

Between Faith and Law: Religion, Legal Consciousness, and Deviance among the Bhopa Tribe of Rajasthan

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between religion, legal consciousness, and deviance among the Bhopa community of Rajasthan, using primary data collected in February and March 2026 from 100 Bhopa respondents across the Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer districts. The study is anchored in three sociological perspectives: Bourdieu's theory of habitus and symbolic capital, legal consciousness theory, and deviance theory. The empirical findings indicate a strongly religion-centred social order: 91% of respondents describe religion as very important, 91% report performing ritual activities regularly, and all respondents identify Pabuji Guru as the central influence over religious life. At the same time, legal incorporation remains weak. Seventy-five per cent of respondents report not being aware of the legal system, 77% express no trust in it, and all respondents disagree that the legal system protects them. Informal mechanisms continue to dominate dispute handling and social regulation: 85% resolve disputes through the community, and 85% report that they warn rather than punish deviant behaviour. The data further show that 86% of respondents have experienced a conflict between faith and law, while 72% prioritise religion when such a conflict arises. This research paper posits that the 'Bhopa case' exemplifies a dual legal consciousness prevalent among marginalised communities, characterised by a scepticism toward formal legal frameworks perceived as distant and untrustworthy. Despite this scepticism, there exists an enduring aspiration for legal reform and state intervention. This analysis enhances the socio-legal discourse surrounding legal pluralism, the dynamics of non-state authority, and the mechanisms of informal governance within the Indian context.

Keywords: Legal Consciousness; Legal Pluralism; Religion and Law; Deviance; Bhopa Community; Rajasthan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and law has long occupied a central place in sociology because both institutions claim authority over human conduct, moral order, and dispute resolution. In many settings, especially in unequal and culturally plural societies, people do not live under a single normative order. They navigate between state law, community expectations, kinship obligations, and religious authority (Callaghan et al., 2012; Galanter, 1974; Moore, 1973; Santos, 1987). Legal pluralism scholarship has consistently shown that formal law is rarely the only operative source of regulation in people's lives; rather, state law coexists with non-state systems that may compete with, supplement, or displace it (Pirie, 2022).

This issue becomes especially significant in marginalised communities, where limited literacy, weak state presence, and social distance from institutions can reduce the practical relevance of formal law (Thapa et al., 2021; Galanter, 1974).

Under such conditions, religion often functions not only as a matter of belief but as a framework of governance. It provides moral vocabulary, sanctions, ritual cohesion, authority figures, and mechanisms of social regulation (Manugeran et al., 2020; Fuller, 2004; Sullivan et al., 2015; Sandberg, 2013). Scholarship on law at the margins of the state has shown that communities experiencing institutional neglect often rely on culturally legitimate, locally embedded systems rather than distant bureaucratic institutions (Vitale et al., 2026).

The Bhopa community, or Nayak Bhil, is a distinct subgroup within the broader Bhil tribe of Rajasthan, particularly associated with the role of Bhopas or "devotee performers, native to Rajasthan, India, the Bhopa community is a nomadic group renowned for their roles as priest-singers and wandering musicians. We belong to the Nayak caste, traditionally tasked with caring for Pabuji's horses. Since Pabuji ascended to heaven, our community members have been reciting the

Phad and singing his stories. Only members of our caste are permitted to learn and perform this epic. They are particularly celebrated for their artistry in recounting the epic tales of local deities, such as Pabuji and Dev Narayan, while using a phad—a painted scroll—as a visual aid alongside their signature string instrument, the ravanhatta. As cultural custodians, Bhopas play a vital role in preserving the rich folk traditions of Rajasthan, often performing for local communities like the Rabari tribe (Doshi, 1978). Traditionally leading a nomadic lifestyle in temporary camps throughout the Thar Desert, many have recently transitioned to urban areas to seek employment in various fields, straying from their customary practices and storytelling heritage (Pachori & Kannan, 2016).

The Rabaris, a nomadic tribe without permanent temples, bring the temple to their location through the Bhopas, traditional performers. They use a 'Phad,' a painted cloth scroll depicting folk epics, to hold rituals over five nights. There are two types of performances: one as a sacred ritual in local temples, and another for tourists, which includes contemporary elements like Hindi film music, often presented in restaurants and during festivals across Rajasthan and beyond (Pradeep, 2017).

The Bhopa community of Rajasthan offers an important empirical setting for examining this intersection. In the research, respondents across Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer were surveyed using a structured interview schedule. The evidence shows a markedly strong religious orientation: 91% report that religion is very important, 91% regularly perform ritual activities, and all respondents identify Pabuji Guru as the central source of religious influence. At the same time, formal legal incorporation appears weak: 75% are not aware of the legal system, 77% have no trust in it, and 100% disagree that the legal system protects them. Informal governance remains dominant, with 85% resolving disputes within the community and 85% handling deviant behaviour through warnings rather than formal punishment. Furthermore, 86% report a conflict between faith and law, and 72% prioritise religion when such a conflict arises.

These patterns are sociologically important for two reasons. First, they suggest that religion in the Bhopa context is not merely symbolic; it is institutional, behavioural, and regulatory. Second, they indicate that legal exclusion does not simply produce ignorance; it produces a patterned

consciousness in which law is perceived as weak, distant, or unprotective. That combination makes the Bhopa case especially relevant to current debates on legal consciousness, legal pluralism, and informal social control.

This paper argues that the Bhopa case reveals a form of dual legal consciousness in the context of marginality. On the one hand, formal law is distrusted, weakly known, and subordinated to religious authority. On the other hand, the same respondents express a desire for legal change and state support, indicating that formal legality is not rejected in principle, but experienced as inaccessible in practice. The paper, therefore, asks: how does religion structure legal consciousness among the Bhopa? How is deviance defined and controlled within a community-centred order? And what does the Bhopa case reveal about law, authority, and social regulation in marginalised settings?

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study draws on three complementary theoretical traditions: Bourdieu's theory of habitus and symbolic capital, legal consciousness theory, and deviance theory. Bourdieu's framework is especially useful for analysing the social force of religion (Dianteuill, 2003; Banakar, 2015). Habitus refers to socially formed and historically embedded dispositions, while symbolic capital explains why certain forms of authority are recognised as legitimate even in the absence of formal institutional backing (Bourdieu, 1990). In the Bhopa case, the centrality of Pabuji Guru and the persistence of ritual practice suggest that religious authority operates as symbolic power: it is recognised, obeyed, and internalised as socially valid.

Legal consciousness theory shifts attention from law as doctrine to law as lived experience (Silbey, 2005). Their framework is particularly relevant to marginalised groups whose experience of the law may be shaped by institutional distance and exclusion (Heimer et al., 1999; Sarat & Kearns, 2009; Nielsen, 2000; Engel & Munger, 2003). The empirical findings from the Bhopa community indicate that the convergence of low legal awareness, diminished institutional trust, and a near-universal perception of legal non-protection reflects a form of legal consciousness that is

structurally oriented away from the legitimacy of formal law (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Merry, 1990; Tyler, 2006).

Deviance theory provides the third pillar. Becker's (1963) labelling perspective remains crucial because it shows that deviance is not a natural property of an act; it is socially defined. What counts as deviant depends on the norms, authorities, and sanctions active in a given community. According to data obtained from the Bhopa community, 62% of respondents primarily perceive deviance as constituting "illegal acts"; nevertheless, the predominant response is not punitive ostracism or legal action, but rather a warning. This indicates that while deviance is recognised, its regulation remains rooted in informal community processes. The discrepancy between the formal categorisation and the informal response is theoretically significant: it suggests that even though respondents employ state-centric terminology—referring to "illegal acts"—their actual mode of regulation remains fundamentally community-centred.

Taken together, these three frameworks enable a nuanced analysis of the Bhopa case as a complex interplay of power dynamics and normative structures. Bourdieu's framework elucidates the mechanisms that underpin the prevalence of religious authority in social contexts (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991). Legal consciousness provides insight into the pervasive scepticism towards formal legal institutions, indicating a lack of deep engagement (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Merry, 1990; Tyler, 2006). Deviance theory sheds light on how local communities respond to norm violations through measures such as warnings, boycotts, or informal penalties, rather than relying on official legal solutions (Becker, 1963; Merton, 1938). This combined approach is analytically superior to any individual framework since it simultaneously examines the connections among culture, authority, legality, and various forms of regulation.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The discourse surrounding religion and society has consistently maintained that religion transcends mere personal belief. Classical sociology frames religion as a crucial social institution that fosters cohesion, delineates moral boundaries, and generates shared meaning. Émile Durkheim's work is foundational, advocating that

religion actively shapes collective order rather than passively reflecting it (Durkheim, 2009; Max Weber, 1978; Peter L. Berger, 1967). Subsequent scholarship, particularly in South Asian contexts, has underscored how religious authority organises daily practices, hierarchies, and public legitimacy (T. N. Madan, 1991; Veena Das, 2007; Malik, 2025). This body of literature is particularly pertinent to the Bhopa case, in which ritual practices and guru-centric authority shape the normative context in which respondents navigate disputes, deviance, and the law.

A complementary area of study focuses on legal consciousness, marking a paradigm shift from law as a codified text to law as lived experience. Ewick and Silbey (1998) illustrated that individuals narrate their engagement with law in consistent patterns that express their positioning relative to institutional authority. Subsequent analyses have deepened this understanding, demonstrating that legal orientations are profoundly shaped by structural inequalities and daily interactions with legal institutions (Silbey, 2005; Patricia Ewick & Susan S. Silbey, 2003; Austin Sarat, 1990). Recent scholarship further refines these insights, asserting that legal consciousness is relational and historically contextual, rather than purely cognitive (Chua & Engel, 2019). For marginalised communities, this underscores that legal distance can solidify into a persistent social orientation, rather than remaining a circumstantial informational void.

A third dimension involves legal pluralism. Griffiths (1986) contended that it is analytically flawed to assume the hegemony of state law in contexts where multiple normative orders coexist. Later research has stressed that non-state justice systems often wield significant authority (Merry, 1988; Nagin & Telep, 2017; Swenson, 2018; Moore, 1973; Santos, 1987; de Sousa Santos, 2002; Chanock, 1985). This literature offers a robust framework for interpreting the Bhopa community's reliance on community-based dispute resolution and the prioritisation of religious norms in faith-law conflicts.

The scholarship on the rule of law and legal legitimacy also plays a critical role. Research on procedural justice indicates that individuals are more likely to perceive the law as binding when institutions are experienced as fair, respectful, and trustworthy. Tom R. Tyler and the broader

legitimacy literature propose that trust is not ancillary; it is intrinsic to the law's authority (Tyler, 2006; Jackson, 2018; Tankebe, 2019; Tyler & Huo, 2002; David Beetham, 1991). This pattern also reflects structural critiques of law, which argue that legal systems tend to advantage socially powerful groups, thereby limiting access to justice for marginalised populations (Galanter, 1974). The observations among Bhopa respondents exemplify this trend: their widespread perception that the legal system fails to protect them underscores a context in which mistrust becomes a structurally embedded sentiment rather than a mere psychological aberration.

Incorporating deviance scholarship provides an additional dimension. Howard S. Becker's labelling theory remains essential as it shifted the focus from viewing deviance as inherent to particular acts (Becker, 1963; Edwin M. Lemert, 1951). Later research has illustrated that norms surrounding sanctions are contextually variable, influenced by power dynamics and local cultural standards (Kai T. Erikson, 1966). In communities characterised by strong internal cohesion and weak institutional integration, informal sanctions, such as warnings, gossip, temporary exclusion, and moral correction, may wield greater significance than formal punitive mechanisms. This is especially relevant in contexts where preserving communal stability is prioritised over resorting to external authorities. The findings regarding the Bhopa community align well with a broader sociological interpretation of deviance as a socially negotiated construct rather than merely a legally defined concept.

Lastly, the intersecting fields of law, religion, and non-state authority suggest that legal orders in pluralistic societies are rarely monolithic. Research on religious norms as forms of non-state law has illuminated how religion can function not merely as an ethical framework but as an alternative regulatory system, particularly within postcolonial and stratified environments (Talal Asad, 2003; Brian Z. Tamanaha, 2008; Saba Mahmood, 2005). These analyses enhance our understanding of how respondents may regard religious norms as superior in conflict situations while simultaneously expressing aspirations for legal reform. The outcome is not a straightforward rejection of the legal system, but rather a complex landscape in which multiple authorities coexist, each with varying degrees of legitimacy and credibility.

4. SUM-UP OF REVIEW

A careful integration of the existing body of scholarship reveals five interconnected analytical insights that guide the present inquiry. First, religion must be understood not simply as a matter of personal conviction, but as a socially embedded system of authority that organises norms, meanings, and collective conduct. Second, orientations toward law are not formed in isolation; rather, legal consciousness emerges through socially structured experiences, shaped by inequality, power dynamics, and repeated interactions with institutional frameworks. Third, the concept of legal pluralism demonstrates that, in practice, multiple normative systems operate simultaneously, particularly in contexts where community-based institutions retain credibility and functional relevance alongside formal legal structures.

In addition, the authority of law is closely dependent on the presence of institutional trust. When legal institutions are perceived as fair, accessible, and protective, their legitimacy is reinforced; conversely, where such perceptions are absent, reliance on formal law tends to weaken. Under such conditions, alternative systems of regulation often gain prominence. Finally, deviance is best understood as a socially mediated construct, where definitions and responses are shaped by local norms, and regulation frequently occurs through informal means such as collective disapproval, reputational control, and community-based sanctions rather than through formal legal intervention.

Together, these theoretical orientations offer a cohesive and multidimensional framework for examining the evidence obtained from the Bhopa community, enabling a deeper understanding of how religion, law, authority, and mechanisms of social regulation intersect within a specific socio-cultural context.

5. RESEARCH GAP

Despite the richness of this literature, a clear gap remains. There is limited quantitative socio-legal research on the Bhopa community

specifically. Even more limited is research that brings religion, legal consciousness, and deviance into a single empirical frame using district-level field data from Rajasthan. Much of the existing literature is either highly theoretical or based on other populations and settings. This study addresses that gap by using interview schedule data from Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer to analyse how religion, legal awareness, deviance, and institutional distrust intersect within the Bhopa community.

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are

1. To examine the role of religion in structuring social life among the Bhopa,
2. To assess the level of legal awareness and trust in formal legal institutions.
3. To understand how deviance is defined and handled, to analyse conflict between religion and law.
4. To evaluate how state contact and access to government schemes shape socio-legal experiences.

7. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The study proceeds with the following hypotheses.

1. Stronger religious centrality is associated with weaker reliance on formal legal systems.
2. Lower levels of legal awareness are associated with lower institutional trust.
3. Deviance is more likely to be regulated informally than formally within the Bhopa community.
4. Greater conflict between faith and law is associated with a higher likelihood of prioritising religion.
5. Limited state contact is associated with weaker perceived legal protection and poorer access to government schemes.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on primary empirical evidence collected in February–March 2026 from 100 respondents from the Bhopa community across the Nagaur, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer districts of Rajasthan. The sample was gender-balanced, comprising 50 women and 50 men, ensuring inclusive representation. Data were collected through a structured interview schedule covering socio-demographic profile, religious beliefs, legal awareness, legal consciousness, deviance, state interaction, faith–law conflict, and reform suggestions.

A purposive sampling method was used to select respondents with relevant experience in community practices and dispute resolution processes. The study follows a mixed methodological approach—quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive. Descriptive statistics are used to present key empirical trends, while sociological interpretation situates the findings within broader theoretical frameworks.

Given the modest sample size, the analysis prioritises pattern identification and interpretive depth rather than causal generalisation. The findings collectively indicate a socio-legal order shaped by strong religious authority, limited engagement with formal law, and the prevalence of informal mechanisms of social control.

9. RESULTS

9.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

The socio-demographic profile reveals a structurally marginalised community characterised by high illiteracy (86%) and economic vulnerability (64% labour dependency). The predominance of younger respondents (52%) suggests demographic dynamism; however, this potential is constrained by limited access to education. The persistence of joint family structures (86%) indicates strong kinship-based governance, which plays a crucial role in sustaining traditional authority systems. These structural conditions directly shape the community's legal consciousness, as limited education and institutional exposure reduce engagement with formal legal frameworks.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–30	52	52%
	31–45	19	19%
	46–60	20	20%
	60+	9	9%
Gender	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
Education	Illiterate	86	86%
	Primary	14	14%
Occupation	Labour	64	64%
	Traditional	36	36%
Family Type	Joint	86	86%
	Nuclear	14	14%

The Bhopa community of Rajasthan showcases a vibrant cultural heritage through their engagement in traditional games and dance forms. These activities serve to entertain, strengthen social bonds, and reinforce cultural identity. The community participates in various games, from simple races to team competitions, promoting physical fitness and community solidarity. Their

traditional dances, marked by dynamic movements and narratives, combine artistic expression with physical exertion, helping participants maintain agility. Overall, the integration of sports and physical activities within the Bhopa community highlights their cultural significance, contributing to the preservation of identity and enhancing communal spirit and well-being.

9.2 RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION AND AUTHORITY STRUCTURE

Table 2: Religious Orientation

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Importance of Religion	Very Important	91	91%
	Important	9	9%
Ritual Practice	Always	91	91%
	Sometimes	9	9%
Religious Authority	Pabuji Guru	100	100%

Religion functions as the central organising force within the Bhopa community. The near-universal adherence to ritual practices (91%) and the absolute authority of Pabuji Guru (100%) indicate the operation of symbolic power in a Bourdieusian sense. Religious authority is not

merely spiritual but institutional, shaping norms, conflict resolution, and everyday decision-making. This reinforces the argument that religion operates as an alternative governance system in marginalised settings.

9.3 LEGAL AWARENESS AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

The findings reveal a profound level of legal alienation. A majority of respondents lack awareness (75%) and trust (77%) in the legal

system, while all respondents believe that the law does not protect them. This reflects not individual ignorance but systemic exclusion. From a legal consciousness perspective, this corresponds to an “against the law” orientation, in which the law is perceived as distant, ineffective, and irrelevant.

Table 3: Legal Awareness and Trust

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness of Law	Not Aware	75	75%
	Heard	19	19%
	Partially Aware	6	6%
Trust in Law	None	77	77%
	Low	16	16%
	Moderate	7	7%
Law Protects	Disagree	100	100%

9.4 DEVIANCE AND INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL

Deviance is partially understood in legal terms (62% illegal acts), yet responses remain overwhelmingly informal. The dominance of

warning (85%) indicates a preference for restorative rather than punitive justice. This supports Becker’s theory that deviance is socially constructed and controlled through local norms rather than formal institutions.

Table 4: Deviance Perception and Handling

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Meaning of Deviance	Illegal Acts	62	62%
	Breaking Tradition	10	10%
	Don’t Know	28	28%
Handling Deviance	Warn	85	85%
	Boycott	8	8%
	Punish	5	5%
	Ignore	2	2%

9.5 INSTITUTIONAL INTERACTION AND GOVERNANCE GAP

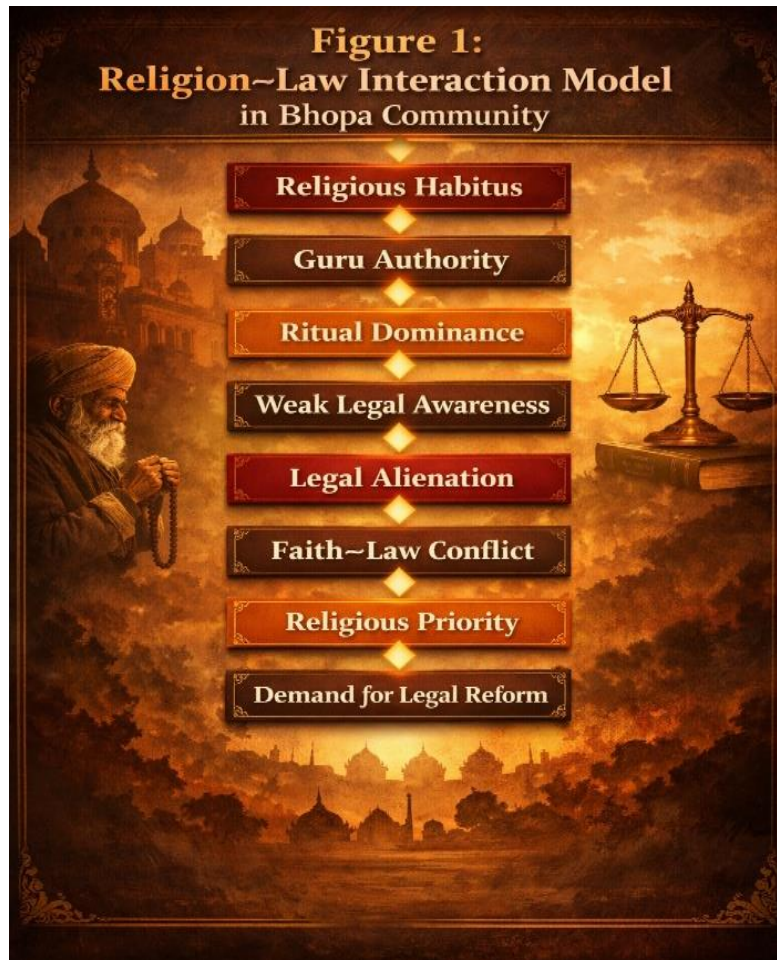
The data highlight a significant governance gap. Limited contact with state institutions (88%) and

lack of access to government schemes (90%) indicate systemic exclusion. The high level of faith-law conflict (86%) and prioritization of religion (72%) reinforce the dominance of traditional authority systems.

Table 5: State Interaction and Conflict

Variable	Response	Percentage
Contact with Officials	Rare	88%
Access to Schemes	No	90%
Faith–Law Conflict	Yes	86%
Priority in Conflict	Religion	72%

10. THE RELIGION–LAW INTERACTION MODEL



Source: Author's compilation and conceptual framework based on primary field survey (2026).

This Model explains a sequential sociological process in which the everyday life of the community is deeply shaped by religious habitus—internalised beliefs, values, and practices that guide behaviour. This habitus strengthens the authority of spiritual leaders (guru authority), whose influence legitimises and reinforces ritual dominance in social life. As rituals become central, formal legal knowledge remains limited, resulting in weak legal awareness. This lack of awareness gradually produces legal alienation, where individuals feel

disconnected from or distrustful of state law. Consequently, situations arise where religious norms and formal laws come into tension, leading to faith–law conflict. In such conflicts, individuals tend to prioritise religion over law (religious priority), reflecting the stronger cultural legitimacy of faith-based systems. Ultimately, this dynamic generates a collective demand for legal reform, in which communities seek changes to formal legal structures to better align with their religious beliefs and lived realities.

11. ADVANCED DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Bhopa community operates within a deeply structured system of religious authority that functions as a parallel governance mechanism. The dominance of religion aligns with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, in which legitimacy derives from cultural recognition rather than from formal institutional power. The Guru's universal influence reflects the concentration of authority within a culturally embedded system.

At the same time, the absence of legal awareness and trust reflects structural marginalisation. The data confirm that legal alienation is not merely a cognitive gap but a social condition produced by institutional exclusion. This aligns with Galanter's argument that legal systems systematically disadvantage marginalised populations.

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the concept of dual legal consciousness in the context of marginality. The Bhopa community simultaneously rejects the existing legal system due to inaccessibility while expressing a desire for legal reform and state support. This duality challenges conventional legal consciousness models and highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of law in marginalised contexts.

The findings on deviance further reinforce this argument. The reliance on informal warning rather than formal punishment indicates that social control is maintained through community norms rather than legal enforcement. This reflects both cultural preference and institutional absence.

12. CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that the Bhopa community of Rajasthan operates within a socio-legal framework characterised by strong religious authority, weak institutional incorporation, and informal mechanisms of social regulation. Religion, mediated by the authority of Pabuji Guru, functions as a central organising force, shaping not only belief systems but also behavioural norms, dispute-resolution processes, and community governance structures.

The findings reveal that legal awareness is significantly limited, with a majority of respondents lacking knowledge of the legal system and expressing deep distrust toward it. This condition reflects not merely an informational deficiency but a structural exclusion, in which formal legal institutions remain inaccessible and ineffective for marginalised populations. The universal perception that law does not protect the community further reinforces this conclusion.

At the same time, the study identifies a paradoxical relationship between the Bhopa community and formal legal systems. While respondents express low trust and limited engagement, they simultaneously demand legal reform and state support. This duality highlights the complexity of legal consciousness in marginalised contexts and underscores the need for theoretical frameworks that move beyond binary classifications of legal acceptance and rejection.

The prevalence of informal dispute resolution and non-punitive responses to deviance indicates that social control within the community is maintained through culturally embedded mechanisms rather than formal legal enforcement. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how law operates in pluralistic and unequal societies.

13. CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

This study makes significant contributions to sociological theory, socio-legal studies, and empirical research on marginalised communities.

First, it introduces the concept of "dual legal consciousness in marginality," which captures the coexistence of legal alienation and aspiration for reform. This concept extends existing legal consciousness theory by incorporating the role of structural inequality and institutional exclusion.

Second, the study integrates three major theoretical frameworks—Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, legal consciousness theory, and deviance theory—into a unified analytical model. This integration provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultural authority, institutional dynamics, and social regulation interact within marginalised contexts.

Third, the study contributes empirical evidence from the Bhopa community, which has been underrepresented in socio-legal research. Employing quantitative methods and structured data analysis strengthens the methodological rigour of research on tribal and marginalised populations.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of designing policies that are sensitive to cultural contexts and grounded in local realities. The study demonstrates that effective governance requires not only institutional expansion but also the recognition of existing community structures.

14. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy formulation and governance.

First, there is a need to develop culturally embedded legal awareness programs. Conventional approaches to legal education may not be effective in communities where religious authority dominates. Instead, programs should

incorporate local languages, narratives, and trusted community figures to enhance engagement.

Second, community-based legal outreach initiatives should be strengthened. Engaging religious leaders such as the Guru can help bridge the gap between formal legal institutions and local communities. This approach can improve trust and facilitate the gradual integration of legal norms.

Third, policy frameworks must adopt a context-sensitive approach to legal reform. Rather than imposing uniform legal structures, reforms should account for the coexistence of multiple normative systems and seek to harmonise them.

Fourth, there is an urgent need to improve access to government schemes and institutional services. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents lack access to state resources, highlighting systemic barriers that require targeted interventions.

Finally, governance strategies should focus on building institutional trust. Transparency, responsiveness, and accountability are essential for enhancing the legitimacy of legal systems and encouraging community engagement.

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