

# Rom/ Gypsies

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Population Estimate: Circa 14 million Gypsies in the world today, mostly in Eastern Europe; circa 500,000 Gypsies in the United States.

Gypsies suffered a history of deportations from Europe to other continents including North America and Hitler exterminated about 500,000 Gypsies as part of the Holocaust.

**Place of Origin:** Northern India circa the 9<sup>th</sup> century; now believed to have been a subgroup of Untouchables called *Dom* whose caste function was to make music---drum beaters in particular.

**Nomadic Heritage:** The group's tradition of being nomadic is tied into the Shah of Persia's edict that they keep moving around the country playing their music---this tradition of moving combined with the group's resistance towards assimilation provide the backdrop for the group's worldwide mystique.

## **Distinctive Gypsy/ Rom Cultural Heritage:**

- a) **Language**---All Rom speak the language of Romany in addition to whatever other language is spoken in the geographic regions that they inhabit. In addition almost all Rom are illiterate as they practice an oral tradition which has never regarded literacy as a virtue.
- b) **Religion**--- The Rom have no organized religion or holy books but do practice a distinctive lifestyle that is mandated as essential to remaining within the Rom community. The Rom call God by the name of Del and distinguish between pure and impure ways of behaving in almost all facets of daily life. The pure is called *Wuzho* while the impure is called *Marime*. The upper half of the human body is wuzho while the lower half is considered marime and it is necessary to keep the two regions separate from one another as much as possible.
- c) **Pomana**---The Pomana is a Gypsy remembrance feast held as part of the funeral proceedings and is required of all Gypsy persons who knew the deceased. During the first week after the death of the Gypsy person one is permitted to eat meat and the pomana is restricted to grains, beans, rice, and fruit. By custom the Gypsy funeral must take place in the same city where the deceased person was born.
- d) **Marriage Customs**---The Rom require endogamy (marriage within the group) and by tradition practice arranged marriage usually at age of about 12 years for both the bride and the groom. The groom's family is required to pay a bride price to the bride's familia (her extended family group). Failure to marry another Rom person results in banishment from the Gypsy community. Virginity is highly prized by the Rom and every bride is expected to be a virgin upon her marriage.
- e) **Kris Romani**---the Kris Romani is the Gypsy court which hears all disputes that the Gypsy people have with one another. The Kris Romani is composed of three judges who hear all the evidence without the presence of any lawyers. One of the judges is selected by the accused, one is selected by the accuser, and the third must be a neutral party with a reputation for fairness that both the accuser and the accused agree upon.
- f) **Kumpania**---a confederation of vitsas (extended families bound together as an economic unit. Each kumpania has its own territorial rights as it pertains to conducting business ventures of various sorts in specified regions during specified seasons