

Presentation of Bhil and their Culture in the Folk Literature of Bhat and Dholi Bards

Shankar Lal Dholi

Bardic tradition is an age old feature found in different castes of Rajasthan and our country. Patronized poets used to compose praise poetry for their patrons and present different literary creations on different occasions. People of many castes like *Bhat* , *Dholi*, *Charan*, *Rao*, *Motisar* , *Dhadhi* etc. present the deeds and history of their patrons through their literary creations like ballads, poems, songs, tales stories etc. Their literature is named *Charani* literature and included in Rajasthani literature. It is based on oral tradition and passed on orally through generations. Many of above mentioned castes maintain the genealogical records of their patrons. The patrons are called *yajmanas*. Manuscripts of the poets and bards of above mentioned castes contain genealogical records, details of cultural ceremonies, rituals, heroic deeds and rewards given by their patrons. The literature by bards and poets not only present the realistic picture of the society but it also has the warnings by the poets and bards for the rulers given during their reign. Manuscripts and folk literature is a mirror of the society which presents its past forms for the present generations and scholars. The people of the caste who patronize the bards are known as *yajmans*.

Bhil also patronize bards and poets to maintain the genealogy and create different literary creations for them. Bhil caste is one of the oldest tribes of our country. 'Bhil' is an exonym that derives from the Draidian word *Vil* or *Vilawar* meaning a bow or a bowman and indicates a prevalent perception of the Bhils as good archers (Doshi 32). Bhils inhabit in different parts of our country since ages. In the book titled *Social Structure and Cultural Changes in a Bhil Village* writer J.K Doshi writes:

The Bhil one of the three largest scheduled tribes of India were (and still are) scattered over a wide area from Aravali range of hills in north to Danga in the South and in the east up to the forest of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, the whole region lying between the latitude of 20 -25 degree north and the longitude of 73 – 75 degree (56).

Dholi and Bhat poets compose praise poetry for their Bhil patrons. Manuscripts of poets cover different aspects like social, cultural, historical etc. Bhils and their culture can be studied through the literature of Dholi poets and Bhats. Dholi and Bhat poets who are patronized by Bhils carry a wide folk literature which is based on the cultural tradition of Bhils. It has not been brought forth to the main stream till today.

Oral traditions which had never been collected or studied were tracked down on a few major communities, and such studies were published. Some of these works obviously tried to reconstruct the earlier biased records of material sources by better understanding and throwing a great deal of light on the thought and poetic imagination of tribes about whom little has hitherto been written (Elwin ix, 56)

Bhils ruled over different parts of country in different eras. Cities of Rajasthan like Banswara, Dungarpur, Kota etc. were named after their founder Bhil rulers. According to Colonel Tod the earliest people of Mewar were bhils. In Gujarat, according to local legend, the Bhils held Abu, Dholka, and Champaner. As late as the close of the 11th century Asaval, the site of the modern Ahmedabad, was in the Bhil's hands. Rajputs drove the Bhils out of Idar, Rajpipla, Mandir, Bansda and Dharmpur.

The Bhils of Mewar (southern Rajasthan, comprising the districts of Udaipur, Chittorgarh and Bhilwara) regions occupied both politico-military importance and economic significance between the seventh and the fifteenth centuries. The tradition about Bappa Raval (the legendary founder of the Guhila dynasty of Mewar) and the Bhil chiefs of Oghna, Panarwa and Undri, Baleo and Dewa participating

in the Rajput royal coronation ceremonies (the historic ritual of anointing the Ranas of Mewar at their accession with a tik- of blood by the chiefs of these two Bhil settlements) points towards political alliances and negotiations of power (Sinha 58). This custom, which continued until Jagat Simha's coronation in 1628 (Tod 183), could be a symbol of the transfer of power from Bhils to Guhila Rajput, but it would be difficult to say what kind of power the Bhils could have enjoyed or could have transferred.

Bhil saviours fought different battles and sacrificed their lives to protect their sovereignty. They never allowed any other power to rule over their territory. With their bravery and sacrifice they could save their distinct culture and social structure. In the essay titled *Bhil Villages of Western Udaipur : A Study In Resistance to Social Change* published in economic weekly in March 1, 1952 economic weekly published in March 1, 1952 the author writes:

It is that the Bhils though themselves illiterate and lacking even a tradition of popular ballad history, such as the minstrel Charans and Bhats provide for their near neighbours, are yet commemorated in the writings and verse of the Rajputs ; and their long association is symbolized in the Mewar royal crest which shows a sun in splendour, with one side a Rajput ,on the other a Bhil warrior. It is therefore all the more striking that in spite of centuries of such contact; the Bhils have maintained their quite separate and distinctive social structure and mode of life. (Carstairs G Morris 231)

Generally the ruling areas of Bhils were aloof in nature. Bhils do not like to be intertwined by outsiders and they appear shy, simple and pure by heart. They do not mingle with people of other communities. For example, the Bhomat area of Mewar which used to be a region of Bhils was never ruled by any king or Britishers directly. The Bhils were never conquered by invaders due to their geographical location of the region and fierce retaliation. Even the Jagirdar of Bhil areas also belonged to the Bhil ancestry. They sacrificed hundreds of lives to protect their sovereignty. Bhilala is a caste which arises due to marital relation between Rajput and Bhil ruler families.

The Bhomat, however, presents a completely different picture. There the Bhils were never conquered: even the *Jagirdars* are of Bhil ancestry. Some can show *jmttas* granted them by Rana Partab for services rendered to him in his lifelong struggle against the Moghuls. In the valleys among these jungle-covered hills, the population consists almost entirely of Bhils. (Carstairs G Morris 231)

Different aspects about the Bhils have been described in the folk literature of Dholi and Bhat Poets.

1. Extension and areas of Kingdom
2. Description of Battles
3. Praise of Bhil heroes and courageous women
- 4 *Habraj* of Bhils by poets which represents the genealogical trees and praiseworthy details of different clans of Bhils.
5. Stories of origin of the universe and Bhil caste

Different bards and poets have described different warriors and bhil warriors in their poems. For example a poet writes about a bhil girl named *Jalki* who was the daughter of Rama Bhil. Poet Jhalkya writes:

झालकी भाई झालकी, रमा भील की बालकी !
 मान्ढव गढ़ की सेना काटी, ज्यूँ रागस ने कालकी ! !
 खड़ी मुंडेरा चोडे धाडे, बाण चलावे हेलो पाडे!
 भीलडीया की सेना साथै, मुंड उडावे कालजो काडे ! !
 कूद पड़ी मुंडेर ती रेटा, जे अम्बा की हांक लगावे !
 खडग हाथ मई लिया कालकी, दोनों ही हाथा खडग चलावे ! !
 खुनाझार वेई गी झालकी, मारकाट दुश्मन ढरकावे !
 जो भी सामें पड़े रांघडो, जिवत्यो पाछो नि जावे ! !
 शीश कट्यो नि ढबी भवानी, धारा लगी भीलन मर्दानी !

Transliteration:

*Jalki bhai jalki , Rama Bjhil ki balaki !
 Mandav shah ki Sena kati, Jyun Raghas mein Kalki ! !
 Khdi mundera chode dhade, Bann chlave hello pade, !
 Bhildiya ki sena sathe , mundh udave karjo kadhe ! !
 Kud pdi munderati renta, jai amba ki hank lagave, !
 Khadaghath mai liya kalaki, donoi hatha khadag chlave! !
 Khunahjar veyi gayi jhalki, markat dushman dharkave!
 jo bhi same pde ranghdo, jivtyo pachho ni jave ! !
 shish katyo ni dhbi bhawani dhara lagi bhilan mardani!*

Translation:

The daughter of Rama Bhil named Jalki is a brave girl. She always for the protection of her people and cut the throats of the enemies. Her appearance is like the Goddess *Kalika* in the battle who killed the Demons. She calls enemies to get ready for fight and kills them like goddess *Kali* killed the demons. She shoots the arrows and recites the name of goddess *Amba*. She has been wounded badly at the battle and at last has martyred saving her people. She is a goddess like fearless Bhil woman who protects her people and has become immortal.

The poets have described different bill heroes like *Katara Pragatia* , *Sikariya*, *Gujariya*, *Jaloria*, *Rama* etc. also in their poems.

In another lines a bard Jhalkya sings:

रामो भील भाई, रामो भील, जंगी जब्बर इन्को डील !
 रामपुरा को वाजो वाजे, भानपुरा ताईं रण में गाजे ! !

Transliteration:

*Rama Bheel Bhai , Rama Bheel , Jabbar Jangi Janaro Deal !
 Rampura ko vajo vaje , bhanpura tain ran mai gaje ! !*

Translation:

Rama Bhiil has a strong and enormous body. He is very difficult to be won. He is fierce in the battle. He can't be won by any enemy easily. Rama Bhil rules over the kingdom Rampura. He has fought with

Charawat rajputs and has saved his kingdom. His fame has spread from Rampura to Bahnपुरा.

In below lines the poet describes the armours and weapons of Bhils and says that:

गोफन भाटा ती मारे, नी चुके डे वारे !
अंग्रेजो का सिपला मोर, भीमो नायकडो !

Transliteration:

Gaufun, Bhata Ti Mare, Ni Chukan De Ware!
Angrejon Ka Cipla Mor ,Bhemo Nayakdo !!

Translation:

The poet describes that Bheel people kill there enemy with the Gauphan (a weapon which is used to throw the stone to a longer distance) and arrows. Using these weapons Bhima Nayak has created fear among British. British don't attack bhils due to Bhima Nayak. He has become a crown for them.

A Dholi -Bhil folk poet Mohan Lal of Salumber district describes the origin of universe and Bhil castes in following ways:

पेली आद हुआ, फीर उपासना बनी, उपासना से खारा जग हुआ, खारा जग से असंग जग हुआ, असंग जग में आदि ऋषि आदरक हुआ, आदरक ने ऊँ जाप किया, ऊँ से शिव शक्ति हुआ, शिव से शिव का बेटा काकस हुआ, काकस का शील हुआ, शील से शीलभाण अर्थात् सूर्य हुआ एवं फीर दुनिया में उजाला हुआ एवं ब्रह्मांड बना!

Transliteration:

Pahli Yad hua, aad se Upasna bani, upsana se Khara jug hua,
feer asang jug hua, asang hug mai Adarak rishi hua, Adarik
rishi me Om jaap kiya , usse shiv shakti hue, Shiv se kakas hua
,Kakas ka sheel hua, Sheel ka Sheel bhann hua, Sheel bhann
se Feer surya hua , feer brhmand ua.

Translation:

The poet says that at first there was *Aad* or initial *Yug*, then *Khara*(sour) then *Asang*(no one was in company) age took place. In *Asang* era *Rishi Adark's* incarnation took place. *Rishi Adark* recited the word *Om*. From *Om* *Shiva* and *Shakti* originated. *Kakas* was son of *Shiva*. *Sheel* was son of *Kakas*. And at last *Sheel* gave birth to *Sheelbhann* (*surya*) and the universe was lightened by *Sheelbhann* (*Surya*).

The tale of origin is very surprising as it has much difference with other tales of origin of Hindu mythology. It describes the ages which took place before *Shiva* and *Shakti* and describes a *Rishi's* incarnation is earlier than Lord *Shiva*. It also represents the value of human and humanity in tribal culture above all other thoughts and ideas through this tale. The literature written, composed and passed through generations by *Dhoil- Bhil* bards and poets needs a systematic extensive study.

The researcher follows the insider outsider techniques of auto-ethnography to collect the primary data and analyse them to understand about *bhils* through folk literature. Different theories like new historicism, cultural studies etc. have been used to enhance the study.

It is believed that tribal have no authentic source of history as they used to live primitive life in the forest and don't have return or well-maintained history. A systematic approach of migration by *bhils* ,their social structure, cultural pattern and history can be traced through the folk literature of bards who have been patronized by *bhils*, The bards have been patronised by *bhils* and they been associated with them since generations. The bards follow a well-maintained and organized pattern of passing the history of tribal through generations in the form of oral literature and genealogical manuscripts. The folk literature of these bards and poets need protection as well as the encouragement to maintain age old records. It is really good for us that the department of Tribal Welfare Development is working for the betterment of tribal and running different programs but it is still found that no efforts for the history of the tribal are made evidently. The folk literature can reveal many aspects

of tribal life and culture. It will develop a sense of pride in the tribal for their history and add a lot to the arena of present folk literature.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2015.
- Doshi, S.L. *Bhils: Between Societal Self-Awareness and Cultural Synthesis*. Sterling Publishers, 1971.
- Maguni Charan Behera. *Tribal Studies in India Perspectives of History, Archaeology and Culture*. Springer Nature, 2020.
- Meeta, Deka. *Folklore and North Indian History*. Guahati University, 2011.
- Munshi, Hardayal Singh. *Report Mridum Shumari Raj Marwar AD.1891, History of the Castes of Rajasthan and Their Traditions*. Raja Mansingh Pustak Prakash Shodh Kendra, 1894.
- . *The Castes of Marwar (Census Report of 1891)*. Books Treasure, 1891.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Pearson India Education Services, 2017.
- Sims, Martha C., and Martin, Stephens. *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*. Utah State UP, 2005.