—such as Bais (Jhusi, Allahabad), Maunas (Kawai), Sonak (Meh), Tisyala (Sikandara), Nanwak (Nawabganj), Bissnen (Kada), and Atharban (Doab)—and formed kingdoms, leading to extended conflicts with Bhar rulers that ultimately displaced them (Arya et al., 1998).

Amid Rajput and Turkic expansion in North India, Bhars in Awadh and Purvanchal resisted for centuries. Rajputs allied with Turks against the Bhars, submitted to Turkic overlordship, and became local landlords, as detailed in historical records (Al-Utbi, 1858; Al-Mas'udi, 1989).

a. Syed Salar Masud: Syed Salar Masud raided the Hardoi region, targeting Bawan in 1028 CE, but lasting Muslim control was not achieved until 1217 CE. Gopamau and possibly Bilgram were also early targets, with effective authority established after Sayyid Shakir's victory at Gopamau. In the 13th century, Hussaini Sayyids from Wasit, Iraq, migrated during Iltutmish's reign, defeated the Bhar rulers (1217–1218 CE), and settled in Bilgram (Rahman, 2008; Darogah, 1880).

b. Iltutmish & Nasiruddin Muhammed - In 1226 CE, Malik Nasir al-Din Muhammad, son of Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish, became Awadh's governor. According to Minhaj-Uddin Siraj's *Tabqaat-E-Nasiri*, he campaigned against the rebellious Bhar community, who killed over 120,000 Muslims before being subdued. Some were subjugated, and early Muslim settlements formed in southern Bahraich. Minhaj scornfully called Bhar dwellings "Accursed Bhartu" (Benett, 1877).

Balban - An inscription from 1206 CE by Trailokyavarma, successor to Parmardideva, records his expulsion of Turks and a land grant to an official whose father died fighting them, titled "lord of Kalinjar." In 1247 CE, Balban, deputy of Nasiruddin Mahmood, attacked a Bhar chieftain, "Dalaki-wa-Malki," plundering their territory and capturing a fort but faced strong resistance. Local traditions indicate Bhar Rajputs regained control of the Mahoba region, including Kalinjar, from around 1252 to 1280 CE. (Oppert, 1893).

d. Allauddin Khilji:

I. Khokhars- Kot village, 30 km south of its tahsil headquarters on the Yamuna River, is named after a fort once held by a Bhar king, captured by four Khokhar Pathan brothers during Ala-ud-din's reign, as per a 590 H mosque inscription. Its mosques, repeatedly destroyed by river erosion, were rebuilt inland using stones from earlier structures (Fisher & Hewett, 1883).

J. Bachgoti & Bhale Sultan, 'Khanzada' – The Bachgoti and Bhale Sultan are Muslim Rajput (Khanzada) clans from Awadh, Uttar Pradesh, who converted to Islam. Khanzadas defeated and killed Bhar king name 'Nanda Kunvar' on the order of Allauddin Khilji. The Bhale Sultan, named "spear masters" by a Delhi Sultan for their military prowess, excelled in warfare and horse trading. The Bachgotis, prominent taluqdars in Faizabad and Sultanpur, supported Sultanate rulers under leaders like Bariyar Singh, earning land and titles (Gutenberg Project, n.d.; Nevill, 1903).

e. The Sharqi Sultan: In Bhadohi, Rajput leader Ram Singh, under the Jaunpur Sharqi Sultanate, constructed a grand fort in Suriyawan, establishing it as a power center. Ram Singh, alongside other Rajputs, supported the Sharqi Sultan in suppressing the Bhars (Nevill, 1905).

- f. Daldev and Ibrahim Shah:** Around 1420 CE, Daldev, the last Bhar ruler of Dalmau, Raebareli, was defeated and killed by Jaunpur's Ibrahim Shah Sharqi in a fierce battle during Holi. The Bhars were massacred, and Rajputs, allied with Sharqi, received the conquered lands as fiefs. Dalmau's people mourn by observing Holi eight days later (Nevill, 1905).
- g. Akbar's Era:** During Akbar's reign, a chieftain named Sakht Singh, acting on Akbar's orders, attacked Bhar rulers in Mirzapur and Bhadohi for failing to pay taxes. He seized their territories and perpetrated a mass slaughter of the Bhars as punishment, as documented in the Ain-i-Akbari (Fisher & Hewett, 1883).

10. Colonial Rule & Socio-Historical Status of the Bhars

The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 labeled the Bhars and other tribal communities as "Criminal Tribes," causing widespread social and political stigmatization (Criminal Tribes Act, 1871). Described as martial yet "rebellious" in Crooke's Tribes and Castes (1896), the Bhars lost their earlier status as landholders and warriors. Despite this, Bhar-Pasi leaders like Beera Pasi, Uda Devi Pasi (1857 Rebellion), Madari Pasi (Eka Movement), and others in the Chauri-Chaura and Civil Disobedience Movement showed resilience in India's freedom struggle. Historical records, including Fisher and Hewett (1883), note the displacement of Bhar chieftains under Mughal and British rule, while "Conibier (1879) documents their resistance in forested areas" (Conibier, 1879). Post-independence, the Bhar community's socio-economic status has declined, with many now working as laborers. Classified as Scheduled Castes in northern India, the Bhars and Bhar-Pasis continue their struggle for identity and equitable recognition (Census of India, 1891; Baden-Powell, 1897; Elliott, 1845; Moreland, 1898; Tholal, 1899).

11. Suggestions and Implications

- a. **Historiographical Revision:** Integrate indigenous perspectives and archaeological data to rectify biases in colonial and Rajput-centric narratives.
- b. **Heritage Preservation:** Protect Bhar architectural sites (e.g., Bhar-dih forts, Baolis, Shivalas) through ASI initiatives.
- c. **Socio-Economic Upliftment:** Implement targeted policies to improve Bhar access to education and employment, addressing Scheduled Caste marginalization.
- d. **Cultural Recognition:** Promote Bhar contributions to Shaivism and folk traditions in academic curricula and public discourse.
- e. **Community Empowerment:** Support Bhar-led initiatives to document oral histories and advocate for political representation.

12. Conclusion

The Bhar tribe, originating from Naga lineages, rose to medieval dominance in Awadh and Purvanchal, highlighting indigenous impacts on India's socio-political and cultural development (Rajbhar, 1985; Rajbhar, 2015). As Bharashiva rulers, they defeated the Kushans, innovated Shaivite practices like shoulder-carried Shivalinga worship, and advanced urbanization through forts, reservoirs, and sites like Dashashvamedha Ghat in

modern Uttar Pradesh (Archaeological Survey of India, 1937–1938; Subramanian, 1928). They fiercely resisted Rajput invasions and Turkic conquerors, including Mahmud of Ghazni, Iltutmish, and Alauddin Khilji, preserving autonomy despite territorial losses to alliances (Minhaj-i-Siraj Juzjani, 1881; Al-Utbi, 1858).

Colonial policies, such as the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act, stigmatized them as rebellious, perpetuating post-independence marginalization (Criminal Tribes Act, 1871; Crooke, 1896). Yet, their resilience shines in lasting Shaivite influences, festivals like Naga Panchami, and independence contributions by leaders like Bira Pasi, Uda Devi Pasi, and Madari Pasi (Sherring, 1871; Carnegie, 1887). This study, drawing on archives, fieldwork, and ethnography, reveals historiographical gaps that undervalue tribal roles in urbanization and resistance (Elliott, 1862; Tripathi, 2014). A comprehensive view requires integrating indigenous viewpoints, archaeology, and oral traditions for recognition. Ultimately, restoring the Bhar narrative corrects historical biases, supports justice, heritage preservation, and empowerment of marginalized groups, fostering inclusive Indian historiography rooted in tribal endurance (Oppert, 1893; Jayaswal, 1943; Prasad, 1940)

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