



## Evolution, extension and consolidation of meena tribe

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### Abstract

The Meena tribe is very ancient from the point of view of historicity. The word 'Menih' mentioned in the Vedas is indicative of this tribe. The meaning of 'Menih' is Vajra or Vajrakay. Meena/Meena tribe has been named in this sense. As per the literary evidence the caste which has a body like a thunderbolt is called 'Mena', 'Maina', and Meena. The infinite bravery and patience of this caste is revealed by this name. In the past, the kings of the Meena tribe used to have Vajra or crown in their hands and the symbol of fish in their flags. For this reason, the writers have mentioned this tribe by the names Mena, Meena, Meen-Ketu, Meenketan, Meena-Dhwajadi. As described in the Yajurveda, "Al Varane Meenan Lati Baraytiti Meenalstadapatyam Mainalam", that is, the Prajavatsal Kshatriya caste which protects man from injustice, oppression, conspiracies, and sins is called Menal. The region between Chittor and Kota was ruled by this tribe and this region was called Mainal. Colonel James Tod has addressed them by the names of Mer, Meena, Mena, Maina, Mairat, Meraut, Merawat, Maina, Maira and Meena. It is quite interesting that Mera is a name of a mountain and due to being a resident of Mera, he has also been called Meravat and Mairat.

**Keywords:** veda, puran, mahajanpada, dasragj yuddh (battle of ten kings), anarya

### Introduction

#### Theories related to evolution of the Meena tribe

The origin of Meena tribe is an inseparable part of human origin. Regarding the origin of Meena tribe, there are two types of beliefs of the scholars- first religious belief and second scientific or logical belief. According to religious belief, Meena, the primitive inhabitant of India, is the descendant of Lord Matsya. The knowledge of the Meena tribe being the descendants of Matsya God is obtained from *Meenpuran* which is also known as *Matsya Puran*. According to the context of this book, in ancient times, the demon Shankasura took the religious scriptures of Hindus to Patal Lok to destroy religion and culture from the world and to establish a kingdom of unrighteousness, incest, tyranny, and misconduct on the earth. As soon as the religious scriptures disappeared and disaster started happening in the earth world. There was a rampage of misconduct everywhere, the flag of religion started disintegrating into pieces, and along with the goddesses, gods, and sages there was a hue and cry among the general public. Distressed by this unimaginable plight, they started calling for the protector of religion, Deenbandhu and Dayanidhi, the ocean of mercy. This compassionate call shook the rest of the bed of Adidev Lord Vishnu. As a result, there was a divine light and Lord Vishnu himself took the form of *Matsya Avatar* after being liquefied. Matsyavatar Lord Vishnu himself went to Patal Lok, killed the demon Shankasura there and brought religious texts from there, and dedicated them to the sages. With the receipt of religious texts, religion and dignity were re-established in the land and people started walking on the right path. The descendants of Lord *Matsya Avatar* ruled the earth for thousands of years. His descendants are called Meena or Meena and the dynasty is called Matsya dynasty. Eminent scholar Herman Goij has also supported the above-mentioned religious belief in his book. According to him, the Meena who live in modern

India are the progeny of Matsya primitive caste of ancient India.

Matsyas are also mentioned in Rigveda, the oldest text of Indian literature. According to the Rigveda, the Matsyas were attacked by the Turvas (the dominant group of the Rigvedic Aryans). They (the Matsya) are counted among the enemies of Sudas (the head of the Rigvedic Aryan dynasty). Sayana, the commentator of the Vedas, has also mentioned the defeat of the Matsyas in the Vedas. As a result, there was a war between the Matsyas and the Aryans for years. The word meni has been used in the Vedas which means Vajra or Vajrakaya. This word has been used only for Matsyas because Matsyas are strong in body and strong like a thunderbolt. That is why this caste was named Mena, Maina and Meena. In a verse of Yajurveda, '*Vishamemyo Mainalam*' has been used. This gives an understanding of the ancient existence of the Meena caste. It is mentioned elsewhere in this book "*Al varen meenan lativarayaniti meenal stam mainalam.*" It means that the Kshatriya caste which saves human beings from crime, injustice, and sins is called Mainal Meena. Many quotes have been given in Yajurveda itself to confirm this, such as-

*Vedanuddharate Jaganni Bahate Geographbhu Bi Bhrate  
Daityam Dayante, Balim Chhalaye Kshetram Kshay  
Kurwate Boltasyam Jayate Khalankalyate Karunya  
Matanwate Malechhanmurchhayate Dashakritkrite  
Menaya Tubhyam Namah*

The above-mentioned can be translated as the one who protects the Vedas, holds the world on his back, protects the earth, destroys the demons, deceives the sacrifice, destroys the wicked Kshatriyas, and defeats the demons like Ravana. I bow to Dashavatar (Vishnu) who does ten such things, who afflicts, spreads kindness to the merciless, and stuns the poor. It is mentioned in *Agnipurana* that five daughters of

Usha were married to Kashyapmunishree. The first of them is famous by the name Meena and the second Maina. Their children are Meena, Meena, Maina, etc. Similarly, the mention of Meena caste is found in *Skanda Purana* as "Meenay Meenathaya Siddhay Parmeshthi." According to another reference in this context, "Shivo Meenasyamakhyat Sarvlok Pitamah Maheshopaska Matsaya Kshatriya Veer Sammata" which means that Lord Shiva, the master of matsaya used to rule on mount Kailash. It has been written in *Shivpuran* regarding the origin of Meenas. In *Shrimad Bhagwat*, reference has been made to the kingdom of Meena caste. In the twelfth chapter, it is written in relation to the future kings, "Navadhi Kanchanvati Meena Ekadash Sitim Bhosantayabd, Shatanyangan Meenate Sansthite Tatah." It is clear from this that the entire India was ruled by Meena Kshatriyas. 'Meena Ekadashaivatu' in *Shrimad Bhagwat* and the story of Matsya Avatar in Mahabharata's Van Parva is taken from Matsya Purana. In the *Markandeya Purana*, Matsya Pradesh has been described at two places. It is understood from this, that there was more than one Matsya region, but only one Matsya state is mentioned till the Shatpath Brahmin period. There is mention of three Matsya kingdoms in Mahabharata namely Matsya, Chedi Matsya and Kaurava Matsya. Manu himself has written about the origin of Meena caste in Meena Purana as, "Manunirano Meena Purana Purushottam, Madhya Saraswat Matsya Shursena Samathura, Gauru Gudashmaka of Kammarranya." According to Jain followers, first Tirthankar Rishabhdev had a hundred sons. One of them was named Matsya Dev. It is said that he had established Matsya Pradesh in his own name. The residents of this region were called Meena because Matsya are called Machh, Meena and Meena in Prakrit language. Chandraraj Bhandari has clarified that the Matsya kingdom was to the south of the Kuru kingdom and to the west of the Yamuna. The Meena of Alwar, Bharatpur and Jaipur were called Adhishwar Meena. Even today Meena tribe reside in large numbers at these places. In the Mahabharata, like the Puranas, Matsya have been described in detail. The Matsya caste is also mentioned in the castes mentioned in Mahabharata. At the time of Mahabharata, Matsya had become the master of many states. King Virata, who became the protector and later friend of the Pandavas, was the king of the Matsya kingdom with Bairath as its capital. In the Viraat Parva of the Mahabharata, a description has been given of the Pandavas reaching Matsya from the lake of Dwaitavana. King Virat was also present in the Ashwamedh Yagya performed by Yudhishtir and he also gave form to many elephants. Before going into exile at King Virat's place, Yudhishtira had told his brothers that King Virat is strong. It becomes clear from the above quotes that the people of Meena tribe belong to the ancient Kshatriya caste. Due to being the ruler in the Vedic period, this caste was considered as majestic and benevolent.

According to scientific or logical belief, the Meena tribe is one of the oldest tribes in India, which is basically related to the Dravidian species. According to RV Russell and Hiralal, the Meena is a primitive caste of Rajputana. They narrate that the Meena caste is related to the Dravidian race. In proof of his statement, he has written that there are many branches of the Meena tribe, in which the name of one branch is Dhediya. Stephen has mentioned in his book that

HH Risley, RV Russell and Hiralal have accepted that the Meena tribe belongs to Kolariyan or Munda group. According to Stephen, Meena tribe as well as Ahir, Gurjar and Meo castes of Rajasthan and Jat caste of Uttar Pradesh belong to the Nomadic group. The main work of castes and tribes belonging to nomadic groups is animal husbandry. They are warriors by nature and they are basically of Asian origin.

Campbell has divided the primitive castes of India into two parts- first, Kolarian or Northern and second, Dravidian or Southern. According to him, Santhal, Kol, Bhil and Meena tribes are in Kolarian group. Similarly, Herman Goij has mentioned the origin of Meena tribe in his book. According to him, the people of Meena tribe are the children of that Matsya tribe which was defeated by King Sudas of Bharat dynasty in the 'Battle of Ten Kings' in the Rigvedic period and which supported the Kaurava in the war of Mahabharata.

The most irrefutable proof of the Meena tribe's relation to Anarya (Dravid) is the battle of ten kings described in Rigveda. In this war, ten kings joined hands against King Sudas of Bharat dynasty. According to Ratibhanu Singh Nahar, the king of Matsya dynasty also participated in this war. He portrays that the entire Rigvedic India (including the non-Aryans) was involved in the battle. In the Rigvedic period, the term Anarya has been used for the Dravidian race. Along with this, the modern Meena tribe is also related to the Dravidian tribal group. Therefore, on the basis of the mention of Nahar, it is concluded that the modern Meena tribe is related to the Dravidian race only.

Colonel James Tod has also rendered the Meena tribe as one of the primitive castes of India. Cunningham has accepted the Meena tribe as the famous tribe of Rajputana. Apart from this, Imperial Gazetteer also proves that Meena is one of the tribes of India. Moreover, the census report of India and Rajputana from 1891 to 1941, the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 also proves the above-mentioned fact.

### **Nomenclature of the meena tribe**

Under the religious belief, it has been expressed that in the name of Lord Matsya, his followers are called Meena or Meena. Colonel Tod calls them Moir, Mera, Mena, Maina, Mairate, Mairawut, Mairavat, Myna, Maira and Meena. Their place of residence is called Gairwara (Mairwara / the region of hills). Mera (Mera, Mer of Mair) is a mountain in Sanskrit language. Because of being a resident of Mera, they are called as Merawat (Mairote) and Mairot. *Mair* is a branch of Cheetah (a major gotra/clan of the Meena tribe). A branch of any mountain-dwelling tribe is called *Pal*. According to Colonel Tod, the meaning of Pal is a narrow path (pass) of a special valley, which is suitable for agriculture and security. In the deserts of Rajputana, the people of the Meena tribe made *Palas* (abode) only because living in *Palas* was favourable to them from every point of view. According to Major Pawlett, the Meena tribe is divided into two groups, one is a landlord or agriculturist (Zamindar) and the other is a watchman (Chowkidar). According to him, there are thirty-two villages of the Meena tribe. Similarly, Stephen has divided the Meena tribe into three parts, first- Zamindari and cultivator, second watchman, and third Dhedia Meena.

In relation to the development and expansion of the Meena tribe, this fact is also worth mentioning that there is also a Muslim branch of this tribe, which is called Meo or Mewati.

Mahmud Subuktgin's grandson Masud, who was the general of Mahmud of Ghazni, attacked the Meena tribe and after defeating them, they were converted to Islam. The people of the Meena tribe, who accepted Islam, were called Meo or Mewati. As per the Meena tribe, the Meo Muslims have twelve Palas. Of these, the names of the first six palas are the same as those named Meena. Although Meo Muslims are followers of Islam from the point of view of religion, but from the point of view of social and religious customs, they are mostly followers of Hinduism. According to Challing and Major Pawlett, the proof of this is that Meos do not perform Hajj, celebrate Holi and Diwali festivals of Hindus, do not marry in their clan, and name their children after all other Hindu names except the word Ram.

In relation to the Meena tribe, Stephen mentions that like the Jats, Ahirs, Gurjars, the Meena are also of Inner Asian origin. Their ancestors came from Asia and started living in Kathiawar and Kutch. In ancient times, they were seafarers and pirates. They are very similar to the Sindhis in appearance. Rawat Saraswat has formulated the following facts regarding the origin of the Meena caste:

- a. The Meenas are the proto-Dravidian people of the Indus Civilization whose coat of arms was Meena (fish).
- b. These people were settled in India before the arrivals and their culture and civilization were very advanced. They made huge forts for defense.
- c. The Meena tribe settled in the Aravali Mountain ranges to get rid of the influence of Aryans and other castes. Even today their number is more here.
- d. The word Meena has been used frequently in Tamil culture older than Aryans, which proves that they were contemporary to the Tamil kingdom.
- e. The time between the destruction of the Harappan civilization and the compilation of the Vedas (from 1750 BC to 1500 BC) is widely variable in history, therefore, Meena were accepted as Arya in Vedic literature. This could be testified by the power players in the Battle of ten kings.
- f. The region of Matsyas which has been mentioned in the Vedas and other ancient Indian texts, the same region is the main place of residence of the Meena tribe.
- g. Due to being strong and war-loving by nature, and by building their forts in remote places, this caste remained in the ruling class from the beginning, enjoying the ownership of the land and its self-respect and existence.

#### **Consolidation of the Meena tribe**

According to popular historian BL Panagariya, we cannot associate them (Meena) with the Dravidian caste because of their body shape, appearance, and nose shape. As per him, these people are pure Aryans. Many tribes of Aryans lived in different groups and places. The powerful clans used to drive out the weaker tribes from their original place. From this point of view, originally the Meena tribes living in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh were forced by the newcomer (Aryan tribes) to move out from there and they made their *Mevas* (abode) in the Aravali hilly regions adjacent to Uttar Pradesh and later established their independent kingdom in Dhudhand (Jaipur). As per Jagas (oral tradition), this caste has 12 pals, 32 tads and 5200 clans. The 12 pals are as follows- Chauhan, Parmar, Gehlot, Chandel, Kachhawa, Yadav, Tanwar, Padihar, Nirwan, Gaud, Badgujar and Solanki.

Father Heras was the first archaeologist who, based on the excavation of Mohenjodaro, considered the Meena caste as the oldest tribal group and related it to the Indus Valley Civilization. He used to say with full confidence that the Meena race lived on this earth even before the arrival of the Aryans. He came to Jaipur on February 28, 1947 AD in search of archaeological material from Rajasthan and stayed with the principal of St. Xavier's School in the city. While there, he contacted veteran social worker leader Gulabchand Gothwal and freedom fighter Laxminarayan Jharwal, who were interested in the history of the Meena tribe. They went to places like Khohgang, Mach (Jamwaramgarh), Jhotwara, Hathroi, Gator Valley Nahan, Jarunda, Nareth, Buj, Jhiri, etc. and got detailed information about the ancient rulers here. In Khohgang, they saw the palaces, temples, step-wells, Naubat Nakkarakhana, etc. built by Meena Raja Alan Singh Chanda and his forefathers and were greatly impressed by their architecture. There was also a standing statue of a snake at the entrance of the cave. He opined that this is the idol mentioned by James Colonel Tod. As per the regional beliefs, this snake had protected Dhuleray. In Khohgang, he also saw the pond where Alan Singh along with his soldiers had offered water to their forefathers on the day of Diwali. It was here that the opponents suddenly attacked and killed the Meena ruler. While returning from Khohgang, they also saw the fort of Amagarh built by the Meena kings, and the temple of Amba Mata on the Guni of Ghat. He described his entire journey in a meeting organized in his honour in the auditorium of the Maharaja's College. Many scholars and historians were present in this meeting besides Laxmi Narayan Jharwal, Rajendra Kumar Ajeya, Adisal Singh and other respected members of the Meena tribe. In his description, he said that Khohgang, Manch, Amer, Jhotwara, Benau, Nahan, Kherad, Kowal (Pratapgarh) were ruled by Meena kings from the first century to the tenth century. Father Heras also told in his speech that during the excavations in Spain and Portugal of Europe, coins marked with fish symbols were found on which Munnir was inscribed. This proves that in ancient times Meena caste was spread even to other countries.

In addition to the big states, the Meena tribe had many small places. As per the archives, at the time of Maharaja Sawai Jaisingh, thirteen major Mevas remained. There is a belief about the Mewasis that they were called Mewasis because of wearing a Mewasa (turban). The use of this word is seen in the songs of the Meena tribe. Similarly, Muni Magan Sagar has taken the meaning of Mevasi from the people living in the Mewat region. This region was also called Mewat because of being the abode of the Mev caste. Many famous regional poets of refers Mevasi to such a ruler, who is able to challenge the mighty kings without fear. Foreign writers have also explained the word Mevas. For example, Elliot and Dowson narrate that 'Mewas' is a Persian word which means a place of safety made in a difficult region. Originally this word was used for Mevasi of Dhundhad (Jaipur) as there was no control of the state power on Mewase. Meena caste of Rajasthan was also such a strong and brave caste, on which autocratic rulers did not have control even now. VA Smith writes that the unruly tendency of the Mewasis had created a lot of trouble in front of the British rulers. Twelve Mewasis have been mentioned in the book of Jagas (oral traditions).

### Conclusion

Based on the accounts described in the Vedas and the Mahabharata, the Meena tribe has been the ruler of the Matsya region. After the regional rulers usurped the state by treachery, their economic condition had become very pathetic. Due to commercial activities, the Meena tribe was divided into the class of Chowkidar and Zamindar. Apart from this, Padhiyar, Saharyar, Garasia, Bhil Meena etc. are also found in the districts of South Western Rajasthan. Because of their bravery, the British also appointed the people of this caste on the posts of IG and Security Officer in the police department. As soon as India became independent (1947), the attention of the national government and state governments was actively attracted towards the tribal tribes. Many agitations and conferences took place in Rajasthan on behalf of the Meena caste and the discriminatory law was abolished.

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