

Environmental Protection and Conservation in Oral Narratives of Dhangarbhats of Mewar

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Mewar was one of the major princely states of Rajputana. Rajasthan including some area of Gujrat and Madhya Pradesh was known as Rajputana. Colonel James Tod called it Raythan or Rajasthan first. Rajputana was divided into different princely states during the rule of Rajput rulers or East India Company. Mewar includes Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand and Bhilwara districts of Rajasthan. The first capital of Mewar was Chittorgarh. The fort of Chittorgarh was made by Chitrangad Mourya of Mori dynasty. He belongs to Shepherd caste called Gadari, Gayari, Dhangar or Gadariya in Mewar. Bappa Rawal, known as Kal Bhoj also, defeated the Mori dynasty and founded Mewar. He ruled over Chittorgarh and declared it the capital of Mewar. Bappa Rawal was brought up by a saint Harit Rishi. He worked as the shepherd for the cows for Harit Rishi (a hermit). Being defeated by Bappa Rawal, the Mories left the fort of Chittorgarh and started to move from one place to another as shepherds. The Patikar clan of Shepherd community (Gadri or Gadriya of Mewar) are known as descendant of Mori rulers of Mewar. They are addressed as *Mori Manidhar Rao* by their culture bearer and folk poets.

<i>Aad chitor ra upniya,</i>	you took birth at Chittor—
<i>Jgga Ishwar Ri jod !</i>	Jagga Ishar (the poet) accompanied you
<i>Patikar Thava Pargne</i>	Patikar are renown in nearby areas
<i>Mathe Jash Ra mod !!</i>	They have always been glorious
<i>Mori manndhar Rao, sabraj!!</i>	Maurya is the king!! I salute you

Meaning:

The poet addresses the Patikar clan and says that you originated from Chittorgarh. I was always with you as your poet. Your fame spreads in all areas of our community. You have always brought pride for our community.

Gadriya/ Gadari/ Gayari (shepherd) is one of the oldest caste of Mewar. The inscription of Man Mori and address of patikar clan in *Habraj* of Gadri caste by Dhangarbhats also link their relation with one of the oldest Mori dynasty of Mewar. Another inscription at Patoliya village at Bhupalsagar in Kapasan Tehsil also proves the ancient history of the Gadari caste. The inscription describes that the people of the castes gathered at the Patoliya village in 1303 A.D and made reforms for the caste.

The people of the Gadari or Gadariya or Gayari or Dhangar caste of Mewar are followers of Hindu religion and worship folk deity Devnarayan and other deities like Goddess Kali, Chamunda etc. The caste has an age old cultural tradition. They have patronized the folk bearers called Dhangarbhats to recite the praise poetry and maintain the oral tradition of their culture since ages.

The praise poetry or heroic poetry on leaders, saints and social reformers of the Gadri caste has been composed in abundance by Dhangarbhats of Mewar. Dhangarbhats poets have been patronized by the Gadari or Gadariyas since the formation or origin of their castes. They are culture bearers for the Gadari caste. Gadari, Gayari or Gadariya caste is also known as Dhangar. The folk bearers Dhangarbhats compose different types of poetry and explain different narratives of Gadari caste through tales and stories. The narratives present the leaders, social reformers and saints of the shepherd community who brought a remarkable change in their cultural tradition and worked for the caste. They follow an oral tradition since ages. Dhangar Bhats of Mewar maintain the genealogical records of Gadari too. Their manuscripts are full of different narratives of Gadaris. The narratives explain the clans, their residing villages, their deeds and migrations, leaders of the caste etc. The songs and stories

prevail in the Gadari caste also have different narratives of Gadari caste. These songs are sung by the women of Gadari caste on different occasions. Narratives based on the deities of Gadari caste are subject of these songs. Amra Bhagat of Gadari caste of Rajasthan is widely known as a shepherd saint. Rajasthan government has approved the budget for construction of a panorama about Amra Bhagat at Narbadiya, the birth place, in Chittorgarh district.

Folklore is a store house of knowledge for us. The knowledge which evolves in any group of people and passed through generations takes the form of folklore. The term folklore was first used by an antiquarian William Thomas in a magazine *Athenaeum* in 1986.

According to Den Ben Amos:

Folklore is very much an organic phenomenon. . . . It is possible to distinguish three basic conceptions of the subject underlying many definitions; accordingly, folklore is one of these three: a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art. (3)

Folklore is transmitted orally through generations and becomes tradition in the community. For example myths, tales, stories, traditional methods of treatment, lullaby, proverbs, chants, legends etc. The term folk lore can be divided into two categories 1- A traditional form of knowledge 2- A form of verbal art. The literature which is based on the oral tradition of any community is named as oral literature or folk literature. It is a verbal form of the folklore and includes many literary forms like folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, songs, chants, legends, stories, poetry and all verbal forms of orally transmitted tradition.

In the context of Oral history Henige defines oral traditions as:

Strictly speaking . . . those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture . . . (and) have been handed down for at least a few generations. (Finnegan 7)

Folklore or folk literature can be classified into different genres. Different genres present different realities of the society. The society is the primary source for the origin of the folklore. Lenin said: "In every folktale there

are elements of reality” (Propp 17). As a form of verbal art folklore is called folk literature or Oral literature. Vladimir Propp writes:

Literature and folklore overlap partially in their poetic genres. There are genres specific to literature (for example, the novel) and to folk lore (for example, the charm), but both folklore and literature can be classified by genres. (6)

Different genres of folk literature like story, tale, legend, myth etc. are called narratives. They tell us about the sequence of events which are the subjects of the genre and took place in the society. According to W.R Goodman “In order to have a narrative, events must be located in a space and time” (93). Many genres of folk literature like Historical poetry, epic poetry, elegiac poetry, folktales, stories, myths, folk songs etc. can be termed as narrative genres of folk literature. They describe about the development of the society, deeds of the people, events and happenings and their effect of the society etc. In the book *The Nature of the Narrative* writers Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg say:

By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller. For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required. (4)

Oral traditions play major role in the preservation of culture of Mewar. There are various oral traditions based on castes and different groups of people which preserve the cultural, social and religious values of the society and store the knowledge for day to day life of people. Literature based on these traditions have been passed through generations and found in oral and written forms. Oral traditions of Gadari caste prevail in the Mewar mostly through Dhangarbhat, a culture bearer sub caste of Dholi. The narratives are based origin and migration of Gadris, their social structure, religious and cultural values, historical events, leaders, social reformers and saints of caste etc. These narratives are found in form of tales, stories, poetry, folk songs, riddles, rhymes, ballads etc. and explain about different happenings and events in the caste with

their times and sequences. Poetic lines or couplets are part of all the forms of narratives generally. The story tellers or poets use these poetic lines to enhance the meaning and lucidity of the tale or stories. It is a style followed in Rajasthan by story tellers or poets of different oral traditions.

R. A Hamilton writes: "Oral tradition ought never to be used alone and unsupported. It has to be related to the social and political structure of the people who preserve it, compared with the traditions with neighbouring people, and linked with the chronological indications of genealogies and age –set cycles, of documented contacts with literate peoples, of dated natural phenomena such as feminine and eclipses and of archaeological finds. (Vansina 7)

The narratives based on the lives of social reformers and saints present the environmental awareness through their teachings. For example the description of a village and emphasis on the oldest Neem tree in a couple develops environmental awareness among residents of the village. The couplet is recited by Dhangarbhat poets on different social and cultural programs of shepherds.

Rodi to rota vante,	The breads are distributed in the village Rodi always,
bhalo vrajyo leem !	A Neem tree is located amidst the village !
Mat wali jamnmiya mard,	Mother Wali gave birth to brave sons,
Panchi ha Bhad kunta ra bheem !!	All five brothers were brave like Pandawas!

The poet says that the village Rodi always serves food for the visitors. He says that in village Rodi the breads are distributed always for the people who are in need. The sons of mother Wali were five in numbers and made sacrifice and serve the society like Pandawas. A Neem tree situated at the centre of village makes a distinct identity for the village and enhances its beauty. The association of the Neem tree in narratives

and folk literature changes the status of Neem tree into a pious and invaluable thing for the people.

In another couplet the poet says:

Pavta Harko ji dudh Hamesh, Harka ji used to serve milk daily,

Dan uga hi dautanna ! At the rising of the sun !

Narathambh moto naresh, The village is famous for its charity in
area,

Dhani karamat dhari kikawata !! Kikawat are very

Meaning:

The poet says that Harka ji always serve the milk for people and visitors. He also serves the milk for snake idol of the village. The service was the main motto of every village. Everyone who comes to his village find himself in a most serene and helpful place. Snakes are friendly reptiles for the farmers. It is believed that they saved the crops from rates. If snakes do not kill the rates, the ever-increasing number of rates will destroy the crops completely. The couplets not only aware the people for not killing the snakes but encourage them to conserve the ecosystem required for the existence of different living beings.

Amara Bhagat is a well-known saint of Mewar. He belongs to shepherd community and worked as a shepherd for his livelihood. He encourages the people for the service of mankind and rearing the sheep and other animal. The narratives on the origin of sheep in shepherd community gives an important status to this animal in the society. The shepherds rear the sheep for their livelihood but care them as a pious animal who has always been the source of blessings for them. The narratives based on the origin of sheep have religious values for shepherd.

Dwaro raja wasak ro dekh, The god went to the palace of king
Wasuki,

vata su gadar aanni ! He brought a pious divine sheep from
there!

Chhnto de bhago senann,	He was purified by pouring the holy water on it,
pachhe prithvi upper pujanni !! Latter on it was worshipped on the earth!!	
Viyo hans gadar re het,	Swan conceived the sheep at ocean,
dhangar re ghar vi dhennu !	It gave birth to lambs at the house of shepherd!
Lodi hans ne lapadi,	Lodi, Hansi, Lapadi,
ya buti kheri bakhannu !!	Buti, Kheri etc, breed were born!!

Meaning:

The poet says that sheep was brought from the king Wasak (The king of snakes known as Wasuki in Hindu mythology) by lord Vishnu. The sheep brought from king Wasak was conceived by the divine swan at ocean and handed over to the shepherd saint Soma Rishi. Latter it was given to the shepherd Bharwad who was follower of lord Krishna and accompanied him during the grazing cows. It gave birth to lambs which were known as Lodi, Hansi, Lapadi, Buti, Kheri etc. These are different breeds of sheep.

The research brings forth different aspects of indigenous culture through folklore which encourages Gadari caste and others for protection of environment and conservation of different species. It also adds a lot to the present knowledge about a primitive caste which is known as forerunner of Rajput dynasty in Mewar. Till today, the extensive research about the Gadari castes has not been completed by any researcher. The research carries many scopes for further studies too which may enrich the study of the folklore, folk literature, oral traditions and narratives prevail in Rajasthan. It will also revisit the history of one of the oldest caste of the Mewar

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