

ODH RAJPUTS: A TRIBE IN THE URBAN SANCTUARY OF DELHI

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I. Who Are the Odh Rajputs?

The [Odh Rajputs](#) (also known as Oad or Ods Rajputs) are a nomadic tribe of labourers historically found in Sindh, Gujarat, Kathiawar, and parts of Rajasthan. Known for thriving in arid, rain-scarce regions, the term 'Odh' historically refers to skilled artisans specializing in constructing ponds, canals, embankments, and mud houses. Over centuries the Odh Rajputs evolved into adept carpenters, masons, and stoneworkers, engaged in trading grains, spices, perfumes, and cloth. While the term 'Odh' originally denoted a profession or skill in earth masonry, it has since come to represent communities associated with such expertise.

II. Why Did the Odh Rajputs Migrate?

The migration story of the Odh Rajputs is a powerful narrative of resilience, adaptation, and survival. Their journey, spanning decades and driven by political upheaval, environmental challenges, and economic shifts, offers a window into the broader dynamics of migration in South Asia.

Partition of India (1947), a historic turning point: The partition of India in 1947 was a cataclysmic event that reshaped lives across the subcontinent. For the Odh Rajputs, the division of the nation marked the beginning of an arduous journey. Forced to abandon their ancestral homes in Sindh and West Punjab, they migrated to now divided India amidst waves of violence, political chaos, and the loss of livelihood. This search for safety and opportunity uprooted countless families, leaving an indelible mark on their community.

Resettlement in Delhi, building a new life:

In the wake of partition, many Odh Rajputs found a new home in Bhatti Village, Delhi. Here, they became integral to the city's burgeoning construction industry. The Bhatti Mines, operational between 1965 and 1990, offered them employment, with red sand and stone fueling Delhi's rapid urbanisation. Renowned for their masonry and stonework skills, the Odh Rajputs contributed to iconic construction projects, turning adversity into an opportunity for economic integration and community rebuilding.

Economic and environmental push factors:

Long before the partition, migration was part of the Odh Rajput heritage. Originating in arid and semi-arid regions where water scarcity was a constant challenge, they honed expertise in water management and construction. Over time, these skills became a passport to opportunities in areas where infrastructure development demanded their expertise.

However, as environmental conditions worsened and traditional livelihoods declined, migration became a necessity rather than a choice. The loss of fertile land, coupled with economic hardships, pushed the Odh Rajputs to explore new horizons, ensuring their survival and relevance in a rapidly changing world.

III. The Bhatti Mines Tragedy

In 1976, around [20,000 refugees](#), including the Odh Rajputs, settled in Bhatti Village, drawn by employment opportunities in the booming red sand and stone quarrying industry. For 14 years this community supported Delhi's construction needs. However, the tragic collapse of a mining pit on May 31, 1990, claimed seven lives, spotlighting grave safety violations. Consequently, Bhatti Mines were closed in 1991, leaving over 4,000 miners unemployed and without support.

The Struggle for Survival and Recognition

The closure of Bhatti Mines marked the beginning of decades-long struggles for the Odh Rajputs and other residents of Bhatti Village. Initially, the government granted ration cards and land titles to settlers. However, in 1984, the area was reclassified as a J.J. slum, and subsequent policies further marginalized the community. By 2001, ration cards were revoked due to fears of slum relocation, worsening their vulnerability. In 2006, demolitions by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi displaced 1,500 families.

Many residents received no compensation or alternative housing, compounding their plight. Despite these challenges, the community has actively fought for their rights through protests and awareness campaigns.

Socio-Economic Profile of Bhatti Village

The [Socio-Economic Profile](#) of Bhatti Village: 18,403 bighas and 3 biswas, with 5,022 bighas and 10 biswas currently being used for cultivation. In 1996, 11,101 bighas and 19 biswas of Gram Sabha land were notified as part of the Ridge in the Delhi Gazette, transferring a significant portion to the Forest Department

Challenges Faced by Bhatti Village Residents

1. Dependence on the Sanctuary for Basic Needs: Many villagers rely on the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary for resources like timber and toilets.
2. Lack of Access to Gas and Clean Drinking Water: A significant portion of the population does not have access to cooking gas, forcing them to depend on timber for fuel. Additionally, clean drinking water is not readily available, exacerbating health and sanitation issues.



A group of women collecting firewood from the sanctuary.

3. Poverty and Lack of Government Support: The villagers live in poverty and lack access to government welfare schemes and basic amenities, leaving them marginalized and unsupported.

4. Inadequate Drainage System: The absence of a proper drainage system leads to untreated wastewater contaminating the abandoned mines, a crucial groundwater recharge zone for Delhi.

5. Poor Solid Waste Management: MCD vehicles service only the main roads, neglecting inner areas and leaving waste uncollected.

6. Educational Challenges: While the village has schools and anganwadis (childcare centers), schools are not entirely safe or well-equipped for students. Many girls stop attending school after the 8th grade due to safety concerns and inadequate infrastructure. Some students are forced to travel outside the village to pursue further education.

7. Macaque: Conflict with monkeys is a serious issue, with injuries and property damage affecting every household.



Untreated drainage water flowing into the sanctuary, a pressing environmental concern



Government School in Bhatti village



Anganwadi in Bhatti village



Government School in Bhatti village

8. Healthcare Deficiencies: The village lacks adequate healthcare facilities and infrastructure, further exacerbating hardships, particularly from monkey-related injuries.

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