

Where do Lohana's come from?

I am a Lohana and as a child, had some passing interest in the subject. When I would ask the elders I was told they were not the "native" people of Saurashtra. They were the "immigrants" who had arrived in Saurashtra/Kutch around the 11th or the 12th Century. Or that they were generally to say "from somewhere North". Occasionally someone would mention the name Veer Jasraj Dada.

My mother occasionally would do a "Diva" in his memory. When I was very young I went through a "Janoi" wearing ceremony. I asked the priest "Why do other Gujaratis (except Brahmins) not wear a "Janoi"? "Oh, Shatriyas wear this. It is to honour Jasraj Dada"

The parents of the Ismaili friends would sometimes say "Ame bi Lohana Hata". The passing interest, over a period of time, had become curiosity. I had been pointed to several articles in various Raghuvansi or Lohana periodicals over a period of time. While on a visit to Saurashtra I was presented a newly published (second edition) book called "Lohrana". It is written in Gujarati by Haribhai Thakker. It appears to be well researched with many references and is a highly informative book. This is a summary of what I have gleaned from various bits of information I have come across over the years.

Raghuvansis or people of Raghukul dynasty inhabited an area called "Lohar Pradesh" before the 10th or the 11th Century. Lohar Pradesh covered large segments of what is today known as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir and the Hindu Kush region. The people were Khatriyas (Shatriyas) warriors. There were about 24 provinces in the Lohar Pradesh and the people were called Lohranas (Loh= iron, ranas= soldiers, warrior). They being in the northwest frontline, were seen by the other rulers (there were many) in India as their protectors from the invading Turks and the other land invaders.

Around the 11th Century when the then Lohar Pradesh supremo Veer Jasraj Dada had invited the other provincial Leaders/ Rulers to a wedding in "Loh Kot" an opportunistic invasion was launched by the Turks. Some provinces were lost to the invaders. Veer Dada Jasraj died in a fierce final battle in the Hindu Kush region (Loh Gat)?

As the Lohar Pradesh started to disintegrate and the invading armies imposed their will, mass emigration of Hindu Lohars followed. They (Unalkats, Sachdevs, Kotaks, Chandaranas, Majithias et el) went to Saurashtra, Kutch, Punjab and some went even as far as Siam (Thailand).

In Saurashtra and Kutch most joined the armies of the local rulers as soldiers, administrators and some went in the commerce and the trade. They were still known as Lohranas. Over a period of time they began to assimilate and adopt the "local" way of life. The Lohranas became Lohanas and even

Luvanas. The Lohanas had also started to distinguish among themselves by generally taking on, as their surname, the name of the region or their Leader in Lohar Pradesh i.e Unalkats (from the place Unolkat). They had brought and kept many Lohar traditions with them.

In Saurashtra and Kutch these traditions have died or are moribund e.g. wearing a (big) pagdi, janoi (wearing a string on their bodypart) or at least wearing a moustache when one had become an adult (sign of "Merdangi" manhood). The Lohranas (Aroras, Sonpal, Majithias, Budhbhattis, Chandaranas et el) who had emigrated to Punjab felt slighted and grieved by the treatment and the position they found themselves in their new environment. So they conquered some land and established their own rule over it.

The founder of the Sikh religion was born here. His father was a Lohrana named Kalidas Chandarana. Guru Nanak Devji took the name of Bedi as his family name later.

Kotak Loharanas went to Siam and Saurashtra. Kotak appears as a name of a King in Siamese history. Sodhas went to Sind and Saurashtra. Today one finds "Sodha" a Sindhi or a Gujarati Lohana name. Sachdevs in Punjab and in Saurashtra. Thobhanis are Khojas and Lohanas.

During the Moghal (Mughal!) period and even very much later many Lohanas adopted the Islamic faith to either avoid persecution or for personal reasons. They were called Khojas (Kwahjas in Turkey) in Saurashtra and Punjab. Memons in Kutch (Cutch).

It would then appear that the Gujarati Lohanas, the Khojas, the Memons, the Lohar Sikhs and even the Vajiri Pakhtuns are of the same "stock". Peas from the same pod so to speak (If there is any student or a scientist searching for a subject for dissertation or genetic finger printing then this is the one I would suggest).

Also, as a matter of interest, Lohana Jinabhai became Swami Gnanjivandas then became Yogiji Maharaj, Leader of the Swaminarayan Faith. Those Lohanas who were converted to Islam are known as Khojas. Many of them retain their Hindu names.

The most celebrated among them was the creator of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Zinnah, whose father's name was Jinabhai Thakkar. A few other names of the long list are Shri Guru Nanak, Saint Shri Jalaram, Saint Lal Bapu, Yogiji Maharaj, Bhikshu Akhand Anand, Maharishi Priyanath, Thakkar Bapa, Shree Nanjibhai Kalidas Mehta, Seth Shree Virjibhai Maskai, Madhvanis, Vajubhai Kotak, Smarat Ranmal Lakha, Dada Jashraj.

The Meaning Of Life...

"Living wise.. wiser.. and wiser..." By learning from an imperfect past and perfecting a future.