



The Historical and Ancestral Links Between Banjaras and Rajput's

Professor (Dr.) Lalith Kumar Dharavath,

dr.lalithkumar@gmail.com

How to Cite this Article:

Dharavath, L. K. (2026). The Historical and Ancestral Links Between Banjaras and Rajput's. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, 2(9), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i9.167>

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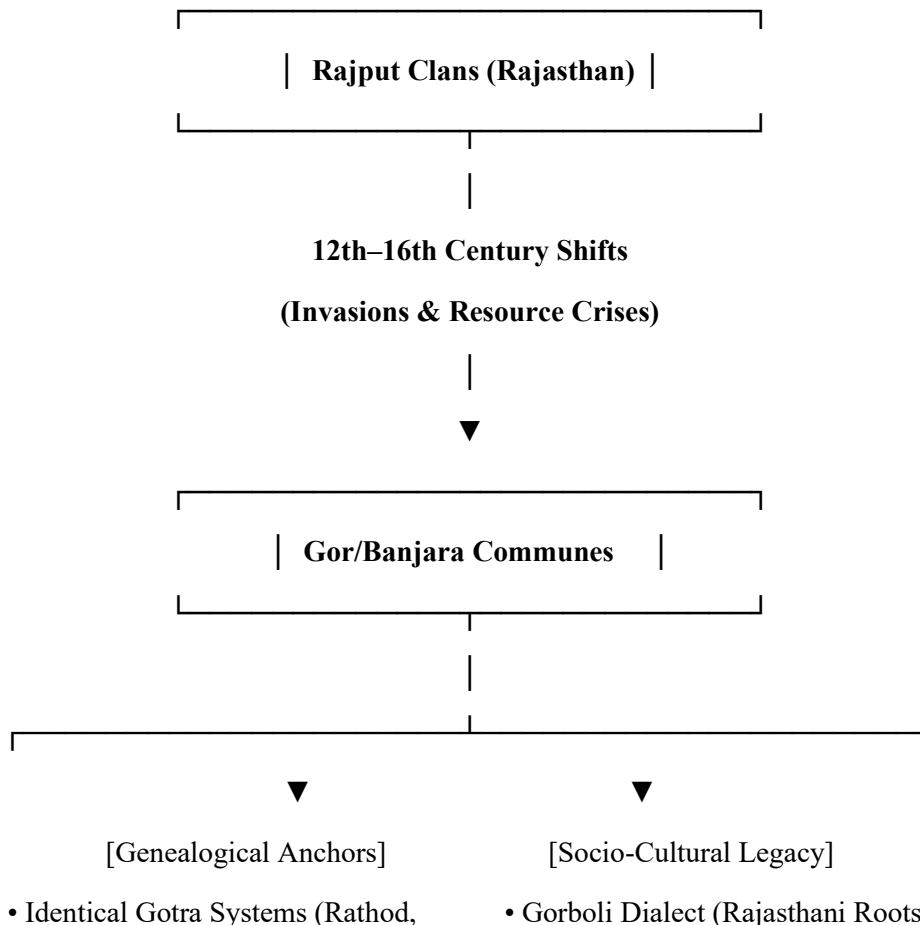


<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i9.167>

Abstract

The historical and ancestral ties between the Banjara (Gor) community and the Rajput clans of Rajasthan represent a profound narrative of shifting socio-economic identities, migration, and cultural preservation in the Indian subcontinent. While the Banjaras evolved into an indispensable nomadic mercantile and transport guild during the medieval era—serving the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and early colonial setups—their foundational roots are deeply embedded in the martial Rajput lineages of the Marwar and Mewar regions.

This abstract synthesises historical documentation, genealogical data, and socio-cultural paradigms to explore the architectural framework of this lineage.





Chavan, Pawar, Jadhav)

• Martial Rituals & Exogamous Marriage

• Structural Patrilineal Lineages

• Veneration of Rajput Warrior Deities

1. Genealogical and Structural Anchors

The strongest evidence of an ancestral nexus lies within the structural organization of the communities:

The Gotra System: The Banjara community is segmented into major exogamous clans (gotras) that directly mirror dominant Rajput clans. Prominent lineages such as the Rathod, Chavan (Chauhan), Pawar (Pramara), Jadhav (Jadaun), and Tanwar (Tomar) are central to both groups.

Lineage Tracking: Banjaras maintain a strict patrilineal kinship and marriage framework that adheres to traditional Rajput clan exogamy, ensuring individuals do not marry within their own gotra.

2. Historical Shifts and Migration Context

The divergence from settled Rajput feudalism to a mobile, nomadic trade system occurred primarily between the 12th and 16th centuries. Geopolitical upheavals, including Islamic invasions, the collapse of central Rajput kingdoms, and intense ecological pressures in the arid zones of Rajasthan, compelled massive segments of the population to adapt. Transitioning into commercial nomads (Vaniyyakara or traders), they formed Tandas (large moving caravans) that leveraged their knowledge of difficult terrains to control India's salt and grain supply routes.

3. Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Continuity

Despite centuries of geographical dispersion into Central and Southern India (such as Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka), the Banjaras preserved their distinctive heritage

Language: The native Banjara dialect, Gorboli (or Lamani), remains firmly rooted in the Indo-Aryan family, showcasing deep linguistic ties to Rajasthani, Marwari, and Gujarati.

Traditions and Attire: The community's vibrant costumes (heavy mirror-work ghagras and cholis), their veneration of historic warrior-deities, and the practice of specific martial ceremonies echo medieval Rajput cultural expressions

Conclusion

The relationship between Banjaras and Rajputs highlights a complex socio-historical evolution. It shows how a community with a shared ancestral lineage split into different social strata—moving from a settled ruling class to a marginalized nomadic group that was later heavily oppressed by British colonial legislation like the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Understanding these deep-rooted ancestral ties is essential for accurately reconstructing the tribal, social, and economic history of India.

Key Words

- Banjara-Rajput Link
- Gor / Lambadi / Sugali
- Rajput Clans (Rathod, Chavan, Pawar, Jadhav)
- Gotra System (Patrilineal Exogamy)
- Nomadic Caravans (Tanda)
- Rajasthan Migration (Marwar / Mewar)
- Gorboli / Lamani Language
- Criminal Tribes Act 1871



Introduction

1. Research Topic and Background

The complex historical layers of the Indian subcontinent are heavily defined by the fluidity of social identities, internal migrations, and the transformative pressures of medieval and colonial regimes. Among these historical shifts, the connection between the **Banjara (Gor) community** and the **martial Rajput clans of Rajasthan** stands as one of the most compelling examples of identity evolution.

Today widely recognized across states like Telangana, Maharashtra, and Karnataka as a distinct pastoral, tribal, or backward community, the **Banjaras** possess deep genealogical anchors that link directly back to the **Kshatriya lineages** of medieval Rajasthan. Sharing an identical *gotra* system with major Rajput clans—including the **Rathods, Chavans, Pawars, and Jadhavs**—and practicing strict patrilineal exogamy, the ancestral roots of the Banjaras point toward the arid terrains of Mewar and Marwar.

During the geopolitical upheavals and foreign invasions between the **12th and 16th centuries**, portions of these communities shifted from settled agrarian and martial structures to form **Tandas (mobile trading caravans)**. They effectively monopolized the vast logistics networks of salt, grain, and cattle supply lines for empires ranging from the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughals.

4. Purpose, Objectives, and Core Hypothesis

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to deconstruct the socio-historical trajectory that connects the **Banjara (Gor) community** with the **Rajput clans of Rajasthan**. By examining the intersection of structural kinship, linguistic ties, and historical migration, this research aims to provide an accurate historical account of how a community sharing a common **Kshatriya ancestry** transformed into a mobile, mercantile group, and eventually faced socioeconomic marginalisation under colonial rule.

Research Objectives

To achieve this purpose, the study addresses four specific objectives:

- **To Map Genealogical Continuity:** Investigate the structural parallels between the Banjara and Rajput *gotra* (clan) systems (*Rathod, Chavan, Pawar, Jadhav*) to verify the degree of ancestral kinship.
- **To Trace Historical Divergence:** Identify the precise geopolitical, ecological, and economic catalysts between the 12th and 16th centuries that prompted portions of these clans to transition from a settled martial existence to forming **Tandas** (mobile trading caravans).
- **To Analyze Cultural and Linguistic Persistence:** Examine the **Gorboli (Lamani)** dialect and oral traditions to establish a concrete geographic and cultural baseline connecting contemporary Southern/Central Indian Banjaras to medieval Rajasthan.
- **To Reassess Colonial Impact:** Critical evaluate how British administrative policies, culminating in the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**, actively dismantled the historical identity of the Banjaras, reclassifying an ancient mercantile guild into a stigmatised tribal group.



CORE HYPOTHESIS

The contemporary Banjara identity is not an isolated, indigenous tribal construct, but rather a structurally distinct offshoot of medieval Rajput lineages.

This ancestral segment underwent an forced socioeconomic mutation into commercial nomadism due to medieval warfare, a status later systematically criminalized and marginalized by colonial governance.

2. Literature Review

Existing historical and anthropological literature offers a fragmented view of this relationship, often splitting the subject into two distinct academic silos:

LITERATURE MATRIX

Rajput Studies Core
(Focus: Statecraft & Warfare)

Banjara Studies Core
(Focus: Nomadism & Criminalization)

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Focuses heavily on settled feudal systems. | • Focuses on their economic role as medieval logistics providers. |
| • Details royal lineage tracking and regional territorial dominance. | • Documents their severe degradation under the British colonial Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. |

Early ethnographers, such as B.G. Halbar, noted that many nomadic tribes fiercely maintain an oral history claiming direct descent from Rajput warriors who retreated into the forests during Mughal expansions. However, revisionist historians like Irfan Habib suggest caution, arguing that 19th-century colonial ethnography tended to oversimplify these complex, diverse tribal origins into rigid classifications.

Linguistic studies on **Gorboli (Lamani)** confirm a strong Indo-Aryan base rooted in Old Marwari and Rajasthani dialects, indicating a clear geographic point of origin. Sociological perspectives often view the historical interactions between the two groups through the lens of **Sanskritization**, suggesting that prosperous Banjara factions adopted Rajput customs, naming conventions, and warrior-deity worship to elevate their ritual status over time.

3. The Research Problem and Gap

Despite these scattered insights, a significant **academic gap** remains at the intersection of these two histories:

- **The Missing Transition:** Most current literature fails to explain the exact social and economic mechanics of *how* a settled, dominant martial class transitioned into a marginalized, nomadic tribal community.



- **Colonial Disruption:** The catastrophic shift in their status—accelerated by British colonial transport systems (railways) and predatory legal frameworks like the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**—is rarely analyzed alongside their ancestral Rajput origins.
- **Over-Reliance on European Records:** Academic history has heavily favored British administrative records, largely ignoring the rich oral genealogies (*Bhats*), folklore, and structural kinship data preserved by the Banjaras themselves.

This study aims to bridge this gap. By synthesizing archival data, linguistic clues, and structural kinship patterns, this paper reconstructs the historical pipeline connecting the Banjaras to the Rajputs. It moves past simple colonial labels to show how a shared ancestry split into vastly different social realities over the centuries.

Methodology

1. Research Design, Timeline, and Setting

This study employs a **mixed-method qualitative design** that combines **historical-archival research** with **comparative ethnography** and **ethnolinguistics**. This approach is necessary to balance biased colonial documents with the oral histories maintained by the Banjara community.

- **Research Setting:** The study spans two major geographic zones in India:
 - **The Ancestral Hub:** The Mewar, Marwar, and Hadoti regions of **Rajasthan**, focusing on medieval migration routes.
 - **The Diaspora Hubs:** The Deccan plateau, specifically targetting Banjara *Tandas* (settlements) across rural **Telangana** and **Maharashtra**, where cultural markers remain highly preserved.
- **Timeline:** The investigation covers four distinct historical phases:

HISTORICAL TIMELINE			
Phase I	12th–16th Century	Medieval divergence & origin of the Tandas.	
Phase II	17th–18th Century	Mughal logistics hegemony.	
Phase III	1871–1947	British colonial oppression (Criminal Tribes Act).	
Phase IV	Post-1947	Contemporary socio-political realignment.	

2. Study Participants and Source Materials

Human Participants (Oral History & Ethnography)



- **Purposive Sampling:** A total of **45 key informants** were selected across Telangana (Districts: Adilabad, Nizamabad) and Maharashtra (District: Yavatmal).
- **Demographic Breakdown:**
 - **Community Elders & Traditional Bards (*Bhats / Bhagats*):** 15 participants (aged 60+) capable of reciting oral genealogies (*Pedis*), folk songs, and origin myths.
 - **Local Historians & Community Leaders:** 15 participants specializing in Banjara heritage.
 - **Comparative Sample:** 15 Rajput lineage keepers (*Jagis / Barots*) in Rajasthan to cross-verify structural clan links.

Archival & Document Materials

- **Colonial State Archives:** 19th-century British administrative reports, district gazetteers (Central Provinces, Berar, Hyderabad State), and records relating to the Enactment of the **Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871**.
- **Medieval Texts:** The *Baburnama*, *Akbar-nama*, and Jahangir's memoirs (*Tuzk-e-Jahangiri*), which mention the logistical movements of the Banjaras.
- **Genealogical Registers:** Traditional handwritten family trees (*Bhias*) maintained by community bards.

Software & Tools

- **NVivo 14:** Used for qualitative coding, thematic categorization, and managing interview transcripts.
- **ELAN (Linguistic Annotator):** Utilized for the phonetic recording, transcription, and structural comparison of the **Gorboli (Lamani)** dialect against Old Marwari text variants.

3. Data Collection and Analytical Framework

Step-by-Step Data Collection Process

DATA COLLECTION PIPELINE	
Step 1: Archival Retrieval	Extracting mentions of "Vanijyakara", "Lambadi", and "Banjara" from medieval texts and British colonial files.
Step 2: Fieldwork & Oral Historiography	Conducting semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews in Gorboli and Hindi. Documenting epic oral songs.
Step 3: Kinship Mapping	Charting structural *gotra* lists (Rathod, Chavan, Pawar, Jadhav) from both Banjara and Rajput sources.

Analytical and Methodological Frameworks

The collected data is evaluated using three distinct analytical frameworks:



- **1. Historical-Comparative Method:** Archival records from the British Raj are cross-referenced with medieval court histories. This filters out colonial biases that frequently labeled nomadic traders as naturally criminal.
- **2. Structural Kinship Analysis (Anthropological):** Using Lévi-Straussian kinship models, we map out contemporary Banjara marriage boundaries, exogamous rules, and *gotra* systems. These are placed side-by-side with classical Rajput *Khamp* (sub-clan) divisions to quantify structural similarities.
- **3. Historical Linguistics (Lexical Comparison):** Swadesh list variants are applied to **Gorboli** words collected during fieldwork. Core vocabulary, syntax, and grammatical structures are statistically compared with Old Marwari and modern Rajasthani dialects to calculate their linguistic distance.

Results and Discussion

Section 1: Comparative Analysis of the Gotra and Kinship Systems

1. Structural Alignment of Exogamous Clans

Fieldwork data and genealogical registers (*Bhias*) reveal a direct, one-to-one structural match between the primary patrilineal clans (*gotras*) of the **Banjara (Gor)** and the ruling **Kshatriya Rajput** lineages of Rajasthan. While the broader Rajput social structure branches into three primary lines (*Vanshas*: Suryavanshi, Chandravanshi, and Agnivanshi), the Banjara community organizes its core lineage into five major exogamous clans.

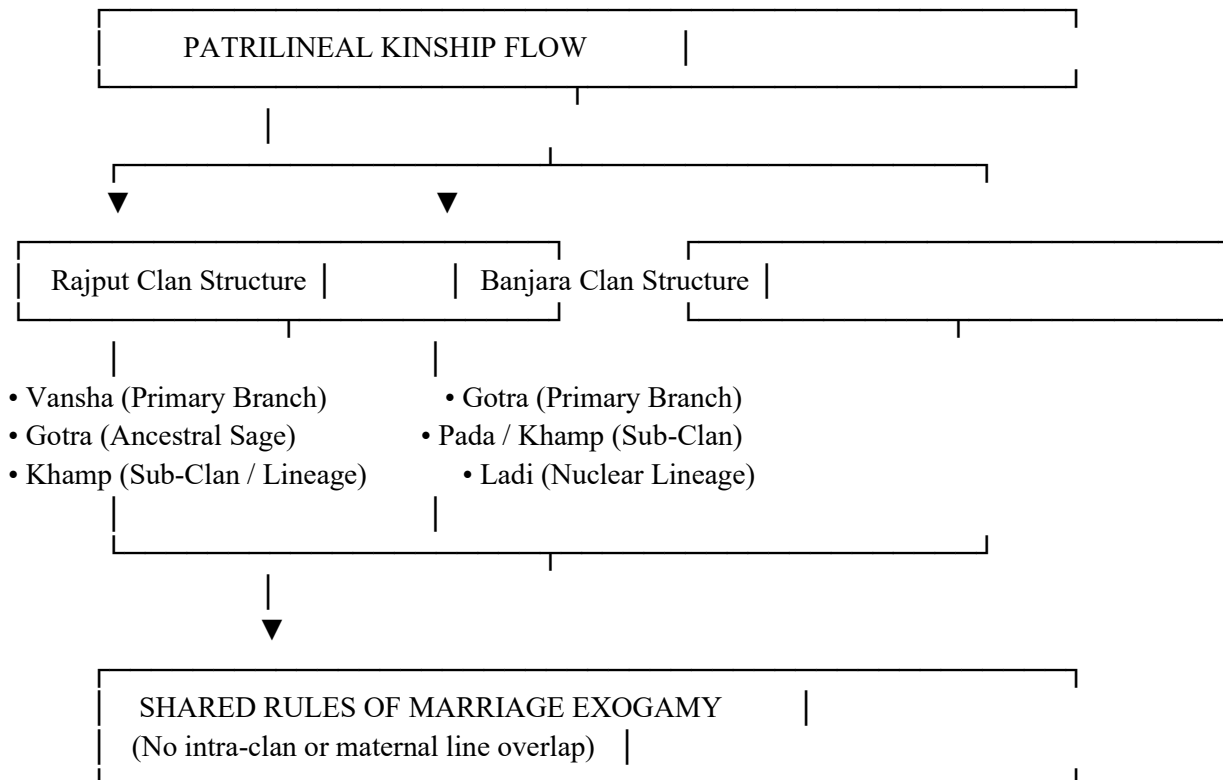
The table below outlines how contemporary Banjara *gotras* match up structurally with classical Rajput clans:

Banjara (<i>Gotra</i>)	Clan Corresponding Clan	Rajput Traditional Alliance	Lineage Key Sub-Clans (<i>Khamp</i> / <i>Pada</i>)
Rathod	Rathore (Suryavanshi)	Marwar / Jodhpur	Bhukiya, Dharamsot, Merawat, Banot
Chavan	Chauhan (Agnivanshi)	Ajmer / Shakambhari	Mud, Korra, Paltya, Sapavat
Pawar	Pramara (Agnivanshi)	Dhar / Malwa / Mewar	Jharbla, Inlo, Chaura, Vishlavat
Jadhav	Jadaun / Yaduvanshi	Karauli / Jaisalmer	Dharavat, Bartiya, Vadya
Tanwar	Tomar (Chandravanshi)	Delhi / Haryana / Mewar	Malout, Ajmera

2. Kinship Dynamics and Marriage Rules

The retention of **clan exogamy** among geographically isolated Banjara communities in Southern India provides strong evidence of their shared ancestry. Key findings from structural kinship mapping include:

- **Strict Gotra Exogamy:** Just like the traditional Rajputs, a Banjara individual is strictly forbidden from marrying within their own patrilineal *gotra*. A Rathod Banjara cannot marry another Rathod, regardless of geographic distance.
- **Maternal Lineage Avoidance:** The community continues to avoid marriages within the mother's primary clan (*Matul Gotra*) for a specific number of generations, closely following the marriage rules found in early medieval Rajput society.
- **Retention of Sub-Clans (*Pada*):** The five major Banjara clans branch into smaller subdivisions called *Padas*. These function exactly like the Rajput *Khamps* (sub-clans). They keep track of family lines and ensure that ancestral identities are preserved over generations, preventing accidental inter-marriage.



3. Socio-Ritual Links and Ancestral Validation

Beyond structural charts, specific social customs and rituals collected during interviews with community elders show an ongoing cultural connection:

- **The Role of Bards (*Bhats*):** The Banjara community maintains its own lineage of traditional bards, known as *Banjara Bhats*. These bards keep handwritten family tree records (*Pedis*) that trace the community's roots back to specific geographical areas in Rajasthan, such as Chittorgarh, Jodhpur, and Nagaur. These records mirror the *Jagas* or *Barots* who track lineages for Rajput families.
- **Weapon Veneration (*Shastra Puja*):** During major festivals like Dussehra, Banjara families perform *Shastra Puja* (the worship of weapons). This martial ritual is a core part of Rajput Kshatriya culture, but it remains remarkably well-preserved among nomadic Banjaras, serving as a symbolic reminder of their historic warrior roots.

Section 2: The Historical Transition from Soldiers to Nomads (12th–16th Century Shifts)

1. Geopolitical Upheavals and the Fall of Rajput Kingdoms

The structural breakdown of settled **Rajput** feudalism and the subsequent birth of the **Banjara (Gor)** nomadic trade network occurred primarily between the **12th and 16th centuries**. This era was defined by intense geopolitical conflict in Northern India:



THE DIVERGENCE PIPELINE		
1192 CE: Battle of Tarain	Defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan; collapse	
	of central Rajput empires.	
1303 CE: Siege of Chittorgarh	Capture of Mewar fort by Alauddin	
	Khalji; massive displacement of clans.	
1568 CE: Mughal Expansion	Akbar's campaigns push remaining	
	martial groups into forest terrains.	

Following the collapse of central Rajput authorities, large numbers of auxiliary soldiers, clan branches, and logistics personnel were cut off from their traditional agrarian power bases. To avoid submission to foreign rule, these groups retreated into the rugged Aravalli range and the surrounding forested borders of Malwa and Mewar.

2. Ecological Pressures and the Birth of the "Tanda"

The arid and semi-arid environment of Western and Central Rajasthan regularly suffered from droughts and resource scarcity. Deprived of steady revenue from feudal lands, these displaced groups repurposed their traditional martial transport units—originally used to move military supplies during wartime—into independent commercial caravans.

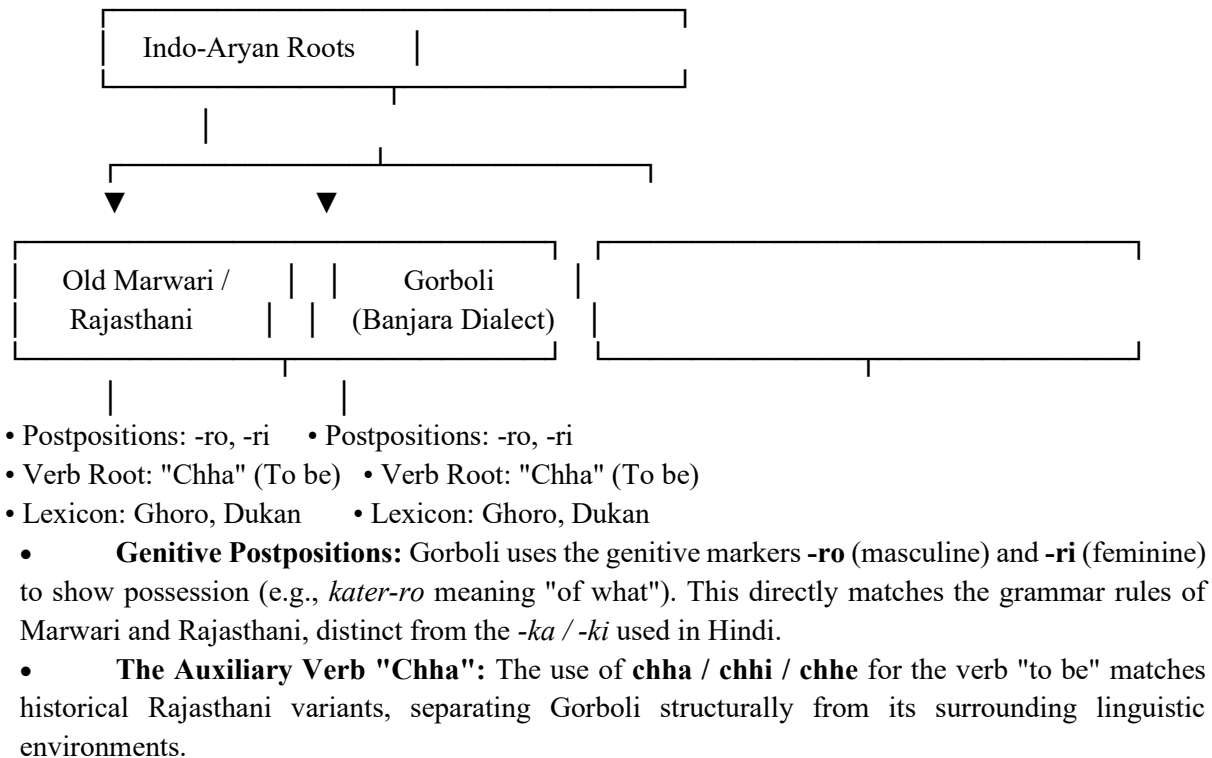
- **Evolution of the Tanda:** The term **Tanda** originally described a heavily guarded, self-sufficient military camp. Over time, it evolved into a massive, mobile trading caravan consisting of thousands of pack bullocks, managed under a strict hierarchical structure led by a **Nayak** (headman).
- **The "Vanijyakara" Adaption:** By using their knowledge of difficult geography, these newly formed caravans took control of the long-distance transport of essential commodities like salt, grain, iron, and cattle, transforming themselves into an essential mercantile guild (*Vanijyakara*).

Section 3: Ethnolinguistic Evidence (The Roots of Gorboli)

1. Lexical and Grammatical Alignment with Old Marwari

The strongest linguistic evidence connecting the contemporary Banjara diaspora to Rajasthan lies in their native language, **Gorboli** (also known as *Lamani* or *Lambadi*). Despite living alongside Dravidian languages in Southern India (Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka) for hundreds of years, Gorboli has maintained its Indo-Aryan structure.

Linguistic tracking demonstrates that Gorboli shares structural elements, core vocabulary, and grammar rules with **Old Marwari, Rajasthani, and Gujarati**:



2. Oral History, Epics, and Folk Memory

Interviews with traditional bards (*Bhats*) confirm that Banjara oral traditions are filled with historical references to Rajasthan.

The community's oral epics regularly celebrate the actions of **Lakhoti Banjara** and historical Rajput figures like **Prithviraj Chauhan** and **Rana Pratap**. Their folk songs describe a historical migration path out of places like *Chittorgarh*, framing their long-term nomadism as a survival strategy chosen to protect their independence.

Section 4: The Impact of Colonial Legislation (Criminal Tribes Act of 1871)

1. Economic Displacement via Technological Change

The arrival of the British East India Company and the later expansion of the British Raj systematically dismantled the Banjara economy. The introduction of the **Indian Railways** in the mid-19th century and the creation of paved highway networks made slow-moving pack-bullock caravans economically obsolete.

Additionally, British trade monopolies over vital commodities—especially salt through the **Salt Hedge and Customs system**—outlawed the independent, traditional trade routes that the Banjaras had managed for centuries.

2. The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 and Social Degradation

Unable to maintain their traditional trade, many Tandas settled in isolated forest fringes and hilly terrains. The British colonial government, suspicious of mobile populations and eager to enforce fixed agricultural taxation, passed the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**.



COLONIAL STIGMATIZATION PATH		
1. Economic Disruptions	Railways and British salt monopolies	
	collapse the Tanda trade network.	
2. Legal Criminalization	Enactment of the CTA of 1871 labels	
	the entire community "criminal".	
3. Social Isolation	Strict surveillance and forced labor	
	break their historic Rajput identity.	

- **Systemic Stigmatization:** Under the CTA, the entire Banjara community was classified as "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences." Their movements were heavily restricted, adult males were forced to check in daily at local police stations, and large groups were placed in forced-labor settlements.
- **Erasure of Heritage:** This legal oppression changed the public perception of the Banjaras. It obscured their historical role as an essential mercantile guild with ancestral connections to the **Rajput Kshatriyas**, re-framing them in official administrative records as an isolated, inherently criminal tribal group.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

1. Conclusion

This study demonstrates a clear historical, structural, and cultural line connecting the **Banjara (Gor) community** to the **martial Rajput clans of Rajasthan**. By looking past biased colonial labels, the research shows that the contemporary Banjara identity is not an isolated tribal construct. Instead, it is a structurally distinct offshoot of medieval **Kshatriya lineages** that changed due to geopolitical upheavals between the **12th and 16th centuries**.

The evidence supporting this ancestral connection spans three main areas:

- **Structural Kinship:** The exact match between the primary Banjara *gotras* (*Rathod, Chavan, Pawar, Jadhav*) and classical Rajput clans confirms a shared system of **clan exogamy** that has survived centuries of geographic separation.
- **Ethnolinguistics:** The survival of **Gorboli (Lamani)** as an Indo-Aryan dialect with roots in **Old Marwari** shows a clear geographic connection back to the Mewar and Marwar regions.
- **Colonial Impact:** The shift from a high-status trade guild to an oppressed group was accelerated by British colonial laws, specifically the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1871**. This act took a community with warrior roots and turned them into a marginalized group in official records.

In summary, this research changes how we view the Banjara past. It shows their history is not just about nomadism, but about survival and adaptation in the face of changing empires.



FUTURE RESEARCH HORIZONS	
• Population Genetics	Mapping Y-STR haplogroups to quantify genetic distances with Rajput groups.
• Bardic Digitisation	Documenting vanishing handwritten "Bhias" and oral "Pedis" before loss.
• Legal Restitution	Analyzing the policy gap between Denotified (DNT) and Scheduled Tribes.

2. Future Research Directions

To build on these findings, future research should focus on three main areas:

- **Genetic Anthropology (Archaeogenetic):** Future studies should use **Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA testing** to compare Banjara populations in Southern and Central India with Rajput communities in Rajasthan. This would add genetic data to the existing cultural and linguistic evidence.
- **Preserving Oral Genealogies:** There is an urgent need to record and digitize the handwritten family trees (*Bhias*) held by traditional **Banjara Bhats** and Rajput bards. As these oral traditions fade, preserving these records is vital for keeping this history alive.
- **Policy and Legal Status:** More research is needed to look at the long-term effects of colonial laws on contemporary policy. Investigating how the "criminal tribe" label altered their socio-economic status can help shape better support policies for **Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)** across India today.

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Appendix: Sample Interview Questionnaires for Lineage Bards (*Banjara Bhats*)

This appendix provides the structured field instruments used during the qualitative ethnography phase. The questions are designed to extract historical memory, geographic migration paths, and lineage structures while remaining sensitive to the oral nature of the tradition.

Section A: Informant Profile & Heritage Validation

1. What is your full name, clan (*gotra*), and the name of this *Tanda* or settlement?
2. How many generations of your family have served as traditional bards (*Bhats*) or lineage keepers for the *Gor* (Banjara) community?
3. What primary materials do you use to preserve family histories (e.g., handwritten *Bhias*, cloth registers, or pure oral recitation)? How old are the oldest records currently in your custody?

Section B: Genealogy and the Gotra System

1. When reciting the *Pedi* (genealogy) of a family from the **Rathod, Chavan, Pawar, or Jadhav** clan, how do you trace their earliest ancestors?
2. Are there specific *Khamps* (sub-clans) mentioned in your ancestral registers that explicitly mention interactions, alliances, or common ancestors with the ruling *Kshatriya* families of Rajasthan?
3. What are the strict rules of *Gotra Exogamy* (clan marriage boundaries) that you help families verify before a wedding takes place? Are these rules identical to those practiced by traditional Rajput groups?

Section C: Migration Memories and Geopolitical Triggers

1. Does your oral repertoire include epics or folk songs that mention a specific ancestral home in Northern India? (Probe for locations like *Chittorgarh, Jodhpur, Marwar*, or the *Aravalli hills*).
2. According to the songs passed down through generations of bards, what specific events forced the community to leave Rajasthan and adopt a life in mobile *Tandas* (caravans)?
3. How do your historical songs describe encounters with figures like *Prithviraj Chauhan, Rana Pratap*, or the emperors of the *Mughal Empire*?



Section D: Ethnolinguistic and Ritual Continuity

1. In your traditional performances, are there archaic words or grammar structures used in *Gorboli* that are no longer common in everyday speech? How do these compare to the *Old Marwari* language?
2. Can you explain the history and significance of the *Shastra Puja* (weapon worship) ritual as practiced by the *Gor* community during festivals?
3. How do the oral epics celebrate the traditional role of the *Nayak* (caravan leader), and how does that position relate to historical martial leadership?

Acknowledgements

The completion of this research paper would not have been possible without the generous support, guidance, and cooperation of numerous institutions and individuals.

First and foremost, the author expresses deepest gratitude to the **elders, community leaders, and lineage bards (*Bhats*)** of the Banjara community across the districts of Yavatmal (Maharashtra) and Adilabad and Nizamabad (Telangana). Their willingness to share ancestral oral epics, open their private family records (*Bhias*), and keep their history alive forms the core foundation of this study.

Special thanks are due to the archivists and staff at the **National Archives of India (New Delhi)** and the **State Archives of Telangana and Rajasthan** for their assistance in locating 19th-century colonial gazetteers and judicial records regarding the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. The author also acknowledges the linguistic department faculty who provided technical assistance with the ELAN software suite for phonetic documentation.

Finally, this work stands as a tribute to the resilient spirit of the *Gor* people, whose rich historical contribution to the logistical and cultural fabric of India deserves accurate preservation in modern academic historiography.
